IDENTITY CHANGE AS A PATHWAY TO PEACE: 
THE CHALLENGES OF RELINQUISHING RIGHTEOUSNESS

Yuri Haasz 
International Christian University, Japan

Abstract. If Zionist identity goes unchanged, it cannot and will not allow just peace to exist between Israelis and Palestinians under any circumstances. The progressive approaches to conflict transformation examined in this article work toward identity change within their respective processes. It is exactly this insertion in an ongoing peace process that makes it less effective, since in order for identity change to make a difference, it needs to occur on a deeper and larger scale, prior to and independent from a formal political process. Its occurrence should not be contingent on the necessity for a punctual peace agreement, but out of a transformed perception of the “other” as a reflection of one’s own humanity, by lifting the ideological fog of Zionist identity. In the case of Israel there is no apparent motivation for it to choose such a path while it maintains its Zionist ideology, thus making identity change contingent on initiatives coming from within, from Israeli and Diaspora Jews who gain awareness of the gap between their real values and the Zionist rationale, and the way it creates realities on the ground. Another problem is the need for isolation and a protected environment, to enable a feeling of dealing with the inner circle alone. Identity change is unlikely to occur if parties are worried about not appearing vulnerable. Summarizing, identity change should be worked on before the stage of interactions for negotiation and the peace process, and by the initiative of internal forces, in order to reach deeper, and be sustainable and internalized. The more internalized an identity change is, the more the group will be true to it, and more evident will be the outcome in the form of attitudes. In the case of Israel / Palestine, provided that deep internalized identity change occurs within the Zionist constituency, profound change will ensue regarding their relationship with Palestinians, since the unjust treatment they have suffered for so long stems directly from Zionist’s deep culture, defined by Galtung (2000, p.33) as “a web of notions about what is true, good, right, beautiful, sacred,” which can be identified in Zionism’s central pillars: Jewishness of the state and security or militarism (Kimmerling, 2005 ; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009). This paper draws two research directions that should be explored, both connected to the question of the identity change process. The first is how the process of identity change occurs at the individual level, in terms of triggers, difficulties, obstacles, and social influences, and the second, about the process of identity change itself, and how that could inform initiatives of change.

INTRODUCTION

The struggle to maintain core elements of current Zionist national identity intact can be interpreted as the Israeli government’s struggle for existence. Israel will not necessarily cease to exist without Zionist identity, but it will cease to exist under its current formula, inasmuch as many of its defining characteristics, such as the Jewish character of the state, the occupation and settlement of the West Bank based on a security rationale, the prohibition of Palestinian refugees to return to their land and the dispute over Jerusalem, are rooted in Zionism (Haasz, 2011, pp. 29 - 49). Much of Israeli laws and policy is imbued with Zionist foundations, such as restriction to same-religion marriage, the law of return available exclusively to Jews and other differentiated rights for Jews only. Combined with the discriminatory legal treatment of Palestinians, such Israeli laws and policies have continuously contributed to the conflict, generating civil unrest by infringing Palestinian human and civil rights, not allowing self-determination and limiting freedom of movement, expression, and the right to legal representation and due legal process (Haasz, 2011, pp. 29 - 49). Zionist identity is maintained in the hearts and minds of Israeli Jews and Diaspora Jews around the world, an identity without which Israel cannot sustain its current format. Zionist culture has become the deep culture out of which structural violence emerged and gave birth to the conflict. The legitimacy battleground has become central to this conflict, where internal social forces in Israel and within the Jewish Diaspora have been at work in sparking an identity change process, although not yet acting in concert, by pushing for detachment from core Zionist beliefs (Haasz, 2011, p.135). These recent developments in Israel have elicited a government response to contain such processes, and reinforce Zionist identity amongst its population, in fear of losing legitimacy, both domestically and internationally, as major think tanks which advise the government have indicated (Reut, 2010).
Approaches to conflict transformation that seek to go beyond mere crisis management and work toward sustainable solutions, have suggested addressing the underlying causes of conflicts such as deep culture and structural violence, rather than just controlling their effects of direct violence for a while, and frequently facing their inevitable recurrence. Galtung’s (2000) theory points to the weakness of negotiating deals such as the mid-90s Oslo peace accords. That agreement led to a temporary cessation of direct violence without addressing social injustices generated by a structural asymmetry in power, what Galtung calls structural violence. In addition, underpinning structural violence is deep culture, which Galtung (2000) defines as “a web of notions about what is true, good, right, beautiful, sacred” (p.33). Without addressing root causes of violence, direct violence was bound to return, as it did in the year 2000 with the second Intifada. Some of these approaches to conflict resolution and conflict transformation include in their proceedings strategies for identity change, where the goal is to transform identity components built on beliefs that sustain conflict, as for example Kelman’s (2004) approach we will touch upon later in this paper. It is a self-critical process of self-examination that allows for each party to take responsibility for its contribution to the conflicting situation.

Nevertheless, in the case of the Israel / Palestine conflict, such approaches do not seem to be the right strategy to generate identity change, since the approaches discussed in this paper do not seem to take into consideration the impact of timing in which such identity change is attempted. To do so during an official process of conflict transformation already underway, where both parties are aware of one another taking part in the process, does not account for the tendency to not want to show vulnerability for fear of getting a bad deal by the end of negotiations. Furthermore, certain aspects of Zionist identity for example are themselves antagonistic to the very idea of making efforts for peace with Palestinians, placing doubts on whether they should or need to take place at all, even more so due to the large asymmetry in power Israelis can count on. These aspects of Zionist identity originate in its narrative, which covers a large terrain from Biblical claims of being the chosen people and their right to return to the land they were expelled from, to present-day perception of Israel as a small peace-seeking Western democracy, fencing off backward Muslim fundamentalists. If brought into a conflict resolution or transformation process unchanged, these aspects of Zionist identity will undermine peace efforts to begin with, since basic signifiers such as “human needs”, which are critical to such progressive conflict transformation methods, will be decoded differently on both sides due to a dehumanized, often demonized perception of Palestinians, and communication which relies on common ground of such basic notions will not occur. This paper will discuss how two progressive conflict transformation proposals, which suggest identity change as a strategy for dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and place it within an ongoing bilateral process, do not account for the lack of motivation for Israel to consent or even aspire to take part in such processes, as a result of Zionist identity and culture. It will further argue that the identity change process from within, brought forth by Diaspora and Israeli Jews before any bilateral process even begins with Palestinians, seems to present a threat to the state, a claim which will be supported by pointing out where the Israeli government and policy making actors have had to contain such occurrences.

PROGRESSIVE CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION APPROACHES

Two conflict transformation approaches will be analyzed in relation to the Israel/Palestine conflict. The first is “The Art of Conflict Transformation Through Dialogue,” created by Graf, Kramer and Nicolescou (2008), and the second is an identity-change approach by Harvard professor Herbert C. Kelman.

The Art of Conflict Transformation through Dialogue

This seven-step process, based on Galtung’s (2000) TRANSCEDE method, created by Graf, Kramer and Nicolescou (2008) seeks to bridge gaps (Lederach, 1999, as cited in Graf, Kramer, & Nicolescou, 2008) that exist in conflict transformation and peace-building approaches. The gaps appear in a few instances, such as the lack of cohesiveness amongst different levels on the same side in a conflict, that is, while traditional approaches would pair for negotiation same-level partners on both sides (i.e. general with general, leaders with leaders, grassroots with grassroots) these levels would not relate to each other in a cohesive way within the same side. Another gap refers to many signed agreements that do not address justice issues, and yet another refers to lack of flexibility in the order of steps taken in a peace process, as well as the lack of
understanding that a peace agreement is merely the beginning of a much larger transformational process both on the structural and the attitudinal levels. The last gap mentioned in the process refers to the importance of solutions being developed from within, and not being imported or imposed.

Each of the phases created by Galtung were divided into steps by Graf, Kramer & Nicolescu (2008). Phase one focuses on understanding the goals of the conflict parties, within which step one is to understand the parties and their goals, and the contradiction between the parties’ goals, directing to a needs-based perception of motivations. Step two tries to answer the question: “How did the conflict occur?” What happened, what failed to happen, and other relevant questions. Phase two focuses on reframing illegitimate goals into legitimate ones, based on fulfillment of the basic needs of all parties. Within this phase, step three looks into the collective unconscious of the conflict formation and tries to answer the question: “What is the context of the conflict?” This is where deep culture is looked at. Step four looks into the future asking the question: “How will it continue, if nothing changes?” The third phase is the elaboration of a sustainable formula that integrates the legitimate goals, where step five, based on basic human needs of all parties asks the question: “What can be done?” In step six: “What are the next steps?” is covered. The last phase is the process of reconciliation (Graf, Kramer, & Nicolescu, 2008).

In effect, if parties were to answer with full sincerity these questions they would inevitably come to face a deep incongruence between beliefs held by each of them and the factual reality. On the Israeli side, to answer questions such as how did the conflict occur? What is the context of the conflict? What are the real goals of Israel? would mean to clash with an entire belief system nourished by Zionist Identity, narrative and deep culture. It would mean to seriously consider the New Israeli Historiography, which is a revisionist historiography that undermines the dominant Zionist narrative. To a large extent, it removes most ethical arguments in favor of the Zionist enterprise vis-à-vis Palestinian human and civil rights. To sincerely come face to face with such incongruence would mean to go through an identity crisis, ensuing in an identity change.

Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective
Herbert C. Kelman (2004) considers the progression from conflict settlement to conflict resolution, and then to reconciliation, to be a transition from a more external dimension to an internalized one in terms of solutions to conflicts. As the progression goes along, the quality of change increases, reaching on the reconciliation end the highest quality of agreement. It is deeper, more durable and sustainable, and integrated into the political culture and societal belief systems of conflicting societies.

Kelman (2004) describes the Israel/Palestine conflict as “an existential identity conflict” and suggests identity change as the core of reconciliation process, based on the removal of negation of the other as a central component of one’s identity, and the acceptance of the other’s identity and narrative (p. 119). According to Kelman, change in identity which should be based on revision of narrative, would strengthen the core of one’s identity as a result. He presents five conditions that can help conflicting groups revise their identity: 1. Acknowledgement of the other’s nationhood and humanity, focusing on rolling back dehumanized views that allow violence. 2. Development of a common moral basis for peace focused on addressing justice. 3. Confrontation with history, focusing on deconstruction of national myths and coming to terms with truths. 4. Acknowledgement of responsibility, focusing on apology, compensation, reparation, restitution. 5. Establishment of patterns and institutional mechanisms of cooperation, focusing on meeting societal needs on a basis of principles of equality and reciprocity.

Discussion of Both Approaches
Both examples of approaches to conflict transformation have strong points, such as not rushing to the negotiation table and confronting the parties, since much of the work is done with each of them simultaneously but separately, and by focusing on self-transformation, as these allow reflexive processes to happen, and thus reduce automatic patterns of thinking on both sides. Another strong feature is the review of historical myths and narratives, and reaching redemption through taking responsibility. On the other hand, both examples do not seem to address extreme asymmetry in power between conflicting parties. Israel has no real motivation to enter such a negotiation process, and is also less likely to relinquish any of its land
expansion priorities and take into consideration Palestinian rights. The grounds for this lack of motivation seem to be the support of its constituency. Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, as well as the US support, but mainly the absence of a moral imperative that Israel senses it should do so, which is rooted in Zionist rationale. This rationale is of an ideological nature, a narrative that produces constructs, which become unquestioned deep assumptions, building blocks to Galtung’s (2000) concept of “deep culture.” These constructs are reproduced in a unified, monolithic way within the Israeli Jewish environment and in the Jewish Diaspora. In such constructs, nationalist myths hold a central place. Historical narrative fed into these constructs build notions that Israel had always acted out of self-defense, and had always been the weaker party in wars. Such a perception, paralleled with the myth of David and Goliath, was critiqued and completely reversed by the New Israeli Historians, as were various historical distortions and confusion with collective memory (Bar On, 2004, p. 5).

The next section will point out relations of such constructs and identity, which in this case, is Zionism, Israel’s national identity. Major components of this identity are Jewishness, security / militarism, and hegemonic Zionism (Kimmerling, 2005, p. 1; Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009, p. 158). Jewishness is the rationale for Israel being a Jewish state, built on a perception of the Jewish people as ancient, which gives that group rights to the land that its centuries-old inhabitants, the Palestinians, do not have. The appeal to an ancient origin is typical in most modern European nationalisms, as Anderson (2006, 111) points out, the mythical origin of a constructed nation. Moreover, Anderson (2006) wrote “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” (p.153). Security / militarism rationale is that Israel is under constant threat, which is why it needs a large security apparatus and a highly militarized society. Yiftachel (2008) points out a “discourse developed in reaction to the Arab-Jewish conflict, … elevating exigencies of national security onto a level of unquestioned gospel” (p. 130). It is rooted in a sense of victimhood and perception of threat. Ophir (2008) writes, “unlike becoming a victim, which may be a result of contingent, ephemeral forces, being a victim means taking, holding to, or being stuck in a victim’s position” (Ophir, 2008, p. 87). Ophir terms how the State apparatuses use victimhood as “aggressive victimhood” (Ghazi-bouillon, 2009, p. 7). Hegemonic Zionism refers to an ideological paradigm set by the founding fathers of Zionism, which defines the limits within which meaningful reasoning and debate on Zionism can take place, as well as what can be thought, imagined or said about it. Social dominance of European cultural elements inherited from that leadership result from its ascendancy over other Jewish groups, which were integrated to, or under, its hegemonic structure. The orientalist view towards Palestinians (as well as Jews from Arab countries) derives from this aspect of Zionism (Ghazi-Bouillon, 2009, p.158).

ZIONIST IDENTITY CHANG: A THREAT OR A DOORWAY TO PEACE?

It is quite usual to think of Zionism as an ideology, and not uncommon to be thought of as an identity as well. However if examined closely, many of its current characteristics present similarities to various definitions of culture. In an article about the relationship that exists between core beliefs on the individual level and world views on the collective level, Eidelson (2003) says that “in contrast to core beliefs an individual holds about his or her personal world, collective core beliefs or group world views are the template through which group and group members interpret their shared experience. Such beliefs are an essential component of group culture.” He points out that a group’s essence can be defined by shared beliefs among group members. These beliefs stem from similar experiences and elaborate socialization processes, and they are viewed as basic truths and held with great conviction (Bar-Tal, 1990, 2000 in Eidelson, 2003, p.183). Triandis (1996) says, “An examination of a range of definitions of culture indicates that almost all researchers agree that culture is reflected in shared cognitions, standard operating procedures, and unexamined assumptions” (p. 407). Eidelson (2003) brings in Psycho-cultural and psychoanalytical perspectives as well, which have also emphasize the idea of “collective templates for understanding the world emerge from culturally determined common experience and shared frames of reference, with dynamics often operating at levels beneath full consciousness.” The analysis of beliefs that have gained hegemonic status in a group in Lustick’s (1993) work, indicate they stop being evaluated since they are inferred as truth.

The combination of a collective template through which a group interprets its experience and shared beliefs, which derive from socialization processes and are not scrutinized and, rarely can be, since they are
unconscious - reflect accurately the results of Zionist historical narratives and its construction of the collective world views of its constituency. The resulting world views of Zionist culture are the ones in conflict with the international community and according to Eidelson, “unless dramatically challenged, data and feedback discrepant with a core belief”, such as the call for Israel to abide by international law and dismantle the Jewish illegal settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, or the Goldstone Report’s findings of war crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian civilian population, will “typically either escape notice all together or undergo reframing to be consistent with pre- conceptions” (Eidelson, 2003, p. 182). Israel explains these two cases mentioned above respectively, claiming its entitlement to Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of Israel to defend itself against Hamas’s rockets attacks from Gaza.

Therefore, unless deeper assumptions or constructs, which are the operational building blocks of collective worldviews, are addressed in one way or another, it is hard to have true communication over what should be a common denominator for a resolution. Besides power asymmetries and this solid national identity / ideology / culture not being addressed, the fact that both these proposals are not “local” and based on public engagement when it comes to Israel could also represent a problem. Lederach (2005) talks about the Authenticity Gap, which refers to a feeling of being “hijacked by a view that peace is primarily within the purview and parameters of a small number of economically and militarily powerful people.” Unless there is authentic ownership of the process on a large scale, any peace accord can be seen as foreign and imposed. No political leader can survive if his constituency abandons him or her. Therefore, both Jewish Israelis and Diaspora Jews should promote identity change from within the population, so it is less likely to arouse suspicion of external manipulation with an agenda that is not in the best interest of Jews. It should also not be focused only on the elites, but be a widespread grassroots transformation. The cohesiveness and pervasiveness of Zionist ideology among Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, and how initiatives which seem to come from an external source with an intention of changing, transforming, or reviewing the situation - even if the declared goal is peace, will be seen as an attack on Zionist identity, culture, and ultimately, the existence of Israel. In order to address the issue of whether identity change initiatives have a concrete probability to succeed, an examination of how the Israeli government and one of its main think tanks fear a change in Zionist identity, and make every effort in their reactions to keep it intact must be conducted. This will first situate these reactions in the increasing tensions in the public relations Israel has been suffering, that has prompted the Israeli government to justify its policies to its constituency, arguably out of fear of losing legitimacy.

Amidst the international crisis Israel faces since its 31 May 2010 violent raid on the Mavi Marmara, one of the “Free Gaza” Flotilla ships that were bringing aid to the Gaza Strip, Daniel Levy (Interview to Aljazeera English, June 1, 2010), a former Israeli negotiator in the peace process, said in an interview to the news network AlJazeera that Israel’s choices to deal with the new strategies of civil disobedience on the part of Palestinians and their supporters, have caused for a growing gap between its self-perception and the way the world perceives it. The Gaza Strip, which has been under Israeli military siege for the last three years, shelters over 1.5 million Palestinians, out of which around 80% are under the poverty line and aid-dependent (OCHA, 2009) due to the Israeli military siege. Israel is no stranger to international public relations problems. Only a few months earlier, the assassination of a Palestinian leader in Dubai, carried out by Israeli secret service operatives, caused the U.K. (“Britain expels Israeli,” March, 2010) and Australia (“Australia expels Israeli,” May, 2010) to expel Israeli diplomats over the use of British and Australian cloned passports for their personnel. In the aftermath of the War on Gaza of 2008/2009 and the Goldstone Report, Israel found itself with a declining diplomatic status and a growing crisis of isolation, which according to the New York Times piece by Ethan Bronner (Feb. 17, 2010) prompted the Israeli government to start “a campaign ... to turn every Israeli – and ultimately every Jew - into a traveling public relations agent”. The Masbirim Israel (explaining Israel) campaign relies on an official website put up by the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs (called in Hebrew Misrad haHasbara vehaTfutzot which literally means Office of Explanation and Diaspora in Hebrew). The website contains instructions for the Israeli population (in Hebrew) on how to respond to the main claims against Israeli policies towards the Palestinians, which are to be used in their encounters with foreigners both abroad and in Israel. It also contains three videos whose main claim is that Israel is misunderstood abroad due to misrepresentation by the media. According to the ministry’s videos, Israel is non-Arab, non-violent and non-primitive, but portrayed inversely. The videos invite each and every citizen (and again, potentially every Jew) to represent Israel in a correct manner by conveying at the end of every video the short message: “Are you fed up with the way we are portrayed around the world? You can change the picture” (Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, 2010).
Nevertheless, the Israeli state would get better results by communicating directly with the campaign’s supposed target audience, the international community, using more powerful and expensive broadcasting tools. The newspaper Haaretz (“A government without hope,” 2010) portrayed this campaign in an editorial as representing “how the government wants its citizens to understand their country and represent it to the world.” Possibly, the main goal is a representation of current events for the Israeli population itself, reinforcing Zionist identity and helping to deal with criticism with ready-made answers that no one is likely to follow through to the factual sources. The same editorial of the Israeli newspaper says “‘Explaining Israel’ reveals the worldview of Benjamin Netanyahu’s government: limitless self-righteousness, eternal hostility toward the Arab and Muslim worlds, a view of Palestinians as invaders and inciters, and commitment to developing the West Bank settlements” (“A government without hope,” 2010). Although critical of Netanyahu’s self-righteousness, the article fails to mention that this same righteousness is in itself the unquestioned truth mentioned by Bar-tal (1990), Lustick (1993), Galtung (2000), Kelman (2004) and Silberstein (2008).

Besides growing external criticism, Israel has been facing growing internal criticism as well. Reut Institute, a leading Israeli national security and socioeconomic policy think tank, has recently released a report that deals with such internal criticism called Building a Political Firewall against Israel’s Delegitimization: Conceptual Framework (Reut, 2010). The findings were published on the institution’s official website as “The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall,” where part of the delegitimization network is described as “so-called post or anti-Zionist Jews and Israelis” (Reut, 2010). The think tank’s conclusions are that neither policy change nor improving public relation will solve this internal criticism, since “delegitimization stems from a rejection of Israel’s existence.” This conclusion reduces the complexity of the situation, representing delegitimizers as radicals, who seek Israel’s demise and not a policy change. Thus Israel’s struggle to prove its legitimacy should not include policy change since the problem lies elsewhere. Reut’s official recommendation is a detailed counter-action to dismantle such “delegitimization network”, as the think-tank calls it in the report. Reut Institute, which is a policy group designed to provide real-time, long-term strategic decision-support to Israeli leaders and decision-makers, stands in tandem with the Information and Diaspora Affairs Ministry and its public relations campaign, pointing out that the problem does not lie with Israeli policy. Both operate on the presumption that Israel’s policies are not illegitimate. They differ only in the reasons they attribute to those who claim illegitimacy: The ministry claims it is due to ignorance or a communication problem, and Reut claims it is a cover for promoting Israel’s demise, thus appealing to the rationale of anti-Semitism (Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, 2010; Reut Institute, 2010). In either case, there is a tone of defensiveness, which indicates a clear perception of threat of losing legitimacy, righteousness and support among the Jewish constituency, which would promote identity change and rejection of Zionist precepts. Shayshon (2010), analyst team leader for Reut Institute affirms it is wrong to think that solely by “explaining” Israel as it is to the world, delegitimization will go away. A rich understanding of the structural roots of the problem and direct response through deployment of the several principles ... may help stem the tide against what is increasingly becoming a strategic threat against the state.

These efforts undertaken by the Israeli government and the apparatuses that dictate policy are a reaction to potential identity changes within Jewish circles in Israel and elsewhere. They show the vulnerability of the discursive structure. According to Silberstein (2008, p.10) “what keeps the dominant forms of knowledge in place are regimes of truths and relations of power”. This should be taken into consideration when thinking of an approach to the Israel / Palestine conflict as it is a form of structural violence, which is present but rarely discussed since it is directed primarily at Israelis and only indirectly at Palestinians. It emanates from Zionist deep culture and shapes worldviews in a way that funnels thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and actions of masses of Israeli Jews and Jews elsewhere into an oppressive, ethnocentric mindset. This by no means relieves Jews of responsibility in the matter, but suggests a possible lack of awareness within the group regarding the moral implications of its stances.

**TOWARDS A CRITICAL APPROACH TO IDENTITY CHANGE**

Processes of identity change should occur on a much earlier stage than that of meeting with the other side for negotiations. If identity change occurs at a deep level, there might not be much left to negotiate. To believe
that a deconstruction of Israeli narrative, myths, ideology, beliefs and other elements of deep culture during a conflict transformation process/workshop will have an effect on the level of national mentality and identity, might be hoping for too much. It may affect the actors involved personally in the process, but as to what extent it can go beyond them, even if they are heads of state, are questions that do not necessarily promise a stronger outcome. The level of acceptance of a “transformed” political leader in the eyes of his / her constituency, which has remained without any identity change, might prove disastrous. It should be noted that Itzhak Rabin did not reach a radical point of identity change, and nevertheless, unhappy constituents assassinated him. In order to think of the identity change process, a larger scale might be needed than just a focus on small numbers.

In order to address this issue, a deeper look into these constructs and how they affect collective thinking in Israel must be undertaken, and examine whether there is anything that could be done at that level. Each of these constructs exemplified above, is easily referred to with few or even one word, recognized automatically by an “other” within Zionist circles, used in producing meaning in communication and in reasoning in Israel’s defense as it has become a cultural phenomenon. Use of these constructs by the government in its public relations campaign and other instances, in the media, education system and in day-to-day communication in any given community is a discursive practice through which Zionist deep culture is constantly reproduced, amplified and perpetuated. It becomes the reality that people perceive and reproduce unwittingly, and thus by seeming to be the only reality, it exerts power over the Israeli and Diaspora Jews.

This relationship between discourse and power, on which Foucault has written extensively, is central to the works of post Zionist scholars. Silberstein (2010) uses Foucault to explain post Zionism as an intellectual critique “of the discourses, practices, and institutions produced by Zionism”, offering a challenging discourse to the Zionist one, which is “imbuing with meaning the daily realities of Israeli life, society, and culture. In the process it reveals the contingency of the prevailing Zionist definitions of Israeli national identity, territory, history, and law. It thus helps us to see that things can be otherwise” (p. 10). Nevertheless Silberstein (2010) adverts that post Zionist scholars’ “primary concerns are by no means theoretical. They regard theory to be significant only insofar as it can help to reveal social and cultural inequities and injustices.” (p. 13). Such an approach reveals an understanding of the deep reach of Zionist discourse and the pragmatic motivation behind post Zionist scholarly critique. Once again, the government’s as well as other Zionist institutions’ response to post Zionist scholarship are indicators of the perception of real threat, such as the case of the deportation and ten-year-ban of Jewish American scholar Norman G. Finkelstein, explained by authorities as due to “security concerns” (Senyor, 2008); the denial of entry to Noam Chomsky (Hass, 2010); and the call for the resignation of Haifa University Professor, Ilan Pappe by the president of the university (Traubman, 2005). These perceptions of real threat by Zionist institutions can be interpreted as indications of concrete potential for identity change to have an impact on government and policy, which is met with attempts to deny or block expression of dissenting voices, arguably due to the impossibility of Zionist prevailing discourse withstanding scrutiny.

Returning to the approaches for conflict transformation mentioned in this article, although they offer processes through which identity change might happen, they do not account for the artificial setting they suggest and how that relates little to the reality of the larger Zionist group. A process of collective identity change needs to be contingent on a search for an ethical existence, a way to be Israeli or Jewish that would not imply an infringing of Palestinians’ or any one else’s fundamental rights. It should occur in a previous phase to that of a negotiation, which will result in a smoother peace process. Kelman (2004) says that identity change should occur out of a recognition that the new identity is closer to one’s own moral values than the old one, thus it would strengthen the core identity rather than weaken it as it might seem initially to be doing. Identity change implies admitting to having responsibility in the conflict in accordance to one’s own moral values, admitting to being wrong, and thereby the need to relinquish certain aspects of such identity. The admittance to such flaws shows a vulnerability that is more probable to be had in circles of trust, and in moments where one feels protected, and therefore not in processes where direct or indirect interaction with the conflict counterpart is underway, but within the group itself as an isolated independent and internal process.

Internal Jewish / Israeli processes of confronting the well-established Zionist identity, ideology and culture, with the new emergent political thought that suggests a new Israeli identity, is the hope for processes that would be local, sustainable, deep, durable, and deeply connected to the political culture and societal beliefs,
that was mentioned earlier by Lederach (2005) and Kelman (2004). This new identity has been emerging through a complex and diverse network of people and organizations, who act in various ways to express their dissent from Israeli government, and often from Zionism, although it is an emotional matter which many people try to overcome by discursively creating an “ethical Zionism”, since it might be too painful to completely dispense with it, as was found in this author’s field research in Jerusalem in 2010, while interviewing Jewish activists in human rights and social justice NGOs, out of which a few presented such doubts (Haasz, 2011, p. 155). It needs to be headed, centralized, organized and planned by Jewish Israelis and Jews from Diaspora. Furthermore it needs to develop means, techniques and resources of communication, which will allow deconstructing Zionist discourse in a humane way, taking into consideration the emotional difficulties entailed in this process. As Halper (2009) points out “the approach to the conflict has to be extricated from its mythical dimension of “Clash of Civilizations” into a framework based on human rights language, where emotionalism of the Israelis and any others who identify with the Israeli narrative of the conflict, is taken into account in order to soften their resistance, and thus engage in a more universal, moral, reasoned way of framing the conflict.”

CONCLUSION

If Zionist identity goes unchanged, it cannot and will not allow just peace to exist between Israelis and Palestinians under any circumstances. The progressive approaches to conflict transformation examined in this article work toward identity change within their respective formal processes of approaches to conflict transformation. It is exactly this insertion in the process that makes it less effective, since in order for identity change to make a difference, it needs to occur on a deeper and larger scale. Its occurrence should not be contingent on the necessity for a punctual peace agreement, but out of an awakening to a state of awareness of the “other” as a reflection of one’s own humanity, by lifting the ideological fog of Zionist identity. In the case of Israel there is no apparent motivation for it to choose such a path while it maintains its Zionist ideology, thus making identity change contingent on initiatives coming from within the Israeli and Diaspora Jews who gain awareness to the gap between their real values and Zionist rationale. Another problem is the need for isolation and protected environment, a feeling of dealing with the inner circle alone. Identity change is unlikely to occur if parties are worried about not appearing vulnerable. In summary, identity change should be worked on before the stage of interaction for negotiation and peace process, and by initiative of internal forces, in order to be deeper, sustainable and internalized. The more internalized an identity change is, the more the group will be true to it, and more evident will be the outcome in the form of attitudes. In the case of Israel / Palestine, provided that deep internalized identity change occurs within Zionist constituency, profound change will ensue regarding relationship with Palestinians, since the unjust treatment they have suffered for so long stems directly from Zionist deep culture. There are two research directions that should be explored from this paper, and connected to the question of identity change process. The first is how does the process of identity change occur at the individual level, in terms of triggers, difficulties, obstacles, and social influences, and the second, if people manage to know more about the process of identity change itself, how could that inform initiatives of conflict transformation.

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