Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Understanding the Zionist Identity Barrier to Peace in the Israel/Palestine Conflict

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I. Introduction

The present work is based on part of the master's thesis by the same author and on the field research (hence forth referred to in this article as "the field research") performed for that thesis in Israel and in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) in 2010.

The article discusses aspects of Zionist national identity that have contributed to the creation and maintenance of the Israel/Palestine conflict, and the resistance of some Jews to this dominant state-inscribed identity, as well as the implications of changes in this identity.

The analysis discussed here illustrates the process through which Israeli and Diaspora Jews, although socialized in a Zionist environment, move away from or reject fundamental Zionist precepts and frequently engage in activism against Israeli policies regarding Palestinians, and against injustices committed against the Palestinian people by the Zionist enterprise for over six decades that the state of Israel has existed.

When thinking about the Israel/Palestine conflict from the perspective of the field of International Relations, it is possible to notice its relation to the conceptual structure of the modern international system of states, where identities are territorialized and need a state in order to obtain international recognition.

Besides this external definition of identity, through recognition granted

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by others, modern states also depend on an internal definition of identity, the national identity.

Both the emergence of Zionism and the six-decade-long plight of the Palestinians have their origin in this state structure.

This discussion is based on the conception that modern national identities are discursively constructed and inscribed by the state, whose politics tend to reflect the same fundamental precepts which constitute the national identity.

II. Identity, International Relations and Political Science

Fearon (1999, p. 39) points out that the discussion on *identity*, due to its intrinsic imprecision and complexity, is somewhat delicate and has been frequently avoided in the fields of International Relations and Political Science. Waxman (2006, p. 5), however, criticizes the *Realist* school of the International Relations field, which denies the importance of considering identity in realpolitik approaches, and is concerned only with security and power. Waxman explains that the Realist approach considers that foreign policy and violent conflict between states originate from security issues, but fails to explain the occurrence of international cooperation and commerce. Moreover, it fails to account for the role that identity politics play in defining foreign policy and in stimulating conflict, both national and international, which can be considered a great omission for a field whose main concern is national security.

It is fitting then to question which underlying suppositions to this Realist approach allow for it to ignore such a fundamental issue as *identity*. The answer possibly lies in the supposition of an immutable character of the *identity* factor, in its stability or essential character.

Traditional conflict resolution approaches that propose negotiation, agreements etc. are frequently based on this same Realist supposition of the identities involved, by attempting to deal with them as given, immutable principles. These approaches, however, have proven unsuccessful in the case of the Israel/Palestine conflict, since it can be argued that fundamental precepts of modern Zionist identity, as we will see later in this article, do not allow for

accommodating any Palestinian needs or interests, which would be necessary for achieving any kind of agreement.

III. State-Inscribed Identities

A common perception of the Israel/Palestine conflict is its supposed *unavoidability*, given the apparent impossibility that the opposing sides involved can escape their identities, which in turn motivate their politics. Though there is evidence that such identities do *exist*, the phenomenon examined in this article (the rejection of Zionist precepts by Jews) questions the supposition that these identities are of an essential and immutable nature. Although it is not a new phenomenon, since movements of such nature have always existed throughout Israel's history, a growing and increasingly organized number of Jews, while still a minority in Israel and Jewish communities around the world, have manifested opposition to Israeli policies regarding Palestinians. Often, these individuals become politically active, also advocating for restorative justice for the Palestinian people.

One of the main challenges for these Jews is in dealing with the Jewish majority, which does not show tolerance for such political postures. These individuals are frequently branded as traitors or self-hating Jews. This kind of delegitimization of political postures that oppose state-imposed identity is a way to avoid their significant discussion within Jewish circles. This delegitimizing reaction results from a perception of threat, since criticism of Israeli policy frequently coincides with a rejection of fundamental precepts of the dominant national identity, Zionism, inscribed in the Jewish population by the state of Israel, and is seen as negating its right to exist.

There is a somewhat *tribal* expectation among the Jewish majority that Jews should support Israel unconditionally, at least in reference to the Israel/Palestine conflict. The evident problem in this conception is that this support is expected based on identity, where Jewish identity presupposes Zionist identity, instead of on an analysis of the political actions applied by the state.

Another form of delegitimizing political postures contrary to the Zionist

ones is the presupposition that the individuals who defend them are somehow predisposed to have them, having come from marginal groups of Jewish collectivity, distant from its real values. The attempt is again to shift the problem to the individuals, ignoring that the majority of Jews in the world is brought up Zionist, a supplemental fact to the exceptional character of Israel, which is not a state of its citizens, but of Jews wherever they might be.

IV. Identity-Change Triggers

The field research points out results inconsistent with the delegitimizing claim mentioned in the previous paragraph, apparently making it void: among the thirteen interviewees, Israeli and Diaspora Jews engaged in activism against Israeli policies towards Palestinians, there were Jews of religious and secular origin — Ashkenazi, Sefaradi and Mizrahi[1] Jews — and even from Jewish settler families in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and some having been settlers themselves; all came from a diversity of Zionist environments and previously identified themselves as deeply Zionist.

The discovery that Israeli policy towards Palestinians is a natural extension of fundamental Zionist precepts, and the finding that these precepts and policies do not represent the moral values these individuals were brought up with, pushed the interviewees mentioned above into a process of de-identification from such precepts, at times to the point of ceasing to identify as Zionists. Such a process often stimulates an *internal conversation*, a reflection around how those people see and define themselves, as well as what identity they should adopt in a way it would reflect their fundamental values.

Identities on both sides of this conflict, Zionist and Palestinian, are significantly defined in relation to a *hostile other*. Some transformative experiences drive people to question the beliefs that have informed their identities so far. Such experiences were described by interviewees in the field

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(1) *Ashkenazi*: Jews of European origin; *Sefaradi*: Jews from the Iberian Peninsula; *Mizrahi*: Jews from the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus.

research, for instance: an Israeli soldier found out that his mission is to protect Jewish settlers while they commit crimes with impunity against Palestinians in their lands, cities, markets and homes (Haasz, 2011, pp. 104-106); or yet the same Israeli soldier found out there is a Palestinian Non-Violent Communication center in the OPT, which completely contradicted the dehumanized enemy-image he sustained of Palestinians in his belief system (Haasz, 2011, p. 111); or the insight of yet another soldier that during night raids on Palestinian villages he took part in, Palestinian children might perceive him as Jewish children perceived Nazi soldiers invading their homes in Europe (Haasz, 2011, p. 117); the encounter of a Jewish American woman with Palestinians in an Arabic language course in Israel, in which they express to her they do not believe she is Jewish because she is treating them so kindly (Haasz, 2011, p. 122);

All of these experiences contributed to the reversion of the perception of Palestinians as an essential *hostile other* in the eyes of the interviewees, humanizing the image of the Palestinian *other*, and generating insight into their own hostile, or better yet aggressive postures. By doing that, a new way of looking at the *other* is internalized, and individuals reach the point where changes in their choices of categories of identification, or in the name they give their identity become necessary in order to reflect this new way of perceiving this Palestinian *other*. Kelman (2004, p. 120) points out that "Internalization represents a readiness to change an attitude because the new attitude […] is more consistent with the person's own, preexisting value system." Kelman's assertion points to the relation between identity and moral integrity we will touch upon further ahead in this paper.

V. Jewish Versus Zionist Identities: A Cognitive Dissonance

One of the main challenges in this context is to dissociate Jewish identity from Zionist identity, since the latter is constituted in a fashion where it co-opts the prior. The discussion about discursive amalgamation of Jewish and Zionist identities, as well as of concepts of Judaism and Jewishness (which we will touch on ahead) has been led by various thinkers, among which are Hannah

Arendt (1973, p. 66), Yeshaiahu Leibowitz (as cited in Rabkin, 2006, p. 34), and more recently Judith Butler (2004; 2011). These thinkers try to offer an alternative discourse to the Zionist one, showing these identities are different from one another, not essential to one another, nor dependent of each other, which allows Jews to look more critically at Israeli policies, as well as dissociate criticism of Zionist policies from anti-Semitism.

Accusations of anti-Semitism have been another strategy to silence criticism of Zionist policies of the state of Israel. The mere existence of Jewish individuals who reject Zionist identity serves as an example that such dissociation between being critical of Zionism and being antissemitic exists.

In the interviews summarizeded in this author's master's thesis, Israeli and Diaspora Jews reporting experiences that moved them to change their political posture and de-identify from, and even reject, Zionist precepts, a phenomenon which social psychology calls *cognitive dissonance* is described, which, according to Cooper (2007, p. 2), means incongruence between expectation and experience.

Formational narratives of the Zionist identity and morality of interviewees ceased to explain, confirm or justify the world they experience in practice. Let us consider two categories of experience to qualify the interviews: direct and indirect. Within the direct experience category there are various experiences told by soldiers, since military service is mandatory in Israel, in addition to many Jews who come from Diaspora communities to enlist as well. The field research (Haasz, 2011) has shown that these individuals were educated to defend their society from enemies who want to eliminate it. These individuals were willing to defend their society, which they perceived as a society that excels in its humanism and solidarity, in its advanced science and political liberalism, and which has suffered immensely in the past due to discrimination and racism, and above all, owes all of its special characteristics to its Jewish roots. The enemies, against which these soldiers were supposed to defend their people, are perceived as coming from backward cultures founded on religious extremism, and which throughout history have always had the goal of eliminating Israel or the Jewish

people.

When they enlisted in the military and volunteered to risk their lives in defense of this society, many of the interviewees found out they were the armed branch of an aggressive settler colonial enterprise, and that the enemy from which they supposedly had to defend the nation is an impoverished and defenseless population, kept under a castrating oppressive regime, having been expelled from their lands in which these same soldiers and their families now live. These interviews express great surprise, not only in discovering that the Palestinian other, before being framed in the enemy image described previously, is as human as they are, but mainly for noticing how their perception was manipulated, to the point of having believed that reality was very different from what they now know to be true.

In cases of indirect experience, interviewees have found in Jewish academic sources, such as the New Israeli Historians, that the history they have learned since childhood has been distorted, and instead of Israel having always been the victim that tried to defend itself, it was in fact responsible for a mass-expulsion of Palestinians from their lands, in operations similar to what after the war in Bosnia and Croatia in the 90's came to be known as *ethnic cleansing*. Even violent attitudes on behalf of Palestinians started to be seen by these Jews as responses to oppression and injustice instead of aggression (Haasz, 2011).

VI. Reactions to Cognitive Dissonance: Reducing Incogruences

According to Leon Festinger, the psychologist who coined the term *cognitive dissonance*, individuals who go through such experience feel compelled to reduce incongruences (Cooper, 2007, p. 3). Festinger (1963) defends that among the forms of reducing incongruences that generate cognitive dissonance, we can find the modification of beliefs, attitudes and actions, which can explain de-identification, the process of adjusting or relinquishing a given identity. Such changes, according to various interviewees, tend to involve psychological and emotional suffering derived from a deep identity crisis, which typically lasts several years (Haasz, 2011). However, the majority of those

who have experienced cognitive dissonance choose other forms presented by Festinger (1963) for reducing incongruences, such as justifying, blaming and denying.

One of the interviewees in the field research, a Jewish Israeli activist who works in political tourism in Jerusalem, reeducates Jewish Israelis about the reality of the conflict and in regard to the discrepancies extant between this reality and the traditional Zionist narrative. He explains that the goal of his job is to take people to what he calls "the point of no return," where they can no longer say "we were not aware," to the point where they feel forced to take a stance — to choose between admitting they support the oppressive occupation policies of the Israeli government, even if just by omission, or to take a stance and possibly act against them. It is possible to say that this initiative compels people to choose between upholding their identity and relinquishing their values, or upholding their values and relinquishing their identity.

Upholding identity and changing one's values is a tendency that Slavoj Žižek (1989, pp. 28-30) considers the way out through cynicism. He explains that cynically taking responsibility for actions that are commonly viewed as condemnable from the ethical or moral viewpoint, both by one's own standards as well as by others', is justified by suggesting conveniently that such actions are a necessary evil in order to deal with the harsh reality, or they are steps in a strategy to deal with a larger and more complex context, that can only be dealt with through such means. Žižek argues that in this way immoral conducts are approved as part of a deeper truth, and that only a complete contextualized exposé would counter such strategy, in order to find and keep the right perspective.

A possible observable example could be the controversial political postures of Israel's Vice Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the extreme right wing party *Israel Beiteinu*. His rise to power represents a large portion of Israeli Jewish population (and possibly Diaspora Jews as well) that has turned more polarized and radicalized, openly supporting discriminatory policies against Palestinians, as a way of dealing with challenges to the legitimacy of Israel's policies.

VII. Identity, Morality and Historical Narrative

Various thinkers believe that *identity* represents the moral values of their holders, as Kelman's (2004) ideas pointed out above. William James (in Erikson, 1994, p. 19) considers there is such a deep connection between identity and morality, that only by being faithful to one's own moral values will the individual have the strongest sensation of being alive and active. When an internal voice tells him "this is the real me!" Fearon (1999) affirms, "'identity' is modern formulation of dignity, pride, or honor." Charles Taylor (1992, p. 27) says identity relates to the definition of what is "what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose." Taylor also describes that in an identity crisis, individuals need to reorient themselves in "moral space." These relations are observable in the accounts of the field research interviewees, when they describe changes in their national identity as unavoidable, in an attempt to recover their existential legitimacy and their dignity (Haasz, 2011).

Other definitions of identity relate it to the historical narrative of a society. Stuart Hall (1990) describes identity as a discursive product of the way in which we make use of the narratives of the past, and not as a result of a recovery of the past, which "secures our sense of ourselves." But maybe it is in combining identity, morality and narrative that we can find the key to unfold the complexity of the process of *de-identification*.

The emergence of the Israeli New Historians, as well as Israeli Critical Sociology and the post-Zionist academic production offer a discourse that not only counters official discourse regarding the traditional historical narrative, but also denies it and contradicts some of its most fundamental points. This reversion takes away a large part of the legitimacy of the narrative on which Zionist identity stands. Although it is becoming increasingly difficult for the state to support the production of official Zionist discourse, this is the version that still remains dominant among Jews and non-Jews around the world and in Israel. Ghazi Bouillon affirms that:

The nationalist project is an intellectual as well as political project, and it relies on collective memory to reinforce its claims of a shared past and a common destiny. Clearly then, intellectuals stand at the heart of the nationalist enterprise because they assist in shaping the collective self-imagination of the nation — not merely in the emergence and the initial stages of the formation of national identity, but throughout the continuous struggle for its redefinition. (2009, pp. 22, 23)

To *know* history, that is, to believe in the Zionist historical narrative, has become then, in the words of Edward Said, a "political knowledge" (1979, p. 9), since it has directed almost all of the Jewish population, as well as a large portion of the perception there was (and still is) of it in the Western world (Said, 2001, pp. 3, 4), towards a political end — the Zionist enterprise. According to Ghazi Bouillon (2009, p. 32), this specific political knowledge "provides the bridge between a 'nation' and the justification of its right to a particular land."

VIII. Three-tiered analysis of Zionist Identity

Zionist identity, a product of this political knowledge, can be seen as structured on three fundamental precepts. Supported by assertions of Baruch Kimmerling (2005, p. I) and Ghazi Bouillon (2009, p. 158), this paper points to three aspects present in the majority of forms of Zionism nowadays: Jewishness, *security-militarism* and a Zionist hegemonic conception of the Jewish State, or simply put, hegemonic Zionism (Haasz, 2011).

1. Jewishness

The first precept, Jewishness, fundamental part of the political knowledge mentioned previously, is the premise that Judaism, not as a religion but as a secular culture, is central to Zionist identity and is the foundation of the notion that Israel, the home of the Jewish people from ancient to modern times, has to be a Jewish state. Such a conception is based in *primordialist* ideas, founded on the maintenance of the essence of the nation, the antiquity of the nation,

and base nationalism on culture. Such is the theory on nationalism by A. D. Smith that favors Zionist narrative with its conception of *ethnie*, a social unit attested by continuity between "modern national units and sentiments and the collective cultural units and sentiments of previous eras" (Smith, 1991, p. 14). Although it describes the *characteristics* that constitute a nation, this approach fails to explain the reasons why they do so, and to recognize the role of human agency in the process of creation of a nation. Benedict Anderson affirms "The significance of the emergence of Zionism and the birth of Israel is that the former marks the reimagining of an ancient religious community as a nation" (2006, p. 153).

Anderson's theory (2006) about nationalism proposes that nations are the product of human agency, are modern, constructed and imagined. This theory better explains the processes of emergence of Zionism in XIX century Europe, when the influence of other national movements on secular Jewish intellectuals compelled them, in the face of various tendencies of pre-national or national identities, to shape their own national identity based on the same standards: ethnically defined groups with a common origin. They feared that if they failed to do so, they would end up with no identity whatsoever (Sand, 2009, p. 77).

Among Jewish historians, the more nationalist and more widespread used biblical texts as historical documents (Sand, 2009, p. 71), although they themselves were secular Jews, members of a new form of being Jewish in Europe, following the emancipation of European Jews in late XVIII century.

Instrumentalizing narrative and Jewish religious symbology in the process of formation of a secular culture continued with the creators of Zionism, such as Ahad Ha'am, and later with its great leaders, such as Ben-Gurion, who did not have any interest in Jewish religion or Jewishness as the essence of Zionist political identity.

2. Security-Militarism

The second precept, *security-militarism*, refers to the belief that Israel is under constant threat from Palestinians and other regional enemies, and needs

a severe security apparatus and a highly militarized society in order to survive. This pillar is based on and is justified by victimhood,[2] from which it extracts its legitimacy. The main argument is that *security-militarism* is necessary for the survival of the people and, more fundamentally, to protect it against unjustifiable aggressions, since it is believed that Israel has done nothing to deserve such aggressions.

Again, political knowledge in the form of Zionist historical narrative produces such a perception. Only with the emergence of New Israeli Historiography that such historical versions were discredited and based on Israeli governmental documents was it revealed that, in fact, the Zionist enterprise has caused and still sustains grave injustice against the Palestinian people.

According to Adi Ophir (2000), Israel strategically uses the position of *victimhood* as "*aggressive victimhood*". Ophir (2008, p. 87) says victimhood is culturally constructed and results in *being* a victim instead of *becoming* a victim; that is, permanently occupying the place of the victim. There are various problems that emerge from such a posture.

In criticism of affirmations by Emmanuel Levinas (1990), that persecution is one of the defining aspects of the Jewish people, Judith Butler (2005, p. 96) points out the danger in characterizing a group as persecuted and never as persecutor is to authorize in an unlimited fashion the use of aggression in the name of self-defense. Such aggressions are rarely examined since, according to Yftachel (2008, p. 130), "discourse developed in reaction to the Arab-Jewish conflict, […] elevating exigencies of national security onto a level of unquestioned gospel."

The Holocaust has a fundamental role in the *victimhood* aspect of Zionist identity. Sonnenschein, Bekerman e Horenczyk (2010, p. 60), in an experiment conducted in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with Jewish and Palestinian Israeli students, concluded that "The Holocaust and persecution made up

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(2) *Victimhood*: a state of feeling as a victim, different from *victimization*, act of becoming or turning others into a victim.

a central and significant component in the national identity of the Jewish participants" and that:

> the persistent appearance of the existential threat during the dialogue and the apprehension that new options for defining the state would amount to a new holocaust point to the success of a broad existing process of education and indoctrination, a process that has constructed the Holocaust and the existential threat as key components of the identity of Jewish Israelis, and has transferred all that to the conflict with the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. (Sonnenschein, Bekerman, and Horenczyk, 2010, p. 60)

The indoctrination mentioned is propagated by state apparatuses in Israel and abroad, through the educational system, official discourse, public commemorations and an immense cultural production around the subject. The state promotes organized visits to the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem and organizes trips to Nazi concentration and extermination camps in Poland for school students and soldiers. In the Diaspora there are a series of educational programs of the same kind, promoted by Zionist institutions.

3. Hegemonic Zionism

The third precept that composes Zionist identity, *hegemonic Zionism*, refers to an ideological paradigm formed by Zionism's founders, who were secular European Jews. Relying on Foucaultian theories, Ghazi-Bouillon (2009, p. 22) describes how this hegemonic movement established its power through *regimes of truth* that defined the limits within which any debate or discussion about Zionism could occur in a way that made sense, as well as everything that could be thought, imagined or said about the issue, determining a new perceptual domain. As a form of political power, discourse is a resource that allows a group, in this case the Ashkenazi Jews, to gain ascendency over other concurrent groups, in this case the other Jewish groups that possess other views of Jewish

identity, submitting them to the hegemonic Zionism. This discourse produces a thought structure that includes historical narrative, ideology and state practices, and, being deeply embedded in the state structure, influences the production of its self-knowledge.

These three precepts seem to compose the base of Zionist identity in most cases, where Jews believe, or *know*, they are descendants of the biblical Jewish people, thus having historical right to their land, and that their existence is in constant danger due to the intention of their enemies, motivated by anti-Semitism, to eliminate them, which brings about the necessity for protection. This protection is conceptualized, based in ideas that structure the modern international system of states, where ties of identity to territoriality preach the need for a Jewish state and, although supported by a narrative that has little academic, scientific or historical support, just the same conserves itself in the two first precepts. The third precept crystalizes perception of the first two, not allowing even a suspicion of the possibility of questioning these foundations in most Jewish circles. Moreover, in geographical and cultural contrast with the environment where Israel is located, the Middle East, Israel sustains a Western self-image. The dominance of European Jews, the Ashkenazim, is still sustained over all other Jewish groups in Israel, even though the Likud right wing party had more success in the 70's in including in its bases Mizrahi Jews and other minority groups than its labor party predecessors, thus taking predominant political control of Israel ever since and allowing for greater inclusion and socio-economic ascendence of Mizrahi Jews. To date there has never been a prime minister in Israel that has not been Ashkenazi.

IX. Identity Blinders

There is a large-scale acceptance of the official Zionist narrative and the national identity inscribed by the state in the society from which it derives. To "'unconsciously subject' to the past cultural choices of [the] forefathers […] who helped define the 'tradition' which they [in this case, Zionist Jews] are now endeavoring to defend," according to Shani (2007, p. 13), is "nothing other than

the forgetting of history." Shani explains this using Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history — is the active presence of the whole past of which it is a product" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56, in Shani, 2007, p. 14).

However, in the process of rejecting these precepts, occurs also a rejection of the main motives for the existence of the conflict, opening the doors to solutions that are more flexible and inclusive of all parties involved, more pluralistic and without territorial barriers.

A good example of how pervasive hegemonic Zionist discourse is, is the surprise reported by the New Historians in interview to Ghazi Bouillon (2009), as well as by other post-Zionist scholars, whose profession is historical political and sociological knowledge, among others, when they made their discoveries by analyzing governmental documents that had been recently turned public in the 80's, and served as basis for the emergence of the Israeli New Historiography.

Likewise, field research interviewees have reported the shock they felt when they encountered a radically different reality from the one they had expected, due to the influence of the above-described Zionist precepts. Some of them were amazed at the absolute absence of Jewish values in the actions of the Israeli government, and others, more secular, refused to accept Judaism as a personal argument for any violence committed against Palestinians. All of them expressed disgust in discovering they were part of the aggressor element, described as the *security apparatus* of Israel. The Holocaust was a recurring subject, in the sense that it led them to think about the roles of victim and oppressor, comparing themselves at times to the Nazis, although not to the degree of the aggression committed, but with repulsion for the fact that they occupied the same role in relation to the Palestinians in the same dichotomic relation: victim-oppressor (Haasz, 2011).

Lilly Weissbrod (1997, p. 62) writes from the Zionist perspective, and affirms that Israel has developed a 'society-specific' identity, where a unique collective identity is highly valued, and made impossible to be based on universal values. Weissbrod (2002, p. 222) sees the Israeli version of a "Jewish-

ethnic" democracy simply as its own interpretation of democracy, just as other western countries have theirs. Judith Butler writes:

> …the formulation of classically liberal principles of citizenship that would forbid discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and ethnicity, for example, are construed as 'destructive' of the Jewish state and if that formulation resounds with 'destruction of the Jewish people,' especially under those conditions where the Jewish state claims to represent the Jewish people, than this view establishes classical liberalism as genocide. (2011, p. 76)

X. The Identity Factor in Conflict Transformation

When reflecting on the innumerous international initiatives that try to influence the reality of the conflict, a grave problem that repeats itself is the reliance on universal values represented by international law and human rights. As Butler (2011) points out, these values tend not to mean the same to Zionist identity on one saide, and to the organizations or states that attribute universality to such values on the other. These universal references, in the Zionist context, can be perceived as a risk of destruction of the state and, potentially, of the Jewish people. Maybe even worse than the perception of threat felt by Zionists when attempting to debate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Zionism's legitimacy, is the lack of perception of the conditions that allow it to happen.

As Erikson (1979, pp. 102-103) points out, there will always be a defensive reaction "against insights which seem to rob us from our self-made certainty," in this case the legitimacy of hegemonic Zionist narrative. There are signs, however, that in internal dynamics between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews, like in initiatives for social justice and peace advocacy, there is a higher potential for transformation.

According to Sonnenschein, Bekerman e Horenczyk (2010, p. 60), the perception of threat, differently from bi-national discussion environments (between Palestinians and Jews), tends to diminish in uni-national discussion

settings (between Jews) where the discussion of the most difficult points and painful change in worldview tend to happen more easily.

XI. Conclusion

When discussing Zionist identity as discursively constructed and inscribed in society by the state, opposing it to processes and internal dynamics of national identity change that act as forms of resistance to those state-inscribed identities, we are able to raise important questions regarding approaches to the Israel/ Palestine conflict. Questions of identity underlying political realities govern the interests of their constituencies (Zionist Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora) — interests that can change according to alterations in the national identity of these individuals.

Up to this point in time, negotiations and peace agreements on the official political level have only led to deterioration of the situation for Palestinians in the conflict. Political activism, although providing a platform on which to demonstrate dissent from Israeli policies, as well as for advocacy and pressure for the resolution of the situation, has served in the hands of the Israeli government to further radicalize the Jewish population, being misrepresented as a modern version of anti-Semitism.

Initiatives by Jewish interlocutors challenge Zionist traditional discourse from inside the Jewish population, looking not only to denounce injustice against Palestinians, but also to reformulate national identity and bring it closer to a common denominator with the international community. The sought common ground is one of universal values and references such as international law and human rights, and classical liberal principles of citizenship which forbid discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and ethnicity. It is fitting then to question whether stronger international support for such initiatives would not prove more efficient in *transforming* the conflict (phasing it out), rather than attempting to *resolve* it (managing what is) since Zionist identity with its fundamental precepts does not admit the possibilty for a solution that would allow dignity to the Palestinian people as well.

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Rethinking Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Understanding the Zionist Identity Barrier to Peace in the Israel/Palestine Conflict

<Summary>

Yuri Haasz

   This article discusses how processes through which some Israeli and Diaspora Jews resist the state-inscribed national identity, Zionism, relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.This discussion is held against the backdrop of a critical approach to the modern international system of states, and its influence in engendering and maintanance of the conflict.This article also challenges views which consider the concept of identity as either static, or, if dynamic, too complex to consider, discarding it from political context analisys. It points out the importance of taking the identity factor into account in approaches to conflict resolution.The processes described in this article exposes the non-essential nature of Zionist national identity, and the challenges that Individuals going through it face in dealing with the larger Jewish majority which sustains the state-inscribed identity. Defensive reactions on the part of the Jewish majority and the state attempt to delegitimize such individuals. Conversely, data from a field research realized by the author of this article show these claims are void. They show such changes come about as consequence of gaining awareness of contradictions between the declared values in the nationalist culture and the realities it produces on the ground.This article also points to the problems derived from amalgamtion of Jewish and Zionist identities, and their uses in delegitimizing discenting voices.The article points out that not all reactions to gaining awareness of incongruences are the same, options

often being made between keeping one's moral values and relinquishing one's identity, or keeping identity and relinquishing one's values, wihch in the case of Israeli and Diaspora Jews, means becoming more radicalized, often assuming openly racist convictions. Relation between identity and morality are drawn from writings of various authors, pointing out how the importance of moral coherence in identitarian affiliation. Political knowledge is discussed in terms of how awareness of changes in historical narrative of facts can reflect on one's world views. Zionism is critiqued by looking at three of its pillars: Jewishness, security / militarism, and hegemonic Zionism, exposing patterns that Zionism has of modern European nationaisms, a victimhood mentality and a dominant Colonialist or Orientalist world view.The unsuspecting trust with which Israeli and Diaspora Jews accept this dicorsively-constructed and state-inscribed national identity complicates addressing the distortions in perception as well as Jewish responsibilities in the conflict. Few become aware of the discrepancies mentioned, go through an identity crisis a which usually takes. The majority that does not have the opportunity to go through such process, remain with a national identity which does not share many of the universal values as most of international community, and classically liberal principles of citizenship that would forbid discrimination on any basis are seen to them as 'destructive' of the Jewish state. Approaches to conflict resolution, which traditionally do not take into identity dinamics, are doomed to continuousely deal with defensive / aggressive stances prompted by perception of threat. Such approaches tend to focus on negotiating between the sides, while investing in intiatives which attempt to universalize particualristic values within the identity-driven society would contribute more to a real shift in the situation. Such initiatives are civil society iniciatives within the Jewish constituency composed of individuals who went through the processes describes in this article.Such intra-Jewish uni-national initiatives for change show greater potential than bi-national negotiation.