Introduction

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RECONCILIATION… FORGIVENESS… *RECONCILIATION* and Forgiveness. Two loaded, even aporetic, terms with tremendously complicated and ever-branching semantic trees, rendered even more complicated by the vexing conjunction in the title. In this issue, *Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness* interrogates these terms, navigating around the personal, psychological, socio-political and moral issues implicated and imbricated in acts of reconciliation and/or forgiveness. Beginning with the first term, we pose a host of questions about the factors that catalyze or impede conflict resolution and reconciliation between erstwhile (internal or external) foes and antagonists. Reconciliation, it has been argued, is an ethically-laden Levinasian gesture informed by an intersubjective optic. This intersubjective vision, some believe, can bring about the social and psychological breakthroughs that make conflict resolution possible. Any investigation of intersubjectivity, however, inevitably leads to attempts at delineating the territory of "identity," "alterity" and the borderland in between. Over and above the weight of "history" and the edited memory that keeps it alive, a group's grand narratives often hinder intercommunal and intersubjective understanding. Scripted identities and dominant discourses stand in the way of the search for emancipatory and hospitable spaces where a cosmopolitical viewpoint and a cosmopolitan ethics can be conjoined.[1] From the perspective of longstanding conflicts, the Middle East example being a salient one among many[2], such liberatory visions are, all too frequently, not in sight let alone in reach. Hybridizing or conciliatory visions seem incapable of competing with the hegemonic discourses on the inassimilable and total Other, the

[1] Jacques Derrida is not alone in dreaming of "des villes-refuge, villes franches…des lieux de pensée," (*Sur paroles: instantanés philosophiques*. Paris: Editions de l'aube: 1999, p. 58). In much of his recent writings, he devotes attention to the theme of reconciliation and hospitality. This theme is echoed in Kristeva's work, as in that of many others.

[2] The Middle East is a good example of a region where the Other is both within a given society as well as out there beyond the borders of the known: the Other is the "inimical Arab or Israeli," as the case may be. Sectarian, confessional and ethnic conflicts exist alongside the endemic Arab-Israeli problem.

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"tout autre." Yet many are those who recognize that, for the distance between Self and Other to be traversed, some aspects of what a group thinks "it is" have to be reconfigured, if only to accommodate the compromises that have to be made to reach a sought-after reconciliation.

Beyond the sphere of ethical and philosophical contemplation, however, another-- some would call it "practical" – view seems to be entrenched: many political scientists and politicians advance the argument that it is realism, not an ethical imperative, that propels peace initiatives. Politicians practicing "the art of the possible" often portray themselves as the guardians of peace negotiations and the guarantors of their success. Reconciliation, as they see it, becomes possible when it becomes necessary. It succeeds when it has to succeed, when all warring factions or parties to a conflict realize that they have no choice but to accept a compromise. Reconciliation, then, is focalized by them as an act of political necessity predicated on an expedient need to end conflict.

Different values, assumptions and calculations underlie what can be tagged the "philosophical" and the "political" perspectives on reconciliation. Which of the two is more sustainable? Is political expediency enough to secure a long-term resolution to conflict, or does it merely drive the contested issues underground? To be sure, the implementation of new social contracts that take into consideration the interests of all groups, including disenfranchised and subaltern ones, is a crucial step toward achieving long-term peace and social stability. So is a revision of school curricula and, in many cases, a rewriting of the ever-contested "history textbook," the official narrative of "what happened" fed to children. Equally important are the politically sponsored performative acts of public apologies, bearing witness, mourning and soul searching. Without tangible and meaningful moves, the victim (there where a victim could be identified) becomes doubly victimized by voicelessness and silence. Among their other roles and functions, truth commissions like that of South Africa are ritualistic expiations of guilt and symbolic acts that signal a group's willingness to probe, and break with, its torturous past. It has to be conceded, however, that political and performative acts that inspire and engender processes like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission cannot forestall individual acts of retaliation and revenge, and might not be able to assuage the lingering pain felt by certain groups and passed on to successive generations. There are many reasons for that, one being the often-unbridgeable gap between collective and individual experiences of reconciliation. The fact that the political leadership of a group is willing to engage in a process of reconciliation does not necessarily mean that all members of that group are equally ready for this process or have sufficiently overcome the trauma of the past to turn a new leaf. Is this not one of the lessons of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* where reverse-racism and virulent sexism combine to assail the fledgling

democratic system and due process legitimized in part by such bodies as the Truth Commission? The black characters in *Disgrace* have their own way of settling scores with Apartheid. With rape and sadism, they respond to the immense moral debt incurred by the white population. Coetzee's message in that novel seems to be that what is sorely needed in countries like South Africa is the strengthening of civil society, citizen governance, and human rights movements. Legislation alone cannot end conflicts. It cannot wish/wash away the trauma and the scars etched on the body of a victim or retained in the memory of a group.

This brings us to another thorny issue, namely, that of memory. One Babylonian dictum contends that "where there is complete truth, there is no peace. And where there is peace, there is no complete truth," while Emily Dickinson advises "tell all the truth but tell it slant." Is forgetting, then (or partial forgetting, or "slanted narration,") a pre-requisite for reconciliation? No. Forgetting is not an option. For we have taken to heart the non-negotiable lesson that, for "Never Again" to have any meaning, it has to be accompanied by "We remember!" and "We shall never forget!" How should a group narrate and narrativize past atrocities it committed or of which it was the victim? Is this not another crucial theme that has to be broached when talking about reconciliation? To echo Celan, Adorno, Paul Verhoeven, Blanchot, Egoyan and many others who have given thought to the ethics of representing the Holocaust and genocide, we must ask: what language can contain the horror that genocide was and is? And how can that language of pain further, rather than hinder, reconciliation? Do "transactional models" where a collective apology, for instance, is offered in return for forgiveness work? What historical examples support such models?

These, then, are some of the many agonistic and agonizing issues to which a discussion of reconciliation gives rise. If they impose themselves on us more than ever before it is because we live in a world where festering conflicts are no longer localized but globalized. Doubtless, answers to the questions revolving around the theme of reconciliation are never univocal, but vary according to context, culture, and degree of commitment or need a group has for reconciliation. Amidst the specificities of each case or context, certain general themes and concerns recurring in the discourse on reconciliation can be discerned and appear to have achieved some universality. One group's "model" of conflict resolution may, therefore, project beyond its situation and be able to offer solutions and strategies to other communities with similar social, political and historical fault lines. A topical illustration of this is the reverberation of the ethos of the South African TRC in the discourse on reconciliation beginning to take shape in Iraq today.

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Only a few weeks ago, in a widely publicized event, Iraqi clan leaders and clerics proposed a Project for National Reconciliation meant to attenuate the side effects of the massive de-Ba'thification of Iraq underway since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The list of issues they tackled brings home to us the utilitarian character of many a reconciliation commission and process. For them, as for Desmond Tutu and the Hague War Crimes Tribunals, and before them the Nuremberg Trials, seeking justice for groups wronged and setting historical records straight (inasmuch as this is possible) are not a luxury, but a practical necessity invested with great moral significance. The following points, in particular, will resonate with many readers in far-flung regions in the world, echoing as they do similar processes in which groups issuing from varying degrees of civil unrest engaged. Of great urgency to the Iraqi chiefs is the delineation of a framework within which reconciliation can conceivably begin to take place. Here are some of the positions and parameters advanced by their spokespersons:

1. "Reconciliation" is not synonymous with "forgiveness." Forgiveness, deferred for now, is not deemed urgent.
2. Retroactive guilt attribution ought not take the form of collective punishment or the criminalization of entire groups. Homogenization would be a grave mistake.
3. Turning a new leaf is a *necessity*. If this is not done, Iraq risks falling into a state of anarchy and civil war. One participant does not mince words when he pleads, saying "we are in dire need of reconciliation, as we cannot afford any more losses." Such stark terms underscore the importance of reconciliation even ahead of judicial proceedings and due process.
4. Related to the point above, Sheikh Abbas Shlaysh tellingly underlines the utilitarian character of the reconciliation project proposed, maintaining that without foresight and a correct reading of the imminent dangers that political disenfranchisement and social ostracism might bring about, former Ba'th members, unable to provide for their families "might ally themselves with terrorist organizations." Hence the urgent need to integrate those people in the new Iraq and find them a place in the institutions being forged.

A whole constellation of concerns, thus, surfaces in the blueprint for reconciliation now being fashioned in Iraq. As expected, the points above echo similar discourses on reconciliation the world over and bring to mind other road maps for peace adopted elsewhere. Fear of anarchy, civil war and a replay of recent fratricidal conflicts in Lebanon then the Balkans propel that blueprint. But one word in that list makes us pause: it is "forgiveness," the second term in the title of this issue. So far, we have referred to some general views of reconciliation. We must now

ask: does reconciliation inevitably lead to forgiveness? Might we be satisfied with the formula "we shall forgive but not forget"? Here is one Iraqi leader stating emphatically that he is not ready to forgive. What is the meaning and value of reconciliation without forgiveness? As Amos Friedland expounds in his article, for Hegel reconciliation has to be anchored in forgiveness, whereas for Arendt and Derrida, this is not the case: the two terms do not have to go together, and, in some cases, must not go together. For Derrida, forgiveness is forever aporetic. One might also consider Ricoeur's contribution to the discussion of the problematic of forgiveness and debt. If the first step toward reconciliation is correcting blinkered visions and combating bunkered mentalities, what are the first steps toward forgiveness? Is forgiveness necessary? Is it possible? Whom do we forgive and who does the forgiving? Can we give ourselves the right to forgive on behalf of those who lost their lives, those who paid the ultimate price of violence, aggression, cruelty, intolerance and hate? These, again, are the torturous and tortuous questions that some of our contributors address from a variety of angles.

In this volume, we have tried to balance the theoretical articles, which intersect in their concerns with a number of issues raised in this foreword, with testimonial pieces and artistic works that translate theory into poetic and visual images or anchor the telescopic vision of theory in the ground of actuality and concrete examples. A few months ago, on the quiet shores of Lake Geneva, some Israelis and Palestinians signed an unofficial agreement (or initiative) now referred to as "the Geneva Accord." The signatories were mostly Israeli and Palestinian public intellectuals and politicians who had formerly held ministerial or other high-ranking political positions. Behind its conceptualization were also writers and peace activists, including Amos Oz. Though not officially recognized by the governments of the two groups, that accord was presented as the most comprehensive one ever signed by Arabs and Israelis, with its proponents contending that it proposed solutions to all the formidable and hitherto-unresolved problems that previous peace initiatives had eschewed. What do some of the people who are directly or indirectly affected by Mid-East violence have to say about it? PEHW solicited responses to this accord to help concretize some of the theoretical issues presented in the Articles section, and to foreground how people who are viscerally involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict think through that accord. The testimonial pieces are written by "stakeholders" who will be affected, in one way or another, by whatever solutions get envisioned and implemented in the Middle East. Among those pieces, a father and son take diametrically opposed views of that document. Going beyond the Middle East, one testimonial article takes us to South Africa to record one woman's thoughts on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which she personally witnessed, while two others

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revolve around the present crisis in Iraq. Equally noteworthy are reflections on space, the past, and the reconstruction of the Beirut downtown core registered by an architect who describes himself as "angry with" the city of his birth. Memory, memorializing, trauma, grief, mourning and forgetting are some of the themes Arida ponders when he deconstructs the discourse on reconstruction and evaluates how what was/is preserved or demolished will impact on identity and memory. Space changed is memory changed and relocated; it is history bracketed and perhaps even forgotten.

Some of the artwork presented in this issue underlines how much every generation needs to define its relationship to past horror. Hughes, for instance, demonstrates how, to avoid the banalization of familiar images, the horror of the Nazi concentration camps has to be defamiliarized for successive generations. Novel images of old horror aim to force us to "look again." Such images must never become familiar or fetishized.

We hope that the reflections on reconciliation and forgiveness contained in this issue will provoke further questions and explorations. PEHW would like to remind its readers that feedback is always welcome. We seek debate and discussion, responses and rebuttals. This week, the world marks the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. Archives on the hundred days of terror that saw the death of close to a million people are now being revisited. Politicians concerned about potential political fallout have gone on the defensive or offensive in an attempt to "explain" what went terribly wrong. If events like those witnessed on the Rwandan killing fields defy description, they still leave us with the moral imperative to fashion out of our, often vicarious, experience of horror a language that grapples with "what happened." Within this language, we can begin to struggle with genocidal and other forms of unbearable violence, if only to suggest ways for the survivors to surmount, to the extent that they are able, the pain and trauma that stand in the way of intercommunal reconciliation.