When Jewish and Zionist Identities Encounter Otherness: Educational Case Study

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In recent decades the social sciences have shown an extensive theoretical and scientific interest in defining the reciprocal relationship between "identity" and "otherness," as well as analyzing the dynamic impact one has on the other. It appears that globalization, which creates transnational identities, and the multicultural era, which has given birth to the politics of identity and sub-nationalities, have awakened a discourse over the definition of both of these concepts (Ben-Rafael & Sternberg, 2001; Deaux, 2006). Within the science of social psychology, the theories of social identity and self-categorization have created a foundation for the understanding of cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes which lead to dividing social stimuli into groups (categories), defining the boundaries between an in-group and an out-group, and adopting behaviors consistent with the membership in the in-group (Taifel, 1981; Turner, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oaks, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). All the models analyzing the concept of identity in sociopsychological, sociological, and/or anthropological terms have recognized the crucial role of defining the boundaries between self-identity and other identities in the process of forming one's own identity as well as in intergroup processes (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Ben-Rafael, 2002; Brewer, 1991; David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Eriksen, 1995). In political science, theories of nationality have faced issues such as the boundaries of citizenship and conflicts between national identities and the identities of ethnic minorities (Brown, 2000; Yakobson & Rubinstein, 2010). And in the field of education, complex dilemmas have been debated, such as the role of the national educational system in maintaining national solidarity, teaching values, and imparting fundamental ethoses, as opposed to recognizing the cultural plurality of students (Banks, 2004; Schlesinger, 1993).

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However, it would be a mistake to assume that "identity" and "otherness" are relatively new concepts or social realities; they are as old as humanity. According to the biblical story, man succeeded in building the Tower of Babel because "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech" (Genesis 11:1). The declaration that all of those present spoke one language is not limited to a linguistic characterization, but in a broader conceptual sense, it describes people who had only one system of codes, values, and behavioral norms which allowed them to coordinate their activity and build the tower. However, the moment that God confused their language so that they began speaking in different languages, they could not continue building Babel and were scattered over the face of the earth. From that time until today, the encounter between different identities is simultaneously the basis for benevolent deeds and troublesome confrontations.

In this chapter, I will propose three different paradigms through which we can interpret the connections and tensions that exist between the concepts of "identity" and "otherness." Subsequently, I will consider the implementation of this theoretical analysis in a specific context related to the intractable conflict in which Israeli society is involved. An important observation in Bar-Tal's work is that almost all intractable conflicts are identity based (Bar-Tal, 2013). There is no doubt that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is such. Both the Jews and the Palestinians perceive the conflict in terms such as sovereignty in the territory which is "our homeland" and "the cradle of our culture tradition" (Morris, 2001). Therefore, it is extremely important to analyze the role of each paradigm in encouraging or moderating the intractability of the conflict. The implementation of the theoretical analysis will be based on an educational program which was devised and put into practice in an elementary school in Israel following expressions of racism against Muslims.

Three Paradigms of Identity

Like many theoretical definitions, the meaning of "identity" in general and "national identity" in particular is dependent upon the paradigmatic glasses through which we view these concepts. Sagi (2006) proposed three different models for the analysis of the concepts of "identity" and "otherness" in three opposing ways.

The basis for the **paradigm of essentialism** is that identity is a fixed, coherent, and homogenic trait, which is not dependent upon transitory historic, cultural, and social contexts; it exists by virtue of itself—a natural "given" into which an individual is cast at birth. This paradigm factors identity as an innate essence which is formed through internal-group processes, rather than one that has been shaped by a historic and social process, in which others have a distinct role in its formation and development. This approach does not maintain, of course, that no other identities exists other than self-identity, but it does underrate the role of other identities in forming a self-identity and establishing its singularity. Essentialism emphasizes the constant striving for authenticity: only those who bear the characteristics which are identifiable as essential to defining the collective (beliefs, values, norms) can be

considered individuals who authentically embody their identity in their lives. In light of this view, cultural exchanges with other identities are seen as a threat to the authenticity and uniqueness of the self-identity, since they harbor a danger of altering its firm and homogeneous essence, as well as endangering individuals' true loyalty and commitment to their collective identity.

The paradigm of essentialism thus magnifies the self and negates the role of the other in the process of forming one's own identity. In contrast, the paradigm of radical constructionism deconstructs identity while at the same time magnifies otherness. It emphasizes the march of the Western world toward a global and cosmopolitan era, in which national identities will play a secondary role, if any, in defining one's concept of belonging (Habermas, 2001). Furthermore, as far as the radical constructionist is concerned, there is no such thing as a "real unique identity." Individuals and collectives invent themselves over and over again through their contact and negotiations with others (Bauman, 1995). Therefore, the "other" is the sole medium through which identity is constructed. The ideology of multiculturalism associated with postmodernism and post-colonialism, which maintains that national identity is the product of constant conflict with others, is an explicit application of this paradigm. This ideology deals with the dissolution of hegemonic national identities and the strengthening of the identity of "others" (the generic name given to minorities), which, according to this approach, have been repressed by hegemonic national collectives (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Chambers, 1994). For example, Yona and Shenhav (2005) maintain that "our viewpoint requires us to adopt an asymmetrical attitude toward efforts to establish collective identities—while it criticizes the practices involved in creating ethno-national identities that lead to the creation of a cultural, political and economic hegemony... it supports these practices when they are adopted by groups trying to free themselves from that hegemony" (p. 154).

The third paradigm suggested by Sagi is the paradigm of moderate constructionism, which maintains that identity and otherness are constituted in a reciprocal manner: the formation of an identity is a dynamic process during which a dialogue is maintained vis-à-vis other identities. The dialogue is based on recognizing a unique self-identity, and confirming the authentic existence of the core of this entity, while maintaining the possibility of transcending this identity through cultural exchanges and dialogue with other identities. The foundation, or core, of selfidentity includes the primary complex of beliefs, feelings, and practices available to the individual or society, which determine their basic attitudes toward the social world. Nevertheless, the dialogical character of identity formation allows the individual or society to deviate from these primary components to encounter new contexts of meaning. In the process of dialogue, human beings decide what part of the "other" will become integrated in their own self-identity (if at all) and what part of the other's identity will be rejected. This is a process of redefining and reinterpreting one's self-identity, which distances us from what Taylor (1994) calls the "monological ideal" typical of the paradigm of essentialism and from the fragmental ideal and the lack of commitment and loyalty that is characteristic of the paradigm of radical constructionism.

Identity and Otherness in the Context of Intractable Conflict

According to Bar-Tal (2013), a society that is engulfed in an intractable conflict develops a sociopsychological infrastructure which helps it in dealing with the constant state of conflict, and this becomes the prism through which the society interprets events related to the conflict. Within this infrastructure, I wish to describe two elements which are particularly relevant to the present discussion.

The first pertains to the societal beliefs of positive self-image, de-legitimization of the enemy and victimhood, which are part of the ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000). The societal beliefs related to positive self-image paint self-identity in bright and favorable colors, suggesting that those who bear this identity possess positive characteristics and that the entire collective behaves according to values which are moral and just. In contrast, the societal beliefs of de-legitimization label the enemies—meaning, of course, the "others"—with extremely negative social characteristics, describing them as the ones who act outside the boundaries of accepted norms and human values. The combination of these two societal beliefs creates a prism which maximizes the distinction between the in-group and the out-group, but also the homogeneity within each one of them. In addition, the societal belief of victimhood puts the blame for the eruption, escalation, and continuance of the conflict on the shoulders of the enemy and focuses on the atrocities done by the adversary. These three societal beliefs are internalized into the collective's self-identity and become part of its contents (Oren, Bar-Tal, & David, 2004).

The second element I wish to emphasize is collective emotional orientation: the strong feelings which have developed in individuals who have been exposed to the conflict for a long period of time, which are now shared by members of the society due to their broad exposure to a variety of social media. Most important to the present discussion are the negative emotions of fear and hatred (Bar-Tal, 2001; Halperin, 2008). Life in the shadow of extreme violence, physical destruction, and extensive killing gives rise to collective fear. It is not only the fear associated with the next violent event, but mainly a fear from the generalized "other." The fear is not directed at the enemies just because of the possibility that they could harm one physically, but rather because their beliefs negate the mere existence of the self-identity. In addition, feelings of collective hatred could arise toward the others, who are perceived as the enemy, fostering violent acts against them. It should be noted that the beliefs and negative feelings discussed here could conceivably spread to include not only the enemies themselves but any person or group who is identified in one way or another with the enemies. Negative stereotypes, prejudice, and expressions or acts of racism are the result of generalizations such as these (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Spears, Oaks, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1997).

Implications for the Educational Arena

I would like now to combine the notions derived from the two theoretical frameworks outlined above into a holistic view and to consider its educational implications. My argument will be as follows: the attitude of educators and educational

programs to the question of identity and otherness expressed through a particular paradigmatic lens might intensify the sociopsychological infrastructure of intractable conflict or moderate it. Both the paradigms of essentialism and of radical constructionism go hand in hand with the intensification of this infrastructure. The first one tends to interpret contacts with others as a possible threat to the authenticity of self-identity. "Others" are categorically "others," so that between myself and their "otherness," a distinct and clear boundary exists. The second paradigm "attributes the 'other' the exact same thing that it negates from the self-identity" (Sagi, 2006, p. 229), i.e., the legitimacy of its existence as a genuine cultural and historical phenomenon. It delegitimizes the self-identity and puts the "other" in a position of the ultimate victim. In contrast, the paradigm of moderate constructionism is the only paradigm which might be applied in the educational arena toward moderating the sociopsychological infrastructure of intractable conflict, because it is the only one which legitimizes both sides of the conflict.

Identity and Otherness: Educational Case Study

In order to examine the argument above, I will now present an educational case study. This educational program was devised and implemented by teachers and students at an elementary school in Israel in response to the occurrence of incidents of racism on soccer fields in Israel. In the season of 2012–2013, two Chechen Muslims joined the Beitar Jerusalem soccer team. Hundreds of Beitar fans objected to allowing the Chechens to play on the team, claiming that only Jewish players should be allowed on the team, and certainly not Muslims, the religion identified with the Arab enemy.

The school administrators decided that they could not ignore such incidents and initiated a program based on a staged courtroom.² The real incidents provided background material for the trial, but some fictional details were added: the team's management gave in to the pressure asserted by the fans and fired the Muslim players under the pretense of "incompatibility with the social and cultural composition of the team" (in reality, the Chechens remained on the team). The dismissed players appealed to the court, contending their contracts had been breached because they were foreigners.

¹For a critical review of the dichotomy between essentialism and radical constructionism, see Calhoun (1994, 2007) and Smith (2000).

²The program was initiated as part of the school's progress towards the "Ma'arag Award—Excellence in Jewish, Zionist and Civic Education." I wish to thank the school's principal and teachers who initiated the program for letting me use their educational materials.

The Prosecution's Arguments

The prosecution began its argument with the claim that Israel is a democratic state and therefore is obligated to maintain certain values: "The State of Israel is a democratic country. The Basic Law of Human Dignity and Liberty applies to honoring basic human rights; its purpose is to protect individual persons' dignity. Israeli law forbids racial discrimination. In the case at hand, the cessation of employment was due to racial discrimination. The Beitar team had employed foreign players in the past, but not Muslims; therefore the plea of the social composition of the team cannot be an argument." This argument is universal in its nature: it is based on a policy of human rights derived from the liberal-democratic Western culture of which Israel is a part.

However, these claims did not satisfy the prosecution, which turned to defend its arguments on the basis of Jewish culture itself: "The Hebrew law and Jewish tradition defend the plea that the attitude toward foreigners must be humane. The Bible warns us about our treatment toward foreigners 36 times: 'The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt'." The prosecution even quoted a judgment made by the assistant chief justice, Judge Menachem Aylon, who wrote: "It appears that there is not another individual about whose treatment the Bible so repeatedly warns us such as the foreigner, if in words or in deeds...as foreigners we were in Egypt."

Later in the trial, one of the fired players is called to the stand and says: "At school I learned about everything that happened to the Jewish people, and I thought that a nation that had suffered from racism would behave according to other standards." It appears that the prosecution was calling upon the collective memory of the Jews in order to establish its argument that humane treatment of foreigners has not been derived from liberal-democratic thought alone; it is a basic tenet of Jewish identity itself. Both the prehistoric memory (of slavery in Egypt) and the more recent historic memory (discrimination in the Diaspora) form a bridge of awareness between Jewish suffering in the past and a moral beacon of behavior in the present.

The Argument for the Defense

The defense presented two types of arguments. The first was pragmatic: employing foreign players causes more harm than benefit to the team. Economic damage due to the cancellation of subscriptions by fans and moral damage that causes the team to lose games are the main pragmatic claims. But then, the defense turns to a second type of argument, which is of an ideological nature: "In the contract there is a clause which states that there is a possibility of cancelling the contract with the players when there is an incompatibility with the social-cultural mentality of the team. Indeed there appears to be an incompatibility... these players were unable to adjust to the team spirit. The team is Israeli and Jewish; it represents the State of Israel. Israel is a Jewish state: the state emblem is the seven-branched candlestick

(*Menorah*) from the Temple; the Israeli flag bears the stripes of a prayer shawl (*Tallit*); the national anthem begins with the words 'a Jewish soul still yearns'...the social and cultural fabric of the team is different."

The arguments of the defense strongly stress the need perceived by the heads of the team to prevent an encounter between the Jewish identity and other identities. The Jewish character of the team identifies with the Jewish nature of the state, and both of them are expressed in an essentialist terminology. The case presented here is that preservation of the authentic Jewish identity of the state and the team requires building walls of separation between Jews and non-Jews. The fact that the emblems of the state are taken from Jewish culture, and express the national character of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, constitutes a basis for defining all of the social relationships existing under the political roof of the state in terms of possible threat to an authentic Jewish identity.

The Court's Judgment

The Court opens its judgment in the trial with: "In the case brought before us, there seems to be a confrontation between the character of the state as a Jewish national state and the state as a democratic entity. It is our duty to protect the values of the State of Israel, as well as the balance between its Jewish nature and its democratic nature." This statement indicates the court's stand that the values of the state and the way it operates must represent both its nature as a Jewish national state and its nature as a democratic state, sworn to protect human rights.

However, following the opening statement, the judges maintain that in the case before them, there is no contradiction between the two value systems: "Throughout the entire history the Jewish people has experienced the tragic consequences of racism... We cannot allow racism. Jewish culture pays special attention to foreigners. Images of our slavery in Egypt as foreigners in a foreign land are imbedded in our collective memory. Slavery in Egypt gave birth to the ideas of freedom of man and ethical behavior towards foreigners and the weak among us... 'One law and one ordinance shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you' (Numbers 15:16)... In the spirit of this commentary, we can say that in order for the State of Israel to be a Jewish state, it must be a humane and just state for all, including minorities and the foreigners within it."

If this is the case, the court adopts the language of the moderate constructionist paradigm, according to which there is a Jewish national, religious, and cultural identity, which has existed from ancient times until today as a unique identity. However, this does not mean that cultural exchanges with others inevitably endanger the authenticity of the Jewish identity. The opposite is true: a significant part of the positive values on which that identity is based falls in the realm of humane and equal relations toward the identities of others.

Deficiencies in the Arguments of the Prosecution and the Court

All the arguments on both sides were related to issues of Jewish identity. However, while the defense emphasized the nationalistic elements of this identity (e.g., the relationship between Jewish tradition and the emblems of the state and its character as a Jewish state), the prosecution referred mainly to cultural and moral aspects derived from traditional Jewish writings, mainly the Bible. But it could have anchored its claims also on modern Zionist writings. By doing so, it would have demonstrated that not only Jewish culture, but also the Zionist idea itself, is not congruent with the essentialist point of view.

For example, the prosecution could have cited Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl, the man who envisioned the establishment of the State of Israel. In his utopian novel "Altneuland" (*The Old New Land*) ([1902], 1997), Herzl describes an election campaign taking part in the Jewish state. The campaign centers around the conflict between the party standing for ethnocentric and racist ideas and the liberal party which supports the idea that the new society being formed in the Land of Israel must be based on social equality. The racist party uses the slogan: "Whoever is not Jewish will not be accepted to the new society." In contrast, the liberal party affirmed that "we must preserve that which has made us a great nation: freedom of thought and expression, tolerance and love of humanity. Only then will Zion really be Zion."

The prosecution could have also cited Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of the Revisionist party (the secular right-wing party in the Zionist movement), and its youth movement, Beitar. As mentioned above, Beitar is also the sports association to which the soccer team discussed here belongs. Therefore, it would have been of special importance to understand Jabotinsky's worldview concerning identity and otherness and to present it during the trial. Jabotinsky was a realpolitik and a liberal Zionist leader. He believed that the Arab national movement in Palestine will use military force to prevent the Zionists from achieving their national goals. Therefore, he called upon building what is known as an "Iron Wall" against it, so that it will recognize that the Jewish national movement cannot be defeated. Yet, at the same time, Jabotinsky developed a comprehensive worldview of the relationships that should exist between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority in the future Jewish state. These relationships should be based on full equality: "Even after the formation of a Hebrew [=Jewish] majority [in the Land of Israel], there will always be here a large Arab population. And if this part of the population will know bad times, then all population will suffer. Therefore, the solid political, economic, and cultural condition of the Arabs will always be the basis for a healthy and solid country. Full equal rights of both nations, both languages and all religions will prevail in the Hebrew State" (Jabotinsky, 1953, p. 298).

Both examples of Herzl and Jabotinsky are expressions of identity taken from the paradigm of moderate constructionism: a national Jewish identity exists, and it receives recognition and legitimacy within an independent political entity. Social communications with others under the umbrella of the state furthers ratification of that identity on the one hand and a fruitful dialogue with other identities on the other.

Summary and Educational Implications

There is no doubt that the sociopsychological processes which create collective identities require that borders be defined between self-identity and the identity of others. Without these boundaries and without defining the singular characteristics of the in-group, the concept of identity has no meaning. The controversy discussed in this chapter relates to the nature of the boundaries and of the relationships formed between identities.

The analysis of the mock trial shows how arguments based on essentialism of identity emphasize—directly or indirectly—raising the walls of separation between Jewish identity and Muslim identity, which is in keeping with the intensification of the sociopsychological infrastructure of intractable conflict. It includes negative stereotyping, feelings of threat and fear, and beliefs which create a dichotomy between positive self-identity and negative otherness (Bar-Tal, 2013). In contrast, the arguments that were based on a moderate constructionist way of thinking emphasized—clearly or by inference—the need to lower the walls of separation between Jews and Muslims and create relationships between Jews and Muslims based on mutual respect and humanism in order to contribute to a change in the sociopsychological foundation of the conflict.

All in all, the moderate constructionist view is the only one among the three paradigms presented here which answers the challenge of identity and otherness. The other two paradigms annul one side of the equation or, at best, do not give it the place it deserves. In contrast, the paradigm of moderate constructionism maintains that identity and otherness are two sides of the same coin. Thus, the educational system has to implement pedagogical programs that will allow students to deal with questions and dilemmas which arise from the encounter between their national and cultural self-identity and other identities. This notion has great significance when we turn to conceptualize the roles of the educational system in peacebuilding processes (see, e.g., Bar-Tal, Rosen, & Nets-Zehngut, 2009; Salomon, 2002; Vered, Chap. 13). This theme is, of course, beyond the scope of this chapter. But it is worth mentioning that it is not possible to educate students to "recognize the national identity of the other" without fostering their own national identity and facilitating identification with the in-group. For this reason, the arguments in the trial which were based on moderate constructionism facilitated the cultivation of a national Jewish-Zionist identity among the students and at the same time developed their willingness to engage in a dialogue with the other. Most of the arguments which denounced prejudices and racism stemmed from Jewish and Zionist culture and history themselves. It should be noted that the analysis here dealt with relations between Jews and Muslims in which those involved were not Israeli Arabs or Palestinians. However, the conceptual analysis made here is valid in terms of all encounters between identities and certainly relative to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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