

Hearts of Flesh not Stone: Encountering the Suffering of the Other through a German Lens

Ladies and Gentleman,

First of all I would like to express my thankfulness to the American institute for Contemporary German Studies and Dr Lily Gardner-Feldman for that possibility to share some aspects of our work: some results as well as some theories from our research on reconciliation.

Thank you also for you time and your presence here.

My presentation is divided into 11 short points:

1st Personal motivation

There is no research without personal motivation. My motivation is that I believe in reconciliation as a specific long term political strategy. I believe that reconciliation as a strategy should be applied in as many cases as possible, at least in much more cases than it has been applied so far.

Historically, it seems relatively rare for policy makers to clearly choose to engage in the relatively complex task of Reconciliation. There are only a handful of examples where such a strategy as a long term project was chosen. At least with two of these cases, most scholars agree that the reconciliation policy has been successful.

The first case is on the international level, namely, Germany's policy of reconciliation after World War II with countries like France, Israel and Poland.

The second case is on a national level, namely, when reconciliation became an overarching goal in post-apartheid South Africa.

In both cases a combination of very different measures - political, legal, economical, cultural, personal and psychological - were needed to change the relationship from enmity to amity and cooperation. In both cases violence and hatred were largely replaced by cooperation and respect. I believe that the German and South African cases deserve scholarly attention to encourage reconciliation in other conflict zones in the world. Of course, case studies are not blueprints, but they provide a great deal of insight as well as motivation and inspiration.

One other reconciliation case deserves mention: Rwanda after the genocide in 1994. For Rwanda the conditions were extremely difficult, probably even more difficult than for Germany or South Africa. This reconciliation has been endangered and “contaminated” by several factors: by the quasi dictatorship of president Kagame, by a lack of just memory and by continuing atrocities through Tutsi-militias in neighboring Congo. But even under these conditions of “contaminated reconciliation”, one can point to the far worse alternatives had reconciliation not been attempted: many more casualties, economical breakdown, mutual revenge and persisting resentment for generations. Thankfully, because reconciliation was attempted, there is a new Rwanda and there are individuals who arrived to forgive and to live together again.

Thus, for the three mentioned cases of attempted reconciliation, there have been, let us say, two and a half successes.

In many other cases around the world, reconciliation was one goal among others and a more or less developed policy. Even in those cases, a significant improvement of the relationship between different conflicting groups and nations was achieved. In many other cases, however, the reconciliation policy was pursued for only a short time and the results were also brief. No success could happen in cases where the term of “reconciliation” was misused to cover the attempts to obtain amnesty for perpetrators or to salvage the reputations of groups like the LURD (Liberians united for Reconciliation and Democracy), a federation of violent guerilla groups who fought against Liberia’s president Charles Taylor.

Germany, to the contrary, benefitted a great deal from reconciliation and used its “second chance” following the war to be a responsible partner in the international community. It did this by making reconciliation a top priority of its foreign policy. With all humility, Germany could and in my eyes also should ask other countries: Why don’t you choose reconciliation? There are more than enough countries who are willing to send weapons, there are still enough countries who are willing to send soldiers, but there should also be countries who propose and provide help for reconciliation.

This leads me to my first point summary: [Reconciliation as a complex and long-term political strategy](#)

Reconciliation should be researched on in a more detailed way. The examples of Germany and South Africa show that there is a promising potential to overcome enmity and to build a common future which can be interesting for other conflict zones. Personally, I believe in that potential. Besides those examples reconciliation processes in other areas should be researched

on. Reconciliation could be a special focus for German foreign policy. The definition of the term “reconciliation” must be clarified.

2nd The definition of reconciliation

As often political scientists and historians do, I would plead for a broad definition of reconciliation. Reconciliation in that broader sense is the reestablishment of “good” or at least “normal” relationships after a violent conflict like war, after mass atrocities like genocides, after crimes against humanity, or after other heavy injustices inflicted to one group by another. If there has never been a good relationship, I suggest using the term “conciliation”. Conciliation requires learning more about the history and the culture of the others. Very often elements of reconciliation and conciliation have to be combined.

That broad definition is sufficient to exclude several forms of misuse of the word “reconciliation”. It is a misuse of that word, to put reconciliation in an opposition to justice. Establishing good relationships is impossible without listening to victim’s deep desire for justice and without the constant and trustworthy attempt to fulfill as much of the requirements which can be acknowledged as justified, as possible. That includes not only restorative, but also retributive justice and punishment of perpetrators, for example by the International Court in The Hague. It is also a misuse to consider reconciliation as a mere ideal. Reconciliation means a process and a goal.

The goal of complete reconciliation probably is never accomplished, but the process and many results of the process can be found here and now in our troubled and violent world. The creation of better relationships begins already with small acts of normal human behavior in the middle of a violent conflict. In the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies (JCRS) that beginning of reconciliation in the middle of strife is so important that we choose for most of our studies what we call the “Hölderlin Perspective”, referencing the philosopher-poet Friedrich Hölderlin’s: “Reconciliation is in the middle of Strife”. We want to pay particular attention to the reconciliation in the middle of violent conflicts. Never in the world is there what Goebbels desired in his hateful mind: a “total war”. There is never 100% conflict; there are always some good experiences between members of conflicting groups, some persons who do not want the conflict, and some institutions and traditions of peace still functioning. At the same time, there is also never 100% reconciliation. Elements and aspects of conflict persist, together with memories and traumas of conflict.

This leads to another misunderstanding: Reconciliation does not mean forgetting, but on the contrary it includes a constant work on history, a common rewriting of text books, historical dialogue, the creation of memorials for the victims and for the reconciliation. Reconciliation

does not mean the end of all conflicts. Conflicts are a necessary part of social and political life, without conflicts there would be no development. But when good relationships are established, conflicts can be treated in a different way which gives more space to negotiation, to international law, mediation and compromises.

When I use that broad definition of reconciliation, you will perhaps think that I am a strange theologian. Theologians often prefer a narrower definition of reconciliation. They underline the origins of the concept of reconciliation in the Jewish and in the Christian religion, they talk about forgiveness and about the spirituality of reconciliation. All those concepts play a role for me as a person and as a believer, but they are not the focus of my research. I am afraid that by a too narrow definition of reconciliation, many possible processes of reconciliation policies are not taken into account. To give only one example: After the Holocaust, many Israelis would not even think about the possibility to forgive the perpetrators, but already in the 1950s Israel and West-Germany could nevertheless enter into a process of reconciliation in the broader sense. Even if people are not believers of a religion, we can speak about a spirituality of reconciliation work. The most spiritual sentence for me in practical reconciliation work is the insight that: if you are not for the people, you can forget that work. If both sides do not feel that you respect them and want the best for them, very likely there will be no success in reconciliation work.

To sum up the 2nd point: The broad definition of reconciliation is essential: Reconciliation is the reestablishment of “good” or at least “normal” relationships after a violent conflict like war, after mass atrocities like genocides, after crimes against humanity or after other heavy injustices inflicted to one group by another. If there has never been a good relationship, I suggest to use the term “conciliation”.

3rd The story in the press:

The Hearts of Flesh project, I want to present to you, in spring 2014 got an astonishing attention in the media. There were articles in newspapers like Haaretz, Washington Post, New York Times, Atlantic, Le Figaro, Le Monde, La Repubblica, die ZEIT, die Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and others, even in Uruguay, Russia and Japan there were articles about the Auschwitz trip. TV channels like CNN, BBC world and Al Jazeera Washington brought interviews and discussions with members of our project. I want to start with the article in the New York Times and then tell you the story behind the story.

New York Times 2014/04/21

Middle East/International Education

Palestinian Teaches Tolerance via Holocaust

By Matthew Kalman/The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 20, 2014

JERUSALEM – Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi is an unlikely advocate for peace between Palestinians and Israelis. He trained as a guerilla with the Palestine Liberation Organization, was banned from Israel for 25 years because of his prominent role in Yasser Arafat's Fatah group, and still refers to Israelis as 'my enemy'.

But Mr. Dajani, now the library director and a professor of American studies at Al-Quds University, in East Jerusalem, has become a prominent activist for tolerance.

In 2007, he founded Wasatia ('moderation' in Arabic), a group that promotes the Muslim tradition of compromise and nonviolence. His chosen path has already led him to a lonely stand opposing an academic boycott of Israel supported by most of his Palestinian peers.

Recently, he traveled into further isolation by leading an effort to teach Palestinians at universities in the West Bank about the Holocaust, which is not part of the curriculum in Palestinian schools. In addition to a series of seminars on the topic, in March he took what is thought to have been the first group of students from the Palestinian territories to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, in Poland.

Referring to the trip, Mr. Dajani said in an interview, "it helped emphasize the human story of the Holocaust, to study the meaning of the historical narrative as related to our conflict, to heighten empathy, awareness, and sensitivity."

The visit was part of a study program on conflict resolution involving students and scholars from Wasatia and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Israel. The program is organized by Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena, in Germany, and paid for by the German Research Foundation."

4th The research project

If you do not read the articles in the press extremely carefully you easily think that the trip to Auschwitz was a political provocative action or as it is categorized in the New York Times a part of "international education". The trip was something else, it was part of a research project. This project is still going on. Last November we decided to plan two more trips of Palestinians to Auschwitz as well as three more trips of Israelis to Palestinian refugee camps. We must say it clearly: The main idea of the research was not to make any direct contribution to the political development in Palestine. As researchers our goal was to avoid to enter into the newspapers, because newspapers articles could disturb our results. The DFG – German Research Foundation – selected our project because the research ideas, the methodology and

the intense preparations we had made before submitting it for that grant convinced the jury. The central discipline of the project is social psychology. Our goal is to find something out about group dynamics. We could have chosen other groups and other countries, but there were three important reasons to do it with Israelis and Palestinians.

(1.) The first reason is Professor Arie Nadler from Tel Aviv University. Professor Nadler is one of the most well-known experts on social-psychological research of reconciliation. He created a well known model to understand reconciliation called the needs-based model. In 2011, Nadler spent several months in Jena as a scientist in residence. Every week we met in an Italian restaurant and discussed our ideas. So the Hearts of Flesh project came into being and it was clear to do it with German-Israeli cooperation.

(2.) The German Research Foundation has different programs for projects with Israel, one of them is the trilateral program with Israel and Palestinian territories. As the universities in Palestine have no possibility to provide doctoral degrees, one idea of the trilateral program is to help Palestinians to get PhDs from a German or – less likely – an Israeli university. The DFG's trilateral program includes all disciplines, including those with nothing to do with conflict and reconciliation studies. But its cooperative structure is intended to provide some positive effects for cooperation and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

The (3) reason to apply for a trilateral project was that we wanted to find something out about the willingness of people within groups to reconcile with another group they presently considered enemies. We wanted to find out, if the encounter with the suffering of the other group can have any positive effect on the willingness to reconcile. We needed groups who see each other clearly as an enemy and who normally are not aware or thinking about the suffering of the other group. On the other hand, the groups should not be so much in an actual violent conflict that any encounter would be excluded. Palestinians and Israelis were ideal for that research because all these conditions are given. Palestinians are not told about the Holocaust in school, relatively often they have doubts whether the Holocaust really happened or whether it was not just a part of the 2nd World War, exaggerated by the Zionists to legitimize what they did to Palestinians. Israel is also interesting for the research we want to conduct. The history of Palestinian suffering is more or less banned from Israeli education, as well as from the daily experience of young Israelis. In schools it is even not allowed to use the normal Arab word "Nakba" to describe the flight of the Palestinians in 1948.

5th The research group and the hypothesis

On that base, three scholars of social psychology came together: Arie Nadler, Thomas Kessler in Jena, and Shifra Sagy in Ben Gurion University (Beer-Sheba). Prof Sagy organizes the

research and the travels for Israelis. Our Palestinian partner is from Al Quds University in Jerusalem: the professor for American Studies Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, whom you also find in the article. He is also very experienced in historical questions and in political science. From Jena we also integrated Nikolaus Knoepffler, scholar of applied ethics and Bertram Schmitz from religious studies. The project's central question is about the experience of the suffering of the "other", namely, of the group who is considered the enemy. The context of this experience is important, obviously, and religion (both Muslim and Jewish) plays a significant role in the feelings expressed as well as the arguments made about the conflict. Other relevant aspects include trust between the conflicting groups, the respect they experience from the other group, general ethical arguments, as well as historical and political beliefs. All together there are actually more 15 students writing PhDs and other research works in the project.

6th Nakba and Auschwitz

After a preparatory workshop for the Palestinians, the travel to Auschwitz took place from March 24th to 30th 2014. The travel of Israelis to a Palestinian refugee camp near Bethlehem had been some days previous. Both groups answered long questionnaires before and after their trips. The Palestinians group had some pressure before the trip, but only 5 students, mainly from Birzeit University, did not go. They were replaced by students from a waiting list. Twenty-eight students began the journey, and one student was stopped by the Israeli control at Allenby Bridge before entering Jordan. The others took a plane from Amman to Warsaw and from Warsaw to Krakow. The traveling group was joined by two "witnesses" - two Israeli professors from Beer Sheba who had lost many members of their families in Auschwitz. Both had parents who had survived Auschwitz and they related the experience of their suffering. For the Israeli students visiting Palestinian "suffering memorials", there were also witnesses interpreting the memorial.

The Palestinian group in Poland expressed significant distrust of the Israelis present. But they also expressed the desire to "experience" the Auschwitz memorial and to learn about the Holocaust. Interestingly, the Palestinians discussed their experience as a group well into the night, spending hours and hours together and producing an incredibly high bill for tea.

7th How we came into the media

During the experience we made the conscience decision not to have any press with us. One Palestinian participant (Salim) produced a documentary for our research. We were approached by several journalists, but we always refused. Only one journalist was granted pre-trip

interviews, the well-respected British-born Jerusalem correspondent Matthew Kalman. He was commissioned to write an article for the Chronicle of Higher Education. The Chronicle also commissioned a photographer to make photos at the Auschwitz Memorial.

It was unfortunate for a number of reasons that Kalman went to press on March 28 during the middle of our visit in an article titled: “Palestinian students visit Auschwitz in first organized visit.” He published this not with the Chronicle a very respectable but relatively focused academic journal, but in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. Kalman later claimed that he had only promised not to publish in the Chronicle before the end of the trip, but we were clear with him about our desire to postpone any media attention during the trip.

Other journals around the world picked up the story, and based upon Kalman’s generally well-informed piece, the image of Palestinians projected in the international English-language press was very positive. However, the Jerusalem-based Arabic-language Al Quds newspaper published an Arabic version of Haaretz article on the Al Quds website. There, they reported that two Zionist organizations sponsored the experience in Auschwitz. That misinformation especially provoked violent reactions in Arab-language social digital media like Facebook, Twitter, and other forums. People called professor Dajani a “traitor”. And, regretfully, our participants (many of whom possessing smartphones and access to internet media) received some pressure from their families.

We are consoled to know that all students and project members arrived safely in their Palestinian homes, but there was significant fallout. Some days after the conclusion of the trip, some so-called “students” destroyed the library of the American Studies Program at Al Quds University. Some weeks later, there were threats to the well-being of Professor Dajani. Dajani was informed that he should only be on the Al-Quds campus under the shelter of university security. After a talk with the now-emeritus president of Al-Quds University Sari Nusseibeh and his successor, the university officials failed to publically support Dajani in the face of insidious allegations and violent threats from university faculty and students. It seems that they had lacked the courage. On the eve of the violence in the West Bank and the war in Gaza, nobody wanted to be accused of cooperation with Israelis – a cooperation that can be considered as against the official policy of anti-normalisation, which means a boycott of any joint project with Israelis. Professor Dajani decided to stop his courses until the situation would change. That decision was interpreted by some journalists as a termination of employment from the university. This time, the story was carried more by Western and pro-Israel media, as an example of Palestinian close-mindedness. The first organized travel of West Bank Palestinian students to Auschwitz together with the reaction in Palestine was the

reason why so many newspapers and now even TV channels like Al Jazeera Washington and BBC world were interested in the story.

8th First results of the research project

The research project is still going on and only the very first results are going to be published in the next month. Therefore I can only give you some general results of our research. I can also only present a relatively small but central part of our research

(1.) It works. The encounter with the suffering of the other group leads to greater empathy with the other group and to a willingness to reconcile. At the end of the travel, a majority of the Palestinian participants even took part in a moment to stand up in honor for the people killed in Auschwitz. In the Palestinian group there were even some participants who said that from now they want to be a witness in Palestine that the Holocaust really happened. The presence of several Germans was also a confirmation for the Palestinians that Holocaust really happened in those monstrous dimensions, we all know from history.

Also the Israeli group was deeply emotionally impacted by the experience of Palestinian suffering. Many did not know what happened in 1948 and were somehow shocked. A few even were open to rethink territorial issues.

Travels like the one we organized strengthen the willingness to reconcile. We do not know whether they work in other cases, whether they work with other settings and also whether less expensive activities would have similar effects. We do not know so far the answers of those questions. We have only the impression that in a context of denial of the holocaust and the Nakba it is very helpful to see the places and to talk with witnesses.

(2.) Those effects, however, interact with several other factors which can be so strong that they can endanger empathy and willingness to reconcile. We observed at least four of those effects:

(a) Trust. There is an extreme potential for mistrust in many Palestinians whenever there is something perceived as Zionist propaganda. They are afraid of being “brain-washed” as they say.

(b) Trauma. About 30% of the Palestinian participants have been in Israeli prisons, some during more than five years. Others have members of their families heavily tortured in Israeli prisons. One of them is a PhD-student in the project. She told that first time, she visited a concentration camp, she thought that that was well done to the Jews. Only by several visits and a longer reflection she opened to compassion with the victims of the camps. Many Palestinian participants wanted Israelis and the whole world to hear their own suffering before

they learn about the suffering of the Jews. This process can even lead to a phenomenon like competitive victimhood.

(c) Universal versus particular meaning of the suffering.

At some moments there were discussions between the Palestinians and Israeli PhD students and professors present in Auschwitz. Those discussions were very limited, because we wanted Palestinians to have an Auschwitz and not an Israeli-group-meeting experience. But what was said was interesting. Many Palestinians expressed that the meaning of the Holocaust is universal. Ethically it should be expressed as a universal rule: Never should people inflict something similar to other people. Experts in Ethics could easily find the universal argumentation and its application like in the negative form of the Golden rule in the argumentation of the participants. When we all agree that such things should not happen and when nobody wants to experience that, why do Israelis inflict so much harm and suffering to the Palestinians. Most Palestinian participants were aware that the quantity and the quality of the Holocaust are different from the reality of the occupation of Palestinian territories, but what individuals suffer can become relatively similar.

Israelis often stress the unique evil of the Holocaust. They see it as linked to 2000 years of Anti-Jewish discrimination, abuse and pogroms. And they link the experience of the Holocaust to the particular rule: Jews should never experience it again. Never Again! Palestinians did not accept that argumentation and the discourses of the Israelis which sometimes ended with a rationale that they had to go to Israel, were an obstacle of empathy and willingness to reconcile on the side of the Palestinians.

(d) Respect.

More by a mistake than by our willingness, one question in the questionnaire was whether Palestinians would now disagree with terrorist activities. The Israeli researchers had introduced that question and the reaction of almost all Palestinians was very negative. The Palestinian PhD students had to work hard to convince them not to stop to fill out the questionnaires. They perceived that question as an affront to their dignity. It seems that the respect of the dignity of the other group is extremely important for the willingness to reconcile. In laboratory studies, a PhD candidate in Jena, Larissa Naegler, showed that respect is an independent factor for the willingness to reconcile.

9th The future experiments

If the DFG gives us the grants for the second half of the research project, we want to research on questions like, whether mixed group travels or travels of Palestinians alone to Auschwitz

or Israelis alone to refugee camps are likely to have better results. A joint project to ours will investigate into the effects of theater-experiences. Palestinian researchers staged the play “Seven Jewish children” which is about the Holocaust in Palestinian theaters and recorded audience reactions. We want to find out more about the trauma of Palestinians, about a better preparation of the groups and also about the notion of victimhood. Our partner Ari Nadler is very much interested in that question. It seems that there is an important difference between “being a victim” and “victimhood” as part of one’s identity. It can be that somebody is a victim of atrocities, but considers that as part of past without many impact on the actual identity. It can also be that somebody cannot be a direct victim, but only his grandparents. The actual consequences of the atrocities which happened to the grand parents can be relatively small. Nevertheless, the person considers her victimhood as an important part of her identity. It seems that that is the case for many younger Israelis. Ari Nadler wants to find out more about that phenomenon. And then we have many other important aspects for example on religious resources for reconciliation. One PhD student shows for example that in 20th Century’s Judaism the commandment to reconcile with others before the reconciliation with God on Yom Kippur is often understood as reconciliation with every human being you should reconcile with. Or another work is about the importance of reconciliation before and during the Hadj, the Ramadan and before dying in Islam. We have many aspects, and I hope to bring all our results and experiences together in a book within the next three years.

10th The political impact of the project

The project itself was and it remains a strictly scientific project. But it had effects, namely on the Palestinian participants of the Auschwitz trip as well as on Professor Dajani and several PhD students. The critical reactions they had to face, led to the effect that a minority distanced themselves from the trip, whereas other became much more committed to reconciliation. The idea of reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis is still rather fresh in Palestine. That idea becomes now an issue. One PhD candidate for example has opened a social digital media forum on the internet where he asks questions about reconciliation and actual political events. Another PhD candidate, Zeina Barakat, got inspired by the Women’s movement in Liberia. Within less than one month she has gathered more than 800 Palestinian women who want to be active for peace and reconciliation. That group has the intention to work together with Israeli Women for Peace. That group is already a rather strong movement. When I was in Ramallah last December, I was surprised to meet a large part of the participants of the Auschwitz-trip politically active and interested in reconciliation. The same things happened to German PhD

students in Jena who organized a rally for peace when the Gaza war broke out. Some of the Israeli PhD students were already engaged in the Peace Movement.

But perhaps more important is that after the attention we have reached by the trip and with the findings we are about to make, we started to reflect systematically on how that project can make an impact on policy makers. We are searching for that impact on different levels and have found several reliable and active partners: The mayor of Jena for example has built up a trilateral city-twinning-program with Gilboa (Israel), Bet Jala (Palestine) and Jena. This cooperation provides us opportunities to present our project to mayors in Germany and, hopefully in 2015, through a meeting of European cities also to mayors of other countries. Other partners who are very much interested to bring our work to the attention of politicians are Church leaders.

11th Germany's Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

During the last two decades, we can observe that more and more policy makers in Germany took responsibility not only to contribute to Israel's security, but also to help Palestinians and to search for ways to transform the conflict in the direction of peace. Behind this policy there are two convictions: (1) the best thing that can happen for Israel is peace and, if possible, reconciliation with its neighbors. It is an illusion to believe that by weapons and walls alone you could get the complete and enduring security. (2) Germany is partly responsible for the conflict. Without the Holocaust fewer Jewish people would have chosen to migrate to Israel. The atmosphere in Israel would be different. People would feel not so fearful, not so much in need of security and not so unaware of the harm they inflicted and still inflict on the Palestinians. There is a general rule for reconciliation, which says that all those who have contributed to a problem should cooperate towards its solution. Therefore, Germany has the responsibility to make a contribution.

There is an obligation felt by more and more institutions, and also by the government, to contribute to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Often scholars see the military cooperation with Israel and the millions of Euros sent by the EU to the West Bank and to Gaza to build and to rebuild infrastructure, but among the contributions of Germany, there are several that belong to a reconciliation approach. To give three examples:

(1) cooperation

One major problem is that increasingly Israelis and Palestinian have no chances to meet each other outside of a strict "security" context. The wall, the interdiction (through Israeli law) for Israelis to visit cities like Ramallah and the anti-normalization policy in Palestine

create more and more obstacles to cooperation and to the creation of a realistic image of the other side. The idea of the trilateral project of the DFG is a direct answer to this problem. We could see that Palestinian and Israeli PhD students changed during the project, some even became friends.

(2) Germans are important witnesses to the Holocaust

As in Palestine many people are not sure whether the Holocaust happened, Germans, as heirs of the perpetrators, have a special role to play and a responsibility to confirm or explain the reality of the Holocaust for the Palestinians. In our project, we experienced that German statements on this point were more convincing than statements by Israelis.

(3) Messages of hope and interesting questions

Palestinians are excited to visit Berlin. It gives them the hope that borders can open again, and they are inspired to create murals on the wall they have to live with.

But there is also a special question Germans can ask. As Germans we are deeply impressed by the generosity of Jewish people to accept cooperation with Germans after the Holocaust. It is like a miracle that so many good experiences between individuals, cities and cooperation on the state level are positive.

Grievances were left behind, and reconciliation could happen. As a German, I wonder whether Israelis, who with Germans were so generous, could not show generosity towards Palestinians. The dimensions of what Germans inflicted on the Jews are so incredibly much more important than what Palestinians did to Israelis. The reasons why Germans murdered Jews are so much less understandable than the reasons of the Palestinians. Therefore, I am hopeful that Israelis could change on this point and become more open for a more human and “normal” image of Palestinians.

It is not clear how far the influence of reconciliation policy can go. To go further, it would have to deal with spoilers like the Al-Quds-news journalists who willingly misinformed the Palestinians. They would also have to deal with people who are profiting from the conflict and with people who have another agenda than peace, like radical settlers who somehow trap Israel’s politicians.

All those questions are open for further discussion.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Martin Leiner, Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies at Friedrich-Schiller-University