

A Dialogical Cultural Approach to the Controversy between Israeli Traditionalists and Liberals

Marc Silverman
marc.silverman@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract

The contention of Israeli traditionalists' contention that Israeli Jews are not 'Jewish enough' and that of Israeli liberals that they are 'much-too Jewish' are among the most divisive issues in Israeli society. Inflated cultural self-images, inattentive listening and devaluation of each other's culture are disclosed in a social-constructivist analysis of their cultural assumptions. Employing a dialogical-cultural paradigm, the paper proposes that traditionalists should respect the liberals' search for human fullness in Jewish political nationalism on the one hand, and that liberals should respect the traditionalists' sense of the decisive importance of historical memory in human cultural creativity and of the intrinsic limitations of human autonomy on the other hand.

Introduction

Over the past forty years with what can be perceived as ever-increasing intensity, the many diverse groups that make-up the social-cultural mosaic of the Israeli polity are engaged in a vocal and, at times, violent public controversy regarding this polity's major political, religious, and ethnic issues. This controversy lends testimony to the corrosion of the discourse of "unity" that at least rhetorically characterized the Israeli polity from its founding in 1948 to the Six Day-War (1967), or the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) War (1973).

The disappearance of this discourse of unity finds expression in the heated debates between Israeli "old" historians and sociologists and "new" ones (Waxman, 1997) as well as in academic works on the construction of Israel's collective national memory (Azarayahu, 1995; Zeruvabel, 1995; Kimmerling, 2004; Peled, 2019). These debates and works address the explicit and hidden struggles of the diverse groups referred to above over the symbolic and material resources of the Israeli polity. They also analyze the discourse through which the future nature of this polity is framed and debated.

The definition of Jewishness or Judaism and its desirable role in Israeli society, culture, and identity is one of the most prominent issues addressed and passionately debated in these works, conversations, and controversies. This paper is devoted toward a presentation, analysis and critique of the main prevalent voices participating in this specific dimension of these conversations and controversies.

In the first section of this paper, the review of the many, diverse, and often opposing voices resonating out of Israeli scholarly works and public printed media regarding this issue of the Jewishness of Israel and Israelis discloses that, despite the existence of significant countervailing voices, it is possible to divide the owners of these voices into two relatively large and distinct camps: the "not-enough Jewish" camp and the "too-much Jewish" one.

Notwithstanding the significant, different intonations and variations of the "not-enough Jewish" camp's voices, the main one emanating out of it claims that non-observant Israeli Jews who embrace a western liberal cultural ethos are not Jewish enough and are opponents of Judaism. In the unabashed words of General Ya'akov Amidror, "there is much wisdom in the claim the secular Israeli Jews are not much more than Hebrew-speaking Goyim [non-Jews] ...other than through the Hebrew language how do you secularists express your Judaism?" (in Berkowitz, 1996). Again, not discounting the significant, different variations of the "too-much Jewish" camp's voices, the main one emanating out of it claims that Israeli Jewish traditionalists who embrace a traditional religious cultural ethos are much-too-much Jewish and that they are opponents of modernity. In words no less arrogant than those of General Amidror's, the Israeli journalist B. Michael contends that the rabbinical leadership of SHAS (Torah Guardians of Sephardi Origins) "adulates and cultivates ignorance and illiteracy" and seeks to create "a new type of a Sephardi individual" -- one who is "a religious fanatic, an ignoramus full of superstitions, scorn toward science and hatred to universal culture, lacking commitment to the principles of democracy..."(1996).

The presentation of the "words" of these respective camps testify that both Israeli traditionalists (the people's voices identified here as the not-enough Jewish camp) and Israeli liberals (the people's voices identified here as the too-Jewish camp) generally hold cultural perceptions of themselves and of each other that are based on the following two mirror-like, shared "senses and sensibilities":

1. WE "HAVE" CULTURE.

We traditionalists have real culture -- the historical religious rabbinical one.

We liberals have real culture -- the western, liberal, democratic one.

2. YOU DON'T.

Traditionalists to liberals: "You are Hebrew-speaking Goyim."

Liberals to traditionalists: "You are opponents of modernity."

In its next section this paper, employing social-constructivist perspectives on the nature of culture and its production, argues that both the traditionalists and the liberals suffer from an inflated cultural self-image and, correspondingly, from an inattentive and unfair hearing of each other's voices and a devaluation of the latter. On one hand, the traditionalists' natural "given" respect and love of the historical religious rabbinical tradition and unreflective, unquestioned assumption that this tradition alone defines the parameters of what can be fairly and clearly called Jewish culture ineluctably leads them to the negation or devaluation of the historically-sociologically linked Jewish dimensions embodied in the national cultural production and expressions of non-observant Israeli Jews. In short, the traditionalists praise the Jewish religious tradition while burying its renewed and new national aspects. On the other hand, the liberals' natural admiration and devotion to Western culture in its liberal democratic version and their uncritical assumption that this culture alone defines the foundations which can inspire a decent and sane society ineluctably leads them to disregard the positive individual and social human features embedded and articulated in the traditionalists' culture and to its devaluation.

Formulating this in constructivist terminology, the adoption by these two camps, respectively, of essentialist and positivist understandings of the nature of culture underlies their self-congratulatory cultural self-perceptions and their exclusion and negation of each other's cultures.

In their unreflective loyalty to their respective cultural paradigms -- the traditionalists to the rabbinical one, the liberals to the western one -- they fall into the pitfall of reification and hegemony. Both camps thereby become "slaves" -- the traditionalist, of tradition; the liberal, of freedom.

The third section of this paper explores the social and cultural risks and dangers that arise out of the hegemonic nature of the traditionalists' affirmation of rabbinical culture and of the liberals' hegemonic affirmation of western culture. This section suggests that the hubris inherent in their hegemonic understanding of their respective cultures leads them to address each other in monologist dialects and to treat each other instrumentally as "serviceable others" to be dominated and oppressed (Sampson, 1993). In the particular language in which they have been socialized to understand, they refer to each other's "them," those who are not "us," those who create "us" by being "them."

In light of this critique, alternative ways toward cultural understanding and management are intimated and the benefits that each of these two camps could derive from their adoption of them are presented. These alternatives are inspired by a dialogical cultural paradigm anchored in recent critical multicultural perspectives, in which any multiculturalism that simply juxtaposes a multiplicity of cultures whose frontiers remain intact, or that supports the leveling of all differences, is not worthy of its name. Consequently, two possible models of multiculturalism are proposed.

In the first, through constructive dialogue, the adherents of the respective different cultures -- while lending weight to their differences, including the right to isolation -- reach agreement concerning the norms applicable to the public domain. In the second model, space in which multiple communities are able to interact is created, thus affording the enrichment of the ever-emerging cultures of these communities and the production of a shared dynamic culture in which each community can recognize reflections of their own identity.

This paper arrives at its ever-to-be-completed conclusion by intimating some of the major cultural benefits that Israeli traditionalists and liberals would gain by applying this latter perspective. The traditionalists might develop an appreciation of the genuine search for expressions of the full humanity of Jews embodied in Jewish nationalism coupled with liberal cultural affirmations, while the liberals might develop a similar appreciation for the human community and commitments embodied in traditionalist cultural affirmations.

1 Traditionalist and Liberal self-understanding and understanding of each other

The Traditionalists

Despite the very significant biographical, sociological, and cultural differences among members of the traditionalist camp, there is a shared view that Jewish culture must be grounded in the belief in a religious covenant between God and the Jewish people. All traditionalists could agree with the following words of the late Gershon Cohen, a leading figure of the conservative movement:

Israel can occupy an indispensable place in Jewish life only if it becomes and remains part of an inseparable dimension of greater centrality -- the centrality of the Jewish people. To this I hasten to add that even the Jewish people can only perpetuate its centrality if it, in turn, is a consequence of a higher mandate...namely the Torah. Only a religious, that is, transcendent, mandate can lead to a sense of consanguinity between my children and Jews of Moroccan origin living in Israel. Apart from that religious mandate, apart from the covenant that underlies such a mandate, no demand of loyalty on my part or anyone else's makes any sense (1977).

From religious, historical, or sociological considerations, or a combination of these, the traditionalists identify knowledge and conscious appropriation of the Rabbinical tradition as a prerequisite of the definition of Jewish culture. Though many of them do not share Cohen's religious viewpoint, they could readily comply with the statement made by the well-known conservative rabbi and accomplished Jewish historian, Arthur Hertzberg:

“In order to continue being an authentic Jew, the secular Israeli Jew must be knowledgeable of the Jewish religious heritage. If he is an ignoramus regarding Jewish sources, unattuned to their substance, he approaches the condition of being a Hebrew-speaking Goy”(1995).

Accordingly, the traditionalists share the assumption that the decisive parameter of the definition and identification of Jewish culture is the historical religious tradition of the Jewish people and the sensibility that the non-observant, liberal Israelis' ignorance of Jewish religious tradition, and their disinterested or negative existential relationship to it, represents a cultural disaster. This identification provides the background to several of their most significant ideological and educational positions. On the ideological plane, they contend that the present cultural state of these Israeli Jews embodies a genuine threat to the very existence of the State of Israel and of the Jewish people as a culturally distinct entity. By way of an example, according to the moderate orthodox Zionists belonging to Meimad:

“...the preservation of the Jewish character of the State of Israel is an existential necessity...we believe that the loss of Jewish uniqueness would endanger, Heaven forbid, the very existence of the State...” (1996).

The traditionalists claim, as well, that the phenomenon of Israeli "Hebrew-speaking Goyim," representing in their eyes, as it does, a severe and pernicious crisis, warrants in-depth educational treatment and the investment of considerable resources to combat this process of Israeli Jewish assimilation. They believe an all-out effort must be made to "turn" the secular Jewish Israeli population, particularly its younger generation, back to Jewish sources, values, and norms.

To sum-up, the traditionalists:

1. Evaluate the Jewish cultural level of non-observant or secular Israeli Jews committed to a western liberal ethos according to the latter's relationship to Jewish religious tradition.
2. Regard the ignorance and alienation of secular Israeli Jews from this tradition as a cultural disaster of Jobian proportions which threatens the very existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish State and of the people of Israel as Jews.

3. Call for educational policies and programs aimed at Judaizing the secular Israeli Jews, particularly the younger generation.

The Liberals

Despite their many significant philosophical, political, and religious differences, members of the liberal camp assume that western culture is superior to other cultures, in general, and to the traditional Jewish culture in particular. They all most probably would agree with Israeli sculptor Yigal Tomarkin's claim that

“...the concept of secular culture is an equivocation -- since all that which is culture is secular, there is only, simply and solely, culture. All the rest is traditions and folklore” (in Sheleg, 1997).

The following four dichotomous assertions that are frequently articulated by Israeli liberals of different shapes and colors underlie their attribution of this superiority to western culture:

1. Western culture places emphasis on the philosophical, scientific and spiritual aspects of human life, while Jewish traditional culture emphasizes the latter's functional, material, ritualistic, and concrete aspects.
2. Western culture is universal and humanistic, while Jewish traditional culture is particularistic, tribal, and ethnocentric.
3. It is present- to future-oriented and forward-looking, while Jewish traditional culture is oriented from the present to the past and backward-looking.
4. It encourages the development of an autonomous, free, and rational individual, while the Jewish traditional culture develops a heteronomous, bonded, and irrational individual.

The belief of Israeli liberals that western culture is philosophical, scientific, and spiritual, while Jewish traditional culture is functional, material, and ritualistic is clearly articulated by Shulamit Hareven (1995) who argues for the cultural superiority of secular Israeli Jews who tend to prioritize "pursuit of peace, the dignity of man, the elimination of discrimination, civil virtues...issues regarding the relationship between human beings" in their scale of values over ritual observance between God and people, such as the use of phylacteries, lighting candles, and keeping dietary laws as defined by Halakha [Jewish Religious Law]. She makes the unequivocal claim that she is unquestionably a better Jewess than the silk-garmented Yeshiva student who cries out Shabos at her....

“because her Judaism did not become fossilized and die, and because, ultimately, a democratic system of government, peace, and the dignity of people created in the "Image" are grounded to a significantly greater extent in the profound intellectual [and] spiritual foundations of Judaism than is automatic ritualism, which is scared to death by any innovation, whose obsessive nature approximates idol worship, and which has already led people to highly immoral acts(Ibid).

The universalism and humanism of western culture, as opposed to the particularism, tribalism, and ethnocentrism of Jewish tradition, are expounded by the critical sociologist, Baruch Kimmerling,(1995) who argues that, in the Israeli cultural mixture, the religious components, which are "by their very nature...more tribal and particularistic....," take precedence over the secular civil ones, and that the "outcome of this is that our culture does not have a civil religion but only a religious one." Another radical sociologist, Sammy Smooha (1996) in an effort to

refute the left-wing Zionist contention that all western liberal democracies are based on a primary national group possessing distinctive ethnic characteristics, claims that the ethnicity inherent in Jewish nationalism due to its inseverable link with a particular religion is especially potent -- hyper-ethnic and hyper-prejudicial.

Echoes of the superiority of western culture over Jewish culture because of the former's forward-looking orientation, as opposed to the backward-looking one of the latter, are heard in the author and journalist Amos Kenan's(1995) praise of Tel-Aviv, which he contrasts with Jerusalem. Only Tel-Aviv, he tells his readers, "has positive historical memories: memories of the effervescent present. Tel-Aviv, the city of the present, demonstrates that the present alone furnishes a safeguard against a terrifying future that takes its inspiration from the past." Zvi Lamm(1988) warns his readers that Israelis should be more than careful, lest they fall prey to the inevitable chauvinistic traps into which the worship of Forefathers has often led peoples in the modern period. By way of a highly sarcastic expression of this aversion toward the existential embrace of the past, we quote the following passage from an interview with Uri Ornan, a well-known leader of the Israeli Canaanite movement "This invention of 'connecting-up with one's roots' is simply and totally a bluff. If we would preserve our roots and allow them to guide our lives as human beings, we would still find ourselves hanging from trees" (in Lotenberg, 1992).

The supposition that western culture encourages autonomy and rationality while Jewish traditional culture develops heteronomy and irrationality is clearly articulated in the following selection of quotes of these Israeli liberals. Anat Maor, an MK from the left-wing political party Meretz, asserts that "an advanced or progressive society is one that believes in the rationality of man and refrains from placing its trust in God" (in Eilon, 1996). The journalist, Eddie Masoubi defines a free human being as one "who does not acknowledge God and definitely not his earthly representatives, whether they are ultra-orthodox, reform, Amish, or the devil knows what"(1998). Gadi Taub(1997) an Israeli cultural critic, accuses the use of charms and amulets by the leadership of the SHAS party as "the cynical political manipulation of the ignorance of poor people, a manipulation whose expressed purpose is to leave them in this ignorance." This recourse to amulets "perpetuates their pauperization" and prevents them from adopting the primary intellectual equipment toward socio-economic empowerment and mobility in an industrial society -- modernity and rationalism. The journalist Orit Shohat ends her polemic against the subservience of secular Israelis to Jewish religious tradition by insisting that they learn "to be independent, alone with themselves, and to face up to the necessity of making rational, autonomous decisions on their own without the 'help of heaven'" (1996).

2 A constructivist critique of the traditionalists' and liberals' cultural paradigms

Culture should not be conceived as a gold standard currency with only so much to go around. It is more like phonologies, in which each sound, each position in the mouth, is significant only as it is defined by the other sounds and no sound is any more real, any richer, or more privileged than any other (McDermott, 1993).

Culture in the constructivist perspectives employed in this paper whether it is viewed as something internal/intellectual (the humanities approach) or as something external/material (the traditional anthropological approach), is not and should not be considered a phenomenon that has

a real, objective, static, and permanent existence "out there." Instead, culture should be appreciated as being constantly negotiated and constructed (Nagel, 1994). Culture is therefore constructed through the joint, as well as at times disjointed efforts of groups and individuals. Individuals in narrative and biographical telling shape and reshape their selves (Kotre, 1995) while nations tamper with memory to construct significant presentations (Anderson, 1983). The constructivist perspective offered here views culture as a dynamic and ever-emerging product of human action and interaction (Schweder, 1990).

As Maurice Godelier (1977) argues convincingly, human beings do not just live in relationships - they produce relationships to live -- thereby producing culture and creating history. Accordingly, neither culture "outside" -- i.e., its material products -- nor culture "inside" -- its ideational and affective products -- entail the "stuff" of culture. Human beings and their identities, Jews being no exception (Horenczyk & Bekerman, 1999) are neither plastic nor passive. Indeed, they all have histories, but only inasmuch as they actively create them within given socio-historical contexts. Accordingly, culture is continuously produced and constructed anew, "wrestled down" through dialogical human interaction (Harre and Gillet, 1995); a dialogue of multiple voices -- heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) and argumentation (Billig, 1987) within ever-changing socio-historical contexts.

If this dynamic, interactive, and inter-relational nature of culture is not acknowledged, its adherents relate to its concepts and categories in a taken-for-granted manner, from which they construct a world that they view as objective, existing out-there, static, permanent, natural, and universal. Their uncritical acceptance of the "givenness" of this, "their" world, leads to a form of cultural ethnocentrism, which translates as a dominating posture toward other cultures. In short their cultural paradigms become hegemonic and thereby dangerous to others who do not share the dominant culture and are thereby excluded or oppressed by it.

In the specific context of this paper, both camps, the traditionalist and the liberal, while coming from different directions, do not appreciate this dynamic, interactive, and inter-relational nature of culture and therefore fall into the traps of reification and hegemony and the dangers inherent in them. In brief, out of their static and reified conception of rabbinical culture, the traditionalists negate or devalue the renewed and new national Jewish cultural expressions of the liberals, while out of their static and reified conception of western culture, the liberals negate and devalue the spiritual and ethical cultural expressions of the traditionalists.

The traditionalists' static approach to culture leads them to an exclusive identification of contemporary Jewish culture with the traditional religious culture. In this exclusive identification, the fluidity of the cultural production emerging out of the conscious and the no less important unconscious dialogue between Israeli nationalism and the Jewish past is ignored. Out of a thirst for continuity with the historical religious cultural identity of the Jewish people, they severely underestimate the powerful weight and influence of the present national context. In their devaluation of this context, they discount the Jewish cultural appropriations of the new Israeli Jews and are blind to the Jewish dimensions of Israeli secular culture.

Inattentive to the dynamic, interactive, and contextual nature of culture, they disregard the far-reaching cultural implications of the changing political and social contexts engendered by the

transformation of a large portion of the Jewish people from a collection of Diaspora communities to a sovereign nation State -- a transformation that has engendered a very consequential change in the nature and scope of their Jewish-human responsibilities, from highly circumscribed to those that are, in the most inclusive sense, politically comprehensive. As an independent Jewish polity, state, and society, Israel has radically altered the scope and nature of the human responsibility and accountability of its Jewish inhabitants. Paraphrasing Goethe, it can be stated that, *ex definitio*, "nothing human is alien" to Israeli Jews.

Regarding this point, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that, from a critical historical perspective, all Zionists, including the orthodox, have been motivated deeply by the urge to overcome what they all perceived as the unhealthy and disembodied nature of Jewish life in the Diaspora. They sought a comprehensive life in which the distinction between the secular tasks of human life and the holy ones of Jewish life would be integrated. As recent research on Zionist ideals of the "New Jew" discloses, reclaiming land, language, physical labor, and prowess for Jews were viewed as Jewish tasks of the highest spiritual order (Rosenstein, 1985; Brinker, 1990; Don-Yehiya, 1980).

The comprehensive nature of Israeli Jewish life seriously challenges the natural, uninterrupted relevance and applicability of the Jewish religious tradition. This tradition was based historically on a very clear demarcation between spiritual, religious Jewish tasks and spheres of life and the political, material human tasks and spheres. As several scholars have pointed out, traditional Jewish culture was based on the existential celebration and reenactment of the past or on the existential hope of the messianic future in the present. Contemporary Israeli culture, however, is based on the existential celebration and enactment of the present for the sake of the foreseeable future (Fukenstein, 1991; Yerushalmi, 1989).

In the context of this Jewish national transformation and its cultural implications, cultural constructivist perspectives can provide us with some important insights. Thus, while Zionists "imaginatively" sought the national foundations of territory and language to foster and sustain the ethnic/national continuity of the Jewish people, they did not intend that this continuity would be identical with the traditional religious culture of Jews, as it was interpreted and practiced in the Diaspora. Indeed, as already indicated above, a powerful rejection of the human qualities of traditional Jewish culture, as they were perceived by most Zionist activists and pioneers, and a rebellion against these were at the root of the motivation of the Founding Fathers to create a renewed or new Jewish culture in the land of Israel (Rosenstein, 1985; Brinker, 1990; Don-Yehiya, 1980).

Taking a cue from D'Azeglio's statement (in Billig, 1995) that "we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians," we suggest that the Jews who "made" Israel are now in the process of "making" Israelis. By making this statement, we are not suggesting that modern nationalism entails creating or inventing a people totally anew -- especially as concerns the Jews (Shimoni, 1995). Jews have had a sense of ethnicity and peoplehood for a very long period of time which was sustained by religious, Rabbinical-Halakhic debate. Over the past hundred years, with its move into a new national context, a significant portion of the Jewish people is in the process of creating a new vocabulary that expresses Jewishness in national terms alongside terms that are religious, Rabbinic, and Halakhic. These national terms and discussions are frequently in

opposition to those that are religious; yet, no less frequently they are voiced both parallel to and within them (Aran, 1987; Lamm, 1975; Silverman, 1996).

It is an incontestable historical reality that, for close to 2000 years, the culture of the Jewish people was inextricably linked to the Jewish religion, as interpreted by the Rabbinical tradition. Furthermore, the social reality of large traditionalist sections of Israeli Jews for whom rabbinical Jewish culture is a life-constructing cultural reality is no less an incontestable one. These factors have served to reinforce the prevalent proclivity of traditionalists toward an essentialist reifying approach to their culture, as well as a hegemonic and devaluing posture toward the Jewishness of the culture of their liberal sisters and brothers. These two realities, the historical and the sociological, also foster the cooperation of liberals in these inattentive and devaluing processes and their acquiescence to them. Indeed, the ascription of their lack of Jewish culture is not simply an outcome of their culture's "victimization" by the traditionalists. The liberals' reification of their cultural perceptions of themselves and of the traditionalists actively contributes to the inadmissibility of their own Jewishness. To a significant extent, the problematic of the authenticity and legitimacy of the Jewishness of their culture is self-inflicted.

The liberals' essentialist understanding of culture leads them to the exclusive identification of a viable, worthy, and worthwhile contemporary human culture with the western liberal culture. Because of this exclusive identification, valuable human transcendent, communal, and material dimensions embedded and articulated in the traditionalist culture are ignored or denied. Out of their praise and celebration of "the effervescent present," liberals severely underestimate the powerful weight, importance, and influence of history and community. A reading of many of the passages from authors cited above discloses that Israeli liberals make distinctions between higher and lower culture: higher meaning, of course, "theirs," and lower meaning the one populated by Israeli traditionalists. In this distinction they are apparently adopting the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European "humanities" understanding of culture presented above at the beginning of this section. They assume that "real" culture is high culture and that the distinguishing mark of its high quality is that it is not connected to everyday life or functional activity. It is thereby opposed to supposedly "lower" traditionalist Israeli culture, which is very much anchored in material activity and not in the contemplative mind.

Integrating the constructivist approach to culture briefly outlined above and applying it to the liberals' relationship to the Jewish religious tradition, discloses that it is grounded in a double-barreled hermeneutic act of reification: at one and the same time, it reifies western culture (that of the disinterested mind) and traditional culture (that of the functional and the material). The former exists "out there" in the form of everlasting, static, and permanent Light and Truth; the latter also exists "out there" in the form of everlasting, static, and permanent Darkness and Falsity.

Simultaneously liberal Israelis seem, first, to affirm that the traditional interpretation of Jewish tradition is its only true interpretation, and second, to deny it any real standing or compelling existential relevance to their lives in the present. This devaluation of existential relevance is anchored in the complementary reification of western culture referred to above and is fostered by it. A brief exposition of the Israeli educational thinker Zvi Lamm's discussion of the desirability of teaching Jewish texts in Israeli secular schools can serve us well as a concrete illustration of

this double reification. In his critique of attempts to introduce traditional Jewish texts into secular education, he argues that individuation -- the educational process that facilitates the intellectual and moral growth of the in-built, unique powers of the individual -- should serve as the exclusive principle of legitimating such texts as part of the curriculum. After presenting an essentially accurate overview of traditional Jewish theological understanding and self-understanding at the threshold of the modern period, he registers the following claim:

Whoever teaches a chapter from the Bible or from the Mishna, a page from the Talmud...not as a text whose expressed purpose is to strengthen the belief that God is the Master of the Universe -- and that the Jewish people are His chosen people, that this people has been exiled from its land because of its sins, and must remain in exile until the Creator of the world sends His Messiah to redeem them - - is not teaching what is contained in Jewish sources, and whoever is faithful to these sources cannot but teach these principles whenever he comes to teach that which is called "Judaism."(1988)

Thus, according to Lamm, (a) the only real Judaism is the exilic Rabbinical one, and (b) this Judaism is totally irrelevant to the process of individuation, which, from his western educational perspective, is (c) the only acceptable educational ideal.

At the root of Lamm's concept of individuation as well as of many other educators, is the concept of the "individual self," which has been reified and is seen as natural in Western culture and powerfully dominates it. This very concept is also the primary source of the major risks and dangers that inhere in the uncritical affirmation of western culture. The liberals' unfair perceptions of Israeli traditionalists as being enslaved -- bounded and bonded by communal obligations and constraints -- as well as the liberals' celebration of the effervescent present coupled with scorn toward rootedness in the past, rests on an unreflective acceptance and reification of this concept of the individual self.

Today, western culture can be characterized by its strong concepts of self and individualism, constructs which have been reified and are seen as natural. Individualism can be defined as autonomous self-containment and as somewhat detached from socialization and contextual influences (Kitzinger, 1992) Human beings are thereby viewed as decontextualized, ahistorical, rational individuals. These western conceptions of the self and individualism have been challenged from a number of perspectives and alternate conceptions of the self, ones that can and should be viewed as more accurate. The eminent anthropologist, Mary Douglas has defined this western conception of the free, autonomous, rational, economic individual as a "non-person"(1998). Geertz has posited that the

“...western conceptions of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivation and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastingly against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures” (1984).

To these perspectives we want to add those of Taylor (1994) and Sampson (1993) both of whom have argued persuasively that the western conception of the monologist individual self-divorced from its dialogue with community, history, and tradition often leads to resentment and alienation.

All of these relatively new perspectives seriously challenge the unquestioning praise by Israeli liberals of the western conception of the self and their no less self-assured burial of the supposedly bonded self of Israeli traditionalists. Their proud vision of the independent individual self, contained and alone, who faces up to the necessity of making rational, autonomous decisions; their devaluation of the self-understanding of Israeli traditionalists as bounded and bonded by communal obligations and constraints by equating it to slavery; and their celebration of the "memories of the effervescent present," coupled with scorn toward rootedness in the past, are at one and the same time particularistic, far from universal, unrealistic, and potentially alienating and destructive. No past, no self and no group. People's voices feed on memories. Without them the grounds for establishing a healthy sense of self and for genuine dialogues between such selves are lost.

Liberal Israelis are usually deeply committed to one or another form of liberal political ideology. Kitzinger has argued persuasively that the assumption of the individual as a natural given of political reality in liberal nation states so much pervades western psychological and political thought that it has made many of its adherents oblivious to the crucial role that social institutions and economic power structures play in society (1992). Thus, for example, the social malfunctioning of minority groups is not treated in the accurate context of structural oppressions, but in the inaccurate one of flawed personality traits to be treated through individual therapy. Kitzinger's argument raises the serious possibility that the affirmation of Israeli liberals of "autonomous free-choosing selves" as a normative culture is, to a significant extent, self-serving, if not self-aggrandizing. Strong support for the validity of this argument is found in the not very surprising discovery that the very same Israeli liberals who so passionately embrace the individual and his/her autonomy, freedom, and rationality also predominate in Israel's political and socio-economic power structures (Bekerman, 1995).

Charles Taylor's cultural perspective is very germane to the points under discussion here. He argues that though a liberal world grants equality and the right of participation, it does not take into account existing cultural differences that impede the realization of equality (1994). More precisely, since its commitment focuses on individuals and not on their specific cultural affiliations and attachments, it does not lend dignity to these cultural groupings, but demeans and excludes them. These tendencies become most pronounced under conditions in which integration is seen as an urgent necessity, when serious cultural differences are viewed as threatening and dangerous to the polity.

Despite the pride they take in their commitment to pluralism, many Israeli liberals fall prey to the "intolerance of tolerance" traps of which Taylor and others have made us aware. This pluralism appears not to have room for those who, for diverse reasons, cannot or do not want to be pluralistic. Indeed, while these Israeli liberals do offer equality, it is an offer that is predicated upon the "others" relinquishing their differences. Equality is realized, in effect, only by those who are willing and capable of resembling the dominant parties and is thus often confused with

sameness. These liberals actively seek the integration of traditional Jews, but it must take place on their terms and on their turf (Bakhurst, 1995).

Adding insult to injury, Israeli liberals tend to attack traditionalists for their attempts to impose religious cultural norms onto secular Israeli society, while they look at their own norms as natural, legitimate, and universal. In other words, Israeli liberals deny the constructive aspects of their own cultural norms. Raising this last point is not meant to exempt the traditionalist camps in Israel from their attempts at vying, as well, for political cultural control and dominance. It does however seek to underscore that the same political cultural games played by culturally subsumed minorities are similarly used -- and usually more successfully -- by the secular regnant ideologies in order to sustain their hegemonic power.

To sum up, this sub-section has sought to offer cogent arguments towards demonstrating that the sharp distinction Israeli liberals make between higher (their) and lower (their "[br]others") cultures, their praise of the freely autonomous self, and their burial or rejection of the communal constrained one, and their uncritical allegiance to the liberal political ideology of the west are anchored in a constructed version of human culture that can be seriously questioned and challenged.

3 Exploring possible constructive constructivist cultural possibilities

Serious socio-cultural risks are engendered by the hubris-like hegemonic nature of the traditionalists and liberals in the embrace of their respective cultures. A strong argument can be made that the most severe among these risks is the mono-logic manner through which these two groups address each other. Through the language into which they have been socialized, they refer to each other as "them," those who are not "us" -- those who create "us" by being "them." Opting for this stand, both groups have fallen prey to the old Cartesian paradigm, which envisioned self as fully contained within personal boundaries, detached from the world around it; whatever lays beyond it was conceived as dangerous and threatening (Samson, 1993).

Sampson's notions of "the serviceable other" and of the "silent killer"(Ibid) can shed light on the relationship of Israeli traditionalists and liberals to each (br)other. According to Sampson,

"to create another...is to use a representation in a powerful manner designed to accomplish desired qualities for one's own group by constructing a contrasting other who will be serviceable to that mission" (Ibid:122).

Thus, cultural representations are often employed to construct a serviceable other -- that other whose inferior culture sustains the superiority of one's own. Sampson also points out that, throughout history, nation after nation has not only used physical force and military power to dominate others, but also the "more silent killer" -- the chronic social tendency to create through word and deed the "other" in a way that inevitably leads to his/her demonization. The strong "us/them" dichotomy articulated by both liberals and traditionalists can be "read" in terms of this construction of the "serviceable other." In many cases, the traditionalists are the serviceable others for Israeli liberals, and vice-versa. In this dichotomy, one can hear them clearly and vociferously directing the following claim at each other: "We have culture; you don't." One can also "see" images of Sampson's "silent killers" in many of the statements they make about each

other. A significant number in both camps, through their words and deeds, frequently tend to construct their respective (br)others in dehumanizing and even demonizing ways.

If the contentions raised above -- that selves are constantly in the making, creating meaning and "becoming" in an inter-subjective world, that culture is a "becoming" at the border, and that persons "become" only in dialogue with others -- reflect an accurate description of human reality, then the crucial question which arises is: Does the "becoming" between liberals and traditionalists necessarily have to be shaped, as it is now, by "monologist dialogue" turned into itself and turned forcefully against the other? Or perhaps, as Sampson suggests, it is possible to gracefully and courteously achieve "becoming" through a "dialogic dialogue" characterized by attentive listening to the (br)other.

This possibility of "becoming" through grace/deference/humility hinges upon the way difference and its relationship to autonomy and freedom is perceived. Clearly, difference is a necessary condition for the construction of identity, but it need not necessarily be judged or dominated by either partner in dialogue. Rather, it can be viewed as providing the occasion to translate individualism and autonomy into collaborative work instead of isolation (Silverman 1996).

Two models of multiculturalism emerge from the dialogical cultural paradigm we are suggesting. In the first, through constructive dialogue, the adherents of different cultures, while lending weight to their differences -- including the right to isolate themselves -- reach agreement concerning the norms applicable to the public domain.

The second is anchored in Giroux's recent critical multicultural perspective (1994). In his eyes, any multiculturalism that simply juxtaposes a multiplicity of cultures, but whose frontiers remain intact or which supports the leveling of all differences, is not useful for facilitating meaningful and effective dialogue. A serious multicultural approach is one that helps create a space in which multiple communities are able to interact, thus affording the enrichment of their ever-emerging respective cultures and creating a shared dynamic culture in which the different communities can recognize reflections of their own identity.

The realization of this latter type of multiculturalism is predicated upon the capacity of traditionalists and liberals to become critically reflective toward their own cultures. Such critical reflection would at once afford them some degree of "freedom" from their respective slavery, which at once excludes themselves and others, and "freedom to" a more attentive listening to, and perhaps enriching appreciation of, some of their (br)others' cultural forms.

Exercising such reflection, the traditionalists might develop a better appreciation of the search for a fullness of human expression embedded in the liberals' affirmation of Jewish political nationalism; and the liberals might develop a better appreciation of the importance of historical memory and community in the making of human culture and of the in-built social limitations of human autonomy and freedom.

Bibliography and References

- Anderson, B. (1983) **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism**, Verso Books, London: United Kingdom
- Aran, G. (1987) **From Religious Zionism to Zionist Religion**," Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Sociology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem [Hebrew]
- Azaryahu, M. (1995) **State Cults: Celebrating Independence and Commemorating the Fallen in Israel, 1948-1956**, Sede-Boker: Israel [Hebrew]
- Bakhtin, M. (1981) **The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays**, Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin and London: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhurst, David (1995) "Wittgenstein and Social Being," in David Bakhurst and Christine Synowich (eds), **The Social Self**, Sage: London, p. 30-47.
- Bekerman, Z. (1995) "Confronting Others: Crossing Borders Inside and Out." Paper presented at the conference "Educating about the Other in an Era of Peace," The Palestinian Peace Information Center, Jerusalem, 8-9 December 1995.
- Ben-Yehuda, N. (1995) **The Masada Myth**, Madison: University of Wisconsin press
- Berkowitz, E. (1996) "Interview," *Yedi'ot Ahronot*, 24 April 1996 [Hebrew].
- B. Michael (1996) "An Association of 'From the Well' should be founded." *Yedi'ot Ahronot*, 22 November [Hebrew].
- Billig, M. (1987) **Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology**, UK: Cambridge
- (1995) **Banal Nationalism**, UK: SAGE press
- Brinker, M. (1990) **Narrative Art and Social Thought in Y. H. Brenner's Work**, Am-Oved: Tel-Aviv [Hebrew]
- Cohen, G. (1977) "The Centrality of the Jewish People," in Moshe Davis (ed), **World Jewry and the State of Israel**, New York: Arno press, p. 241-2.
- DonYehiya, E. (1980) "The secularization, negation, and integration of traditional Jewish world-views and concepts in Socialist Judaism", **Kivunim, No. 8**, p. 29-79 [Hebrew].
- Douglas, M. (1998) **Missing Persons**, Berkeley: University of California press.
- Eilon, G. (1996) "The Israeli Parliament Believes in God," *Ha'Aretz*, 26 July 1996 [Hebrew].
- Fukenstein, A. (1991) **Perceptions of Jewish History from Antiquity to the Present**, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved [Hebrew]
- Geertz, C. (1973) **The Interpretation of Cultures**, New York: Ingram
- (1984) "From the native's point of view: On the nature of anthropological understanding," in Nancy R. Goldberger and Jody B. Veroff (eds), **Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion**, UK: Cambridge, p. 25-41.
- Giroux, H. (1994) **Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture**, New York:.
- (1994) "Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Language of Pedagogy," **Harvard Educational Review, 64-(3)**, p. 278-308.
- Godelier, M. (1977) **Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology**, UK: Cambridge.
- Gorny, Y. (1990) **The Quest for Collective Identity**, Tel-Aviv: Am Oved [Hebrew]
- Hareven, S. (1995) "Who is a Jew," *Yedi'ot Ahronot*, 17 November 1995 [Hebrew].
- Harre, R., Gillet, G. (1995) **The Discursive Mind**, London: SAGE.
- Hertzberg, A. (1995) "The Advantages of Jewish Dissatisfaction," *Ha'Aretz*, 30 June 1995, [Hebrew].

- Horenczyk, G., Bekerman, Z. (1999) "A Social Constructivist Approach to Jewish Identity," in Steven M. Cohen and Gabriel Horenczyk (eds), **National and Cultural Variations in Jewish Identity**, Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Kenan, A. (1995) "Tel-Aviv Is the Truly Safe Border," *Yedi'ot Ahronot*, 20 January 1995 [Hebrew].
- Kimmerling, B. (2004) **Immigrants, Settlers, Natives: Israel Between Plurality of Cultures and Cultural Wars**, Tel Aviv: Am Oved [Hebrew]
- (1995) "National vs. Civil Religion," *Ha'Aretz*, 29 September 1995 [Hebrew].
- Kitzinger, C. (1992) "The Individuated Self-Concept: A Critical Analysis of Social-Constructionist Writing," in Glynis M. Breakwell (ed), **Social Psychology of Identity and the Self Concept**, London: Surrey University Press in association with Academic Press
- Kotre, J. (1995) **White Gloves: How We Create Ourselves through Memory**, New York: Norton
- Lamm, Z. (1988) "The Ideological Foundations of Jewish Studies in Israeli Education", **Ha'Hinuch Ha'Meshutaf**, No. 130, p. 57-76 [Hebrew].
- Lotenberg, I. (1992) "Canaanism", *Hadashot*, 30 October 1992 [Hebrew].
- McDermott, R. (1993) "The Acquisition of a Child by a Learning Disability," in Seth Chaiklin and Jane Lave (eds), **Understanding Practice**, U.K. :Cambridge, p. 114-35.
- Masoubi, E. (1998) "It's Not Relevant to Secularists," *Kol Ha'Ir*, 30 January 1998 [Hebrew].
- Meimad (1996) "The platform of Meimad," Tel-Aviv: Yariv Ben-Eliezer [Hebrew].
- Nagel, J. (1994) "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture", **Social Problems- 41**, p.152-76.
- Peled, Y., Peled, H. Herman Peled (2019) **The Religionization of Israeli Society**, London: Routledge
- Rosenstein, M. (1985) The 'New Jew' -- The Approach to Jewish Tradition in the Secondary Level of General Zionist Education from Its Inception to the Founding of the State of Israel, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Jewish History, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem [Hebrew]
- Sampson, E. (1993) **Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature**, Great Britain: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Sheleg, Y. (1997) "Prophets without God", *Kol Ha'Ir*, 1 January 1997 [Hebrew].
- Shimoni, G. (1995) **The Zionist Ideology**, New England: University Press of New England for Brandeis university
- Shochat, O. (1996) "Where Are the Seculars Hiding?" *Ha'Aretz*, 15 November 1996 [Hebrew].
- Shweder, R. (1990) "Cultural Psychology -- What Is It?", in James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder, and Gilbert Herot (eds), **Cultural Psychology**, UK: Cambridge
- Smooha, S. (1996) "Ethno-Democracy: Israel as an Archetype," in Pinchas Ginosar and Avi Bareli (eds), **Zionism: A Contemporary Polemic** Jerusalem: Magnus press, p. 277-311 [Hebrew].
- Silverman, M. (1997) "People before Covenant and Realistic Messianism: The Contemporary Meaning of Zionism and Its Educational Translation," in Natan Gover and Miriam Bar-Lev (eds), **Zionism and Zionist Education**, Jerusalem: Israel Ministry of Education, p. 5-26 [Hebrew].
- (1996) "Models of Contemporary Israeli Relationship to Jewish Religious Tradition," in Miriam Bar-Lev and Natan Gover (eds), **Tradition in Judaism and Humanism -- Issues in Teacher Training**, Jerusalem: Israeli Ministry of Education, p.18-39 [Hebrew]
- Taub, G. (1997) **The Dispirited Revolution**, Tel-Aviv: Ha'Kibbutz Ha'meuchad, [Hebrew].

- Taylor, Charles. 1994. "The politics of recognition" in **Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition**, ed. Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton: Princeton University
- Waxman, C. (1997) "Critical Sociology and the End of Ideology in Israel," **Israel Studies**, 2(1) 194-210.
- Yerushalmi, Y. (1996) **Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory**, Washington: University of Washington Press
- Zerubabel, Y. (1995) **Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition**, Chicago: Chicago University press

