"From the river to the sea, humanity will be free" - the dynamics of the new civil society in Israel: Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the European Sociological Association, 2-5 September 2009, Lisbon, Portugal ; RS14 – Chronic Regional Conflicts
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" From the river to the sea, humanity will be free! " – the dynamics of the new civil society in Israel

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2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that a new civil society is emerging in Israel that is fundamentally distinct from the old state-led civil society. Its core organising logic is cosmopolitan, universalist and post-Zionist, expanding its sphere of contestation to challenge the ethno-nationalist and communitarian basis of the enduring Zionist societal consensus. The implications of this phenomenon are uniquely profound for the Israeli context. A cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society challenges the *raison d'être* of the state in its current ethno-nationalist construction, calling for the inclusion of marginalised groups into its sphere. The Jewish people have for long debated the merits of universalist ethics vis-à-vis particularistic considerations. The horrors of the Holocaust tilted the balance of the debate in favour of the communitarians, culminating with the establishment of the state of Israel as a Jewish national home. More recently, a growing interconnectedness of social relations has forced a reassessment of the moral basis of the Israeli society reigniting once again the rift, this time between Zionist communitarians and post-Zionist cosmopolitans. To develop this argument, the old and the new civil society will be contrasted on the basis of the conceptual limitations of common understandings of civil society. This will enable an adequate assessment of the empirical and aspirational forms of the term and the merits of a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society in a global age. The emerging phenomenon will be then explained through the ongoing process of displacement of identities which have forced Israelis to reconsider existing perceptions of the self, the meaning of being an Israeli; and the construction of external others. Finally, it will be concluded that Israel is at a cross-roads and civil society can play a key role in drawing the future of the state.

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the ideological basis to which it was founded has been one of the most controversial political issues of our times. This paper aims to add to this debate by questioning the ethical basis of the Israeli society and the role of civil society in sustaining or challenging the status-quo as informed by current empirical developments.

In light of present global transformations, how has civil society in Israel been impacted and how can these changes be explained? In answer to this question, it will be argued that a new civil society is emerging in Israel that is fundamentally distinct from the old state-led civil society. Its core organising logic is cosmopolitan, universalist and post-nationalist, expanding its sphere of contestation to challenge the ethno-nationalist and communitarian basis of the enduring Zionist societal consensus. The emerging civil society in Israel is therefore post-Zionist, the lens through which it interprets the world is not only concerned with Jewish emancipation, but also with a humanistic ethos free from ethnic, nationalist and religious prejudices.

Cosmopolitan values are not unprecedented in Israel but a growing interconnectedness and increased consciousness of a single world community have opened up new spaces and opportunities for the development of these ideas. The implications of this phenomenon are notwithstanding uniquely profound for the Israeli context. A cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society challenges the *raison d'être* of the state in its current ethno-nationalist construction, calling for the inclusion of marginalised groups into its sphere.

Zionism has become a state-society orthodoxy in Israel and a core component of the Israeli identity. Post-Zionist expressions have thus fomented tensions and antagonisms with the actors of the dominant ethno-nationalist order. Whereas the many ethno-nationalist civil society actors differ in policy, political orientation and methods, they share a common ideological basis in Zionism that delimits the boundaries of its sphere. The new civil society in Israel stands distinctly from these actors for its rejection of the limitations imposed by state ideology, which has become obsessed with a "national security" paradigm, at the expense of those excluded. These transformations can be explained through a process of displacement of identities which have forced Israelis to reconsider existing perceptions of the self - the meaning of Israeliness - and the construction of external others – namely the Palestinians who have been the victims of exclusionary communitarian biases of an Israeli identity centred upon state-Zionism.

This paper will begin with an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the communitarian and cosmopolitan moral claims and then relate these arguments to the Israeli context, where post-Zionist cosmopolitanism has mounted a challenge to the existing Zionist orthodoxy. The concept of civil society will then be problematized to adequately assess the empirical and aspirational forms of the term and the merits of a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society for a global age. The case study that follows will draw an analytical distinction between the old and new civil societies in Israel and the discussion, will seek to explain the new civil society in light of displacement of identities. This paper will conclude by privileging the role of civil society in shaping the future of the state.

The Jewish historic experience represents a microcosm of the wider preoccupations of humanity. The Jewish people have for long debated the merits of universalist ethics vis-à-vis particularistic considerations. On the one hand, Judaism has made a significant contribution to Enlightenment thought and to the development of universal values of equal moral worth (Shmuel 2004). On the other hand, the Jewish people have been subjected to prejudice and hostility directed at them as a group, encouraging the development of communitarian solutions. Even today, after the establishment of the state of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people, the debate continues alive and well. What began as a debate about Jewish assimilation in Europe (Marx 1843), transformed into a backlash in favour of communtarianism following the horrors of the Holocaust. The discussion has now reignited, this time in Israel, between Zionists and post-Zionists. Those who argue that the Israeli state is the protector of the Jewish people, feel that its demise would represent a throwback to the ghettos of the old world, where Jews formed an oppressed minority unable to express their cultural and religious traditions unhindered. The nascent post-Zionist movement seeks to present an alternative vision, motivated by decades of protracted conflict, where Jewish existence in Israel is not dependent on the non-existence of the Palestinians. The following section will begin with an outline of the general contours of the ethical debate and will then provide a background to the emergence of post-Zionism in Israel.

Ethics and morality – communitarians vs. cosmopolitans

Ethics is an inherently contentious field of study because it attempts to make sense of abstract concepts in order to develop a moral framework to guide human action. A growing interconnectedness of social relations have brought a new layer of complexity to questions of morality. Conflicting interpretations of "the good life" have revived concerns over the possibilities of a universal morality applicable to all humanity. This debate has opposed cosmopolitans and communitarians. Cosmopolitans appreciate the humanity of individuals on the basis of universal standards of morality that are consistent across space and time. Communitarian morality is grounded on collective values that are context specific, so different communities construct their own morality. Cosmopolitan and communitarian constructions are ideal-types and these values co-exist to different degrees in different polities (Benhabib 2002). The debate between these two positions have persisted despite attempts to move beyond them. Each side depends on the weakness of the other side for its own strength.

Communitarians stress the autonomy of communities to organise their own affairs and without interference. This is transposed in practice through the principle of state sovereignty. States are seen as

the political embodiment of community values (Walzer 2006). However this assumes that communities and states overlap and are homogeneous, ignoring the possibility of dissent and assuming that these values are stagnant and do not switch over time (Habermas 2005). Furthermore, communities do not exist in isolation. Different cultures, values and ideas are mutually constituted and cross-border exchanges have become more common (Nussbaum 2000). Cosmopolitans acknowledge that the "morality of states" cannot be self-contained as modern states encompass different communities and nations can cross borders (Barry 1999). This viewpoint encourages respect for diversity and commonly shared values irrespective of the community each individual belongs to.

Moreover, communities are said to be historically constituted, its members sharing a unique set of characteristics and a morality which is contingent to its historical development (Seton-Watson 1977). This rigid construction of communities underplays the role of the agency in shaping societal values and its ability to selectively reproduce norms (Giddens 1984). Cosmopolitans attribute moral worth to individuals *a priori* to society, where the agency is capable of consciously changing culture (Habermas 2005). In this way, the individual also has the autonomy to operate outside the boundaries of the community or beyond the limits of what the community deems to be acceptable.

Communitarians additionally argue for the rights of its members to collectively agree on moral conduct and the good life. Morality is viewed as a relative concept where each community adopts its own moral code. The implications of this would be that cultures are seen as immune from criticism due to their historical specificity (Barry 1999). Communitarians therefore discourage critical voices from outside and reflection on what values are truly meaningful (Nussbaum 2000). This is grounded on the assumption that all values are acceptable as long as these are "agreed" by a certain group and that any attempt to interfere or critique is tantamount to ethnocentric imposition. "The championing of open public discussion tolerating and encouraging different points of view, has a long history […]" (Sen 2004)[1]. In this light, the cosmopolitan viewpoint encourages cross-cultural critique whilst arguing for universal values that establish minimal agreement to allow for co-existence.

Cosmopolitan ethics has nonetheless substantial weaknesses which correspond to the strength of the communitarian position. Cosmopolitans argue for universal values and human rights. However, evidence suggests that these values are difficult to agree on, giving credence to communitarian claims that norms are culturally constituted (Brown 2006). This points to a tendency for circularity of the cosmopolitan position (Rorty 1998). Universality has been associated with the imposition of values on other people and legitimate resistance to those values has been criminalised (Keen 2007). Furthermore,

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[1] P. 352

the power to define truth is linked with the power to define knowledge and the limits of the legitimate (Foucault 1979). The powerful thus may want to impose a world-view that serves their interests through a cover discourse of universality. This has formed the basis of the Asian values debate on human rights, which challenge the western cultural and political domination (Brown 2004).

Moreover, the cosmopolitan argument may undermine the established order of the international system. Non-intervention and respect for the principle of sovereignty are central features of the Westphalian order, conflicting with the established principles of human rights (Brown 2004). Cosmopolitans argue for human equality irrespective of community affiliation, however material conditions may mean that equality would hardly be achieved in practice, reducing cosmopolitanism to mere utopianism (Nagel 2005). The cosmopolitan viewpoint also requires wide agreement on universal values and it presumes some form of democratic participation. This adds a level of complexity in the decision-making process as voices may be ignored and alienated (Held and McGrew 2002). Communitarians argue instead for a more simple framework of decision-making at a local level, with states playing a central role (Walzer 2006).

Globalization, a growing interconnectedness in social relations, has upset the balance of the debate in favour of the cosmopolitan viewpoint (Kaldor 2007). The encounter of the community with external others have become inevitable as the boundaries of the internal and external erode (Beck 2006). The gap between the conception of a community and its actual realization has become too wide for us to expect that the application of particularistic moral codes would go without externalities, exclusions and oppressions against those outside its sphere. The moral argument for ignoring "external" suffering has therefore become less defensible (Singer 1972). It is with this premise that the remainder of this paper will be explored.

Zionist communitarians vs. post-Zionist cosmopolitans

Zionism was a European nationalist movement that sought to provide a solution to the Jewish question through the establishment of a Jewish national home (Herzl 1988). Zionism should be understood in the context of European modernity (Kidron 2003). On the one hand, Zionism was a response to European anti-Semitism. Jewish assimilation to European society failed to deter anti-Semitism and European Jews were discriminated in many areas of social life. A Jewish state would provide a refuge for the Jews around the world and enable them to independently organise their social, cultural and political life for the first time since the great exile. On the other hand, Zionism was deeply Eurocentric. Zionism grew from European Jewry, the Ashkenazim, and from the European tradition of the Enlightenment. Similar to how the liberal values were misused to legitimate imperialism (Mehta 1999), Zionism was

sold in Europe not only as a means for Jewish emancipation but also as an extension of European colonial interests. The Zionists promised the European powers prosperity, "to make the desert bloom" (Shafir 1996a), and adopted the European model of colonialism as the preferred means through which this objective would be fulfilled (Shafir 1996b). It is telling that prior to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Zionism made little headway with the *Mizrahim* Jews of the Orient, who shared little in common with the *Ashkenazim* Jews of Europe, both in appearance and culture, finding secular Zionist ideals foreign to their value system (Shohat 1988; Massad 1996). For European Jewry however, Zionism symbolized liberation from centuries of discrimination and oppression.

Zionism is profoundly communitarian in its assumptions and moral outlook. Its ethno-nationalist claims are justified on the basis of religious and historical determinism. The movement sought to reconstitute Jewish collective identity, from an ethno-religious community to an ethno-political community (Divine 2000). The construction of Jewish nationhood was accompanied by a revitalization of ancient Jewish customs and the revival of the Hebrew language akin to an "imagined community" of the ancient Israelites (Anderson 1991). Furthermore, Zionism has relied on "imagined geographies" in its interpretation of reality (Said 1985). Zionist leaders propagated the myth of the "land without people, for a people without land" in reference to Palestine, ignoring the existence of an established society inhabiting the land the Zionists coveted (Said 1980). Zionism thus existed in spite of the existence of the "other", in the prophetic words of Chaim Weizmann the first President of Israel, Palestine would become Jewish "as England is English" (Weizmann 1966 [1949]). Knowingly, the Zionist movement promoted a policy of *Kibbush Haavoda*, or "conquest of labour", to build a parallel polity and economic system that deliberately excluded and alienated the local Palestinian population in the achievement of the high goals of Zionist colonization (Shafir 1996a).

The state retains to this day the role of physical and moral guardianship of the Israeli society, where external post-colonial opposition to Zionist moral exclusivism has cast a permanent shadow of military conflict over its population. The six day war in 1967 unleashed a spiral of internal contention against the state as the outermost structures of the Israeli society were broken as a result of territorial expansionism, alas this did not signify a definitive departure from Zionism (Migdal 2001). More recently, with the end of the cold war, a radically different form of contestation emerged. Post-Zionism, a theoretical opposite to Zionism, began in academic circles with the work of the "new historians" who sought to challenge the hegemonic Zionist narrative that for so long has shaped the sacred cows of Israeli society (Pappe 1997a). This scholarship de-mythified the events leading up to the creation of the state, uncovering the extent of Zionist rejection of outsiders. The planned ethnic cleansing of the local Palestinian population led to a demographic reversal in Palestine, paving the way for the successful

creation of an ethnically Jewish state (Pappe 2006). Post-Zionism was in this way entrusted with the reconstruction of the narrative of marginalised groups, namely the Palestinian Arabs, contributing to the resurgence of questions of justice and morality associated with the creation of the state. This debate soon crossed the boundaries of academic discourse, penetrating public consciousness with the aid of the Israeli media. "The very inclusion of debates on post-Zionism in the print media and both television channels […] is indicative of a significant change compared to the past and indeed would have been inconceivable ten or fifteen years ago" (Pappe 1997b)[2]. It was only a matter of time that post-Zionist discourse would find a political expression, through organised collectivities, within what we call the new civil society in Israel. This has formed the most "basic point of contention over the character of Israel" (Dowty 1998), changing the self-perception of Israelis and initiating a process of negotiation over the future of Israeli national identity (Bar-On 2004). This premise will now be further elaborated.

A cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society – an empirical and aspirational project

Liberal theory is enthusiastic about civil society's role in affecting societal change, as a medium for political empowerment and upholder of democratic accountability but pays insufficient attention to the limits of this concept. Critical and post-modernist theory seek to deconstruct the ideological foundations of civil society to identify constituent power relations, marginalised voices and dominant discourses (Chandhoke 2002). A liberal conception of civil society may therefore be deceiving. Civil society as an aspiring political project should be attuned to these contradictions maintaining a permanent check to internal forces that seek to perpetuate existing societal oppressions. Particularistic claims of collective interest are harmful to those excluded from the dominant discourse. Particularistic nationalisms promoted by the state make civil society vulnerable to the development of orthodoxies that hamper the flexibility essential for democratic contestation.

Seckinelgin (2004) writes of the example of Turkey, where civil society and the state share a commitment to the Kemalist nationalist project. This means that the state provides a political space for civil society to make claims and contest state policies, as long as it does not cross certain red lines. Civil society may share disagreements with the state but when external actors dare to question the nationalist orthodoxies of the state, "both civil society and the state protest with one voice to defend a particular way of life" (ibid)[3]. This has problematic consequences to the newly emerging groups who challenge this state-society consensus. These groups, according to Seckinelgin[4], "find it difficult to enter the civil society space as agents for social debate". This is because civil society and the state agree on a common

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[2] p. 41
[3] p. 176
[4] p. 177

identity and see the identity of external groups as alien to the constitution of society. There is a closing of debate to these groups creating social frustration and alienation. "This can be seen as demonstrating a restricted understanding of civil society that considers it as an extension of the specific interest of the state" (ibid)[5].

A parallel can be drawn to the case of Israel where the state and civil society share a commitment to Zionism. This means that civil society assumes an ethnocratic existence where Jewish communitarian interests take precedence over other forms of contestation (Yiftachel 2000). A polity that consensually allows for ethnic determinism is incompatible with a cosmopolitan post-Zionist sphere of contestation. This is because ethnocratic political discourse will invoke ethnic privileges legally guaranteed by the state to overwhelm a cosmopolitan sphere of contestation. Israel maintains a legal system which privileges Jews over non-Jews (Massad 2007). Political discourse is contingent to the acceptance of the parameters laid down by the state and agreed to by society. For instance, groups who act "directly or indirectly against the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people" are banned from participation in the national democratic process (Knesset 2008). This latter form of contestation, it must be emphasized, does not denote an anti-state discourse, but dissent over the ethnocratic nature of the state, morally legitimate under cosmopolitan values. Therefore a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society should be conceptualized as "new", because it entails a radically different organising logic, incompatible to that of the existing Zionist civil society. The aforementioned incompatibility between the old and the new civil societies should not be translated into open conflict. Civil society is both an arena for contestation (Chandhoke 1995) and an open-ended process of negotiation over competing visions (Kaldor 2003). These spheres are mutually constitutive, generating a reflective process that involves the reconstruction of identity in relation to external others.

Cosmopolitan post-Zionist "principles provide values, criteria, norms and goals for a unified political project, as well as the values, criteria and norms for each of the member discourses" (Chandhoke 1995)[6]. The arguments of this paper are positioned in opposition to the conceptual limitations of civil society, in that a new civil society signifies a departure from the ideological boundaries defined by the state. In this way, a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society will be defended both as an empirical observation and as a moral aspiration.

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[5] p. 179
[6] p. 234

This paper makes a conceptual separation between the old and new civil society to better understand the structural changes taking place in contemporary Israeli society. The old civil society is communitarian, reflective of the enduring societal consensus based on Zionism and centred upon the state. The new civil society is cosmopolitan, seeking to move beyond the narrow confines of state ethno-nationalism into a post-Zionist reality, paying special attention to the narrative of those excluded. What follows is a characterization of both spheres, based on empirical evidence of the current Israeli reality [7].

The "old" Zionist civil society

The old civil society constitutes the dominant configuration in Israel albeit heterogeneous in its composition. The distinguishing elements amongst its actors are the degree of accommodation and tolerance towards those outside its sphere, the nature of the relationship with the state and the level of liberal political discourse or lack of thereof. The two main actors of the old Zionist order are the ethno-nationalist fundamentalists and ethno-nationalist liberals. Both share a commitment to the Jewish homeland, but have different interpretations to what this means. Kimmerling (2001) makes the distinction between the "land of Israel" and the "state of Israel". The ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors aim for the redemption of the land of Israel according to the belief that God promised the land to the Jewish people. The ethno-nationalist liberal actors espouse secular and progressive values that promote the material conditions for the realization of Jewish civilization. The two actors represent the opposing poles of the old civil society continuum, but this opposition is confined to the state-centric arena of Zionist discourse. "From Peace Now on the Left to Gush Emunim on the Right, there is a wide consensus" about the future of the state (Pappe 2000)[8].This consensus entails the legitimation of the state although with different degrees of exclusions to outsiders.

❖ Ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors – the case of El-Ad

Ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors actively contributed to the foundation of the state in 1948. The pre-state revisionist faction of the Zionist movement, led by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, ardently advocated the

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[7] To arrive at the empirical conclusions, this paper relies on three key sources of information. First, civil society reports, websites and media clippings available online. Second, in depth conversations and formal interviews with Israelis and Palestinians actively engaged in the political contestations of civil society in Israel-Palestine. The long-term involvement of the author in the Israel-Palestine civil society movement has been a valuable resource to connect these loose ideas into a long-term vision.

[8] p. 33

forceful takeover of Palestine rejecting any compromise to a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael*, or Greater Israel. Jabotinsky's "iron wall" doctrine has formed the ideological backbone of contemporary ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors such as the *Gush Emunim*, or Block of the Faithful, who seek to redeem the land of Israel through active settlement and the transfer of its Palestinian population (Shlaim 2000).

The establishment of the state was interpreted as the culmination of God's promise to the Jews. Despite this, many believed that Jewish redemption would only come with Israel's control of Judea and Samaria, present day West Bank, and the old city of Jerusalem, both of great historic and religious symbolism to Judaism. In the 1967 six-day war, Israel conquered those territories, giving a new lease of life to ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors (Segev 2007). Throughout Israel there was an atmosphere of euphoria stemming from the impressive military victory and the humiliating defeat of the Arab army. A messianic discourse sought to exploit these conditions to further expansionist objectives. Ethno-nationalist fundamentalist movements actively colluded with the state to implement a policy of strategic settlement of the newly occupied territories whilst opposing attempts by the state to compromise with outsiders (Aronson 1990). In this way, ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors filled the void for implementation of a policy the state did not want to be seen to openly condone.

El-Ad[9], a settler organisation dedicated to the revival of the biblical City of David in the heart of East Jerusalem, provides an adequate example of the symbiotic relationship between the old civil society's ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors and the state. The state granted El-Ad exclusive rights to manage an "archaeological park" in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan in Jerusalem, on the supposed location of the ancient town. The license however has been used for ulterior motives. "Today, hundreds of Jewish residents live in the City of David and help form the inspiring new mosaic of the return of the Jewish People to their homeland and eternal capital – Jerusalem" (City of David 2008). These residents are illegal under international law and serve the annexationist objectives of the state through the settlement of Jerusalem as Israel's "complete and united" capital (MFA 2008). The revival of the biblical City of David, did not come without a cost to the "other", the Palestinian residents of Silwan. In 2005, after pressure from the movement, the Jerusalem Municipality ordered the demolition of 80 Palestinian homes, for the "area is an important cultural and historical site for the Jewish nation because it stands on the site where King David established his kingdom" (JMCC 2008). The state and El Ad work closely together. Whilst the state in times opposes El-Ad's activities, through judicial orders to curb illegal building and prevent intimidation of the local population, El-Ad is ultimately allowed to operate in "the margins of the law" (Bronner 2008). "The IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] send

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[9] The author came across El Ad whilst living in Jerusalem and has friend directly affected by the activities of the organisation.

all their soldiers on El-ad tours, […], where they are fed the line that Silwan has always had a Jewish presence, and by doing so El-ad justify their reasons for 'Judaising' the area in the present day" (Freedman 2008). The movement has thus predictably manipulated history, hiding archeological evidence of ancient Palestinian presence in the area (Rapoport 2008).

Israeli ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors are exclusivist, rigid and unwelcoming to external others. They hope to recreate a distant past rejecting outsiders on the basis of a deterministic "neo-Zionist" identity (Ram 2008). The Palestinians have bore the brunt of their actions, epitomizing the extremes Zionist ethno-nationalism can reach. The state has played an important part in providing a conducive environment for these groups to operate, partly due to their influential role inside government (Pappe 2000). Conversely, ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors provide legitimacy to the state-society Zionist project, for ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors claim to act no different to the early Zionist pioneers of the early *Aliyah*[10].

❖ Ethno-nationalist liberal actors – the case of Peace Now

The ethno-nationalist liberal actors stem from the western tradition of Enlightenment and most closely resemble classical conceptions of a territorially-bound civil society (Laskier 2000). In Israel, ethno-nationalist liberal actors burst into the scene through the many protest movements that came into being after the 1967 war, when the society consensus around the state suffered its first major crisis (Migdal 2001). These movements are actively engaged in cycles of contention and have mobilized significant sectors of the Israeli public gaining important concessions from the state. The ethno-nationalist liberal actors are varied and their numbers have been steadily growing (Gidron, Hagai et al. 2003). These actors make materialist demands to the state and the issues of concern relate to the local and to the national (Tamar 1996).

Ethno-nationalist liberal actors are somewhat accommodating to marginalised voices of society. For instance, in the 1970's the Israeli Black Panthers movement shook the European *Ashkenazim* establishment with waves of protest against discrimination of *Mizrahim* Jews of middle eastern origin (ibid). Whilst the aforementioned community-specific issues addressed by the ethno-nationalist liberal actors do not directly threaten the communitarian equilibrium of the state, "peace" movements, by their very nature, attempt to define the boundaries of community. They deal in this way with the existential question of the state and propose an all-encompassing societal project. Israel's relations to Palestinians

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[10] Organised Jewish immigration to the land of Israel initiated in 1882.

and neighbouring states is deeply controversial and elicits strong reactions from Israelis, thus "peace" movements occupy a delicate position within the ethno-nationalist liberal discourse.

Peace Now[11] is "the largest extra-parliamentary movement in Israel, the country's oldest peace movement and the only peace group to have a broad public base" (Peace Now 2008a). It began its existence with the "1978 officer's letter", addressed to the then prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin and signed by soldiers and officers in reserve of the IDF. The letter expressed doubts about the diplomatic policy of the state and asked the government to pursue the path to peace at a time when Begin was in negotiations with Sadat of Egypt over occupied Sinai. It was the first time that individuals within the military establishment expressed discomfort towards the state. The letter established a blue-print to Peace Now's actions to this day. The movement does not have members in the formal sense. Anyone who supports its populist message is part of the movement. Its founders did not want a movement on the fringes of society, notwithstanding the respectful position the military occupies in Israel. After the Shabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, Peace Now brought 400 thousand people to the streets protesting against the war being waged in Lebanon, the largest demonstration ever held in Israel. The action prompted the Kahan commission of enquiry.

Peace Now, as do other ethno-nationalist liberal actors, are loyal to the Zionist social contract as the basis for state legitimation. The movement positions itself as the "Zionist left", it actively supports the government's efforts for "security" of the state, the preservation of its Jewish character, as the basis for its actions. The movement for instance does not endorse conscientious objectors, the refuseniks, who refuse to serve in the military and urges its members to fight for the country regardless of its moral justifications (Feige 1998). Moral issues, such as the illegal occupation of the West Bank, are framed to the Israeli public as necessary for the safeguard of the interests of the state. "Their desire for peace with the Palestinians derives more from a wish for an unbreachable separation from Palestinians than from any concern to redress a historical injustice or to end an immoral behaviour" (Pappe 1997b)[12]. Collective interests are thus paramount for the movement's activities and the fulfilment of these "interests" are enshrined in the state. Peace Now prides itself for crossing party lines. Activists are close to the Labour and Meretz parties, often occupying senior governmental posts. The current Minister of Education Yuli Tamer and former Defence Minister Amir Peretz are amongst the activists-politicians that play an active role in the movement. Peace now operates "according to the established rules of the

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[11] Dr. Galia Golan, a leader of Peace Now, provided the author with a valuable overview of the guiding principles of the organisation and its activities here mentioned.
[12] P. 38

game" and has never taken anti-state positions, where "national and personal security, rather than peace, are presented as unconditional values" (Feige 1998)[13].

Peace Now is particularly well known for its tough stance against the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. These settlements are built on land expropriated from the Palestinians, as do other towns in pre-1967 Israel, but unlike the latter, these are considered illegal under international law. Peace Now does not question the state's Zionist orthodoxy, contesting instead its expansionism as prejudicial to the long-term survival of the state as a state for the Jewish people. Through this process, a strong sense of duty to the state is inculcated to its members. The movement make these values prominent on their website (Peace Now 2008b), arguing that Israel's settlement construction would lead to the end of a Jewish state, Israel being forced to give full civil rights to the millions of Palestinians, the external others, whom it is currently ruling over. Other examples of duty to the Jewish character of the state include the singing of the *Hatikva[14]* at the end of every public protests to demonstrate loyalty to a Zionist state (Yehiel 1986). Furthermore, the movement is transnational only to the extent that it facilitates the achievement of its ethno-local objectives. It therefore aims to reach out to the Jewish Diaspora as a proof to its commitment to Zionism (Norell 2002)[15].

The Israeli ethno-nationalist liberal actors are characterized for their commitment to Zionism. They are accommodating to external others, including the Palestinians, as long as this does not threaten the Zionist consensus of the Israeli society. The state has played an important role in providing the environment for the ethno-nationalist liberal actors to operate and conversely, the ethno-nationalist liberal actors provide legitimacy to the state project. Above all, both fundamentalists and liberals protest with one voice when Zionism is perceived to be at risk.

The "new" cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society

With the end of the cold war there was too a reconfiguration of the politics of the region. After decades of violence and mutual recrimination, the Israeli state and the Palestinian leadership had to come to terms with the existence of each other. This was a rather belated process. Civil societies on both sides had established relationships at varying degrees long before this acknowledgement from above (Pappe 1997a). With the Oslo accords in 1993, the Israeli government recognised the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the representative of the Palestinian people and acknowledged Palestinian

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[13] p. 90/2
[14] Israeli national anthem
[15] p.105

aspirations for self-determination. The PLO in turn recognised the Jewish state, renouncing its claims over historic Palestine. Notwithstanding, the Oslo accord was out of touch with the transformations occurring in the global environment and within civil society. The language of "self-determination of peoples" and recognition of "states" was the legacy of a system of international relations where the state was still seen as the "local agent of the common good" (Bull 1984)[16], with competing conceptions of the collective, one Jewish and the other Palestinian Arab. By then, some had moved beyond this paradigm.

Greater interconnectedness had broken down a blind loyalty to the state. Whereas the "old civil society" operated within the hegemonic limits of the Israeli state, a new set of ideals challenged state-led conceptions of the "self" and of the "other". Civil society did not immediately take on board this discourse however. The Oslo peace process was considered an unprecedented step towards the end of a long and bloody conflict and enjoyed wide public support thus there was little space for a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society to articulate its alternative vision. The outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, marked the end of the Oslo process. Ethno-nationalist fundamentalist actors exploited the wave of violence to demonize non-Jews and the ethno-nationalist liberal actors had its influence reduced "to almost nil" (Ben-Eliezer 2005)[17]. During this period an opportunity opened up for a new type of politics.

"The difference now is that a concrete challenge is being mounted to the nation-state and its basic truths by raising identities and orientations toward reality at large" (Ben - Eliezer 2005)[18]. A new generation of Israelis, with a global vision, used the opportunity to challenge the state's construction of community and its core orthodoxies. They exposed the costs of the creation of a state where the "other", the Palestinian, is and was a permanent fact that cannot be excluded or dispossessed in defence of narrow communitarian interests. They challenge the Hobbesian security paradigm of the state and aim to "civil-ize the Israeli society" – "While taught to believe that the country is faced by threats beyond its control, we now realize that the words 'national security' have often masked calculated decisions to choose military action for the achievement of political goals" (New Look 2008). Rather than focusing on the politics of Zionism, the preservation of a Jewish state, the new civil society challenges the state on the basis of its creation. The majority of Israeli Jews still see the state as their protector. The legacy of a state-geared-to-war taught Israelis to think they were on the brink of permanent extinction. So Israelis,

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[16] p.14
[17] p.52
[18] p. 53

fundamentalist or liberals, turn to the state for protection[19]. The new civil society seeks to break this cycle. It emphasizes the equality of all humans and strives to understand the narrative of external others, for so long obscured by the state. The old ethno-nationalist order becomes in this perspective a means to marginalization of otherwise legitimate discourses and narratives.

Zochrot[20] was founded in 2002 during a period of bloody violence, when the so-called peace process had collapsed and the gulf between Israelis and Palestinians seemed wider than ever before. A group of Israeli Jews began educating the Israeli public about the *Nakba[21]*, the events in 1948 that led to the establishment of the state of Israel with the consequent destruction of over 500 Palestinian villages and the displacement of two thirds of the local Palestinians from their homes (Pappe 2006). Zochrot aims in this way to challenge the Zionist discourse that has acquired a status of orthodoxy, believing that Israelis will only be at peace with external others and ultimately themselves, when they acknowledge the suffering the state had inflicted upon Palestinians with the creation of an ethno-nationalistic state[22]. Today, in the internationally recognised boundaries of the state of Israel, 92% of state land is held in trust for Jews around the world (Shahak 1998), regardless of their connection to Israel. Most of this land was expropriated from Palestinians. Conversely, thousands of Israel's own Arab citizens live in over 40 "unrecognised villages" inside Israel, which do not appear on any map and the state considers its residents as "trespassers" despite having lived there long before the establishment of the state (Schechla 2001). Thus, Zochrot sees no distinction between the territories occupied in 1948 and those occupied in 1967. The damage Zionist ethno-nationalism inflicted upon external others, the Palestinians, are to be acknowledged and responsibility should be taken for the *Nakba* as a moral standpoint.

Zochrot organises amongst other activities, tours of the destroyed Palestinian villages, posting signs with the original names of the villages and of old Arab streets which had their names changed to Hebrew ones after the establishment of the state. These activities have brought intense curiosity and interest from local residents who were never exposed to the narrative of the other, or knew little about the past inhabitants of the houses they now occupy. The activities of Zochrot also provoked hostile reactions from fellow Israelis and from the state. On a sign posting tour of Ramle for example, two Zochrot activists were barred from entering the city for five days due to what were seen as "illegal" acts in challenge of the status quo. In some places the street signs were vandalized and some residents

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[19] ""or "the whole world is against us "העולם כולו נגדנו is a popular say in Israel, denoting a suspicion of non-Jews and the need to remain together as a collectivity.

[20] Meaning Remembering in Hebrew

[21] Meaning Catastrophe in Arabic

[22] Amaya Galili, an long-term Israeli activist, provided the author with an in-depth understanding of the motivations and vision of Zochrot and other similar movements.

disrupted Zochrot's activities accusing them of colluding with the enemy. "To say that we succeeded in creating a revolution is an exaggeration, but undoubtedly there is a change, which we at Zochrot sense" (Inbari 2007). Amongst Zochrot's successes, a legal challenge against the Jewish National Fund forced the organisation to post signs commemorating the destroyed Palestinian villages in the Latrun region (Stern 2008).

Zochrot is not a Palestine solidarity group, but a collectivity aimed at change in the Israeli society. Today, in the territories between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea, i.e. Mandate Palestine, there is one state, the state of Israel. Zochrot also envisions one state, but a secular state where Israelis and Palestinians can celebrate their common histories together and live as equals (Lavie 2004). This entails the return of those Palestinians expelled by Israel. Most Israelis have invariably seen this as aiming at the "elimination of Israel" (Yemini 2005), and a threat to a Jewish majority. Thus, Zochrot has been marginalized by both ethno-nationalist fundamentalist and liberal actors. Nonetheless, the number of Israelis contacting the organisation and interested in its activities continues to increase (Zochrot 2004). The mainstream Israeli and international media have played an important role, helping to stretch Zochrot's reach to a wider audience. Zochrot also works in collaboration with academia, and other collectivities around the world. These global links help strengthen Zochrot's activities (Zochrot 2006).

The emerging civil society is growing, albeit embryonic, it has a solid core though strongly dependant on the initiative of a few pioneers and faces significant obstacles for its survival within a hostile environment. Nonetheless, it was able to flourish and establish itself within the Israeli society because it successfully harnessed the global environment by building its legitimacy through transnational connections when legitimacy lacked at home. The new civil society in Israel is characterized for its cosmopolitan character. It envisions full equality, beyond racial or religious considerations by challenging the ethno-nationalism of the current Zionist social contract and by mounting a challenge to established state-led orthodoxies in the Israeli society. It has actively contributed to fostering discussion for the construction of an alternative societal project.

DISCUSSION

So far we have established, through empirical evidence, the distinction between the old and new civil society in Israel, in light of the communitarian and cosmopolitan ethical frameworks, a debate which is transposed in Israel between Zionists and post-Zionists. The new civil society has a distinct logic to that of the old civil society. A cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society liberates itself from the hegemonic limitations of state-led Zionism, a societal project that has exclusionary criteria of participation and admission to its sphere. Both new and old civil society operate in tension with each other. The ethno-nationalist civil society's loyalty to the state and rejection of non-Zionist basis for engagement represent a dogmatic barrier to challenge the existing order. The emerging civil society is embryonic, although its significance should not be underestimated. It fomented a debate on unconventional terms for Israel, hostile it may be, but its impact has been magnified by a strong media interest and global interconnections (Silberstein 2002). "The cumulative effect of the post-Zionist critique does indeed threaten what Zionists have taken to be sacred truths, sacred practices, sacred narratives and sacred memories. And the struggle is over what Israel will become in the future" (ibid)[23].

Jewish opposition to Zionism stretches as far back as the pre-state era (Aronson 2003). Brit Shalom, a humanist movement of Jewish intellectuals founded in 1926, and later the communist workers parties after the creation of the state, amongst others, have expressed dissent from the dominant Zionist project (Gendzier 1975). However, "the ideological orientation of these last, coupled with the fact that they were not historians or sociologists by profession […], made it easy to dismiss their findings as mere claims of political activists beyond the pale of the national consensus" (Pappe 1997a)[24]. Post-Zionism signifies a constructive and more credible alternative, where the existence of one group is not dependent on the non-existence of another[25]. The timing of its development, when Israel is undergoing transformations under the influence of global factors, have brought it a new lease of life and opened up new prospects that merit academic attention.

"'Civil society' has always stood both for norms and for social realities" (Trentman 2003)[26]. A cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society is an on-going normative project to denote the possibility of Israel to start anew, implementing moral principles of justice that would grant it a moral legitimacy lacking under cosmopolitan principles (Linklater 1999). The new civil society found a space to articulate its alternative politics after the collapse of the Oslo peace process triggered by the second

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[23] p.103
[24] p. 30
[25] Zionist leaders used to claim that dissenting voices aim to "throw the Jews into the sea" in order to discredit their message.
[26] p.3

intifada. The origins of the new civil society however can be found in the reconstruction of the Israeli "self", with consequences to perceptions of the "other", triggered by a consciousness of common human destiny. The remainder of this discussion therefore focuses on the displacement of Israeli identities as an explanation for the new civil society. This paper will then conclude with the prospects and implications of a cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society in Israel.

Displacement of identities: from Israeli militarism to world citizenship

Israel is a "nation-in-arms" (Ben - Eliezer 1998a); militarism has come to dominate Israeli politics, culture and society and is uncritically accepted as an intrinsic part of being an Israeli. All Israelis are conscripted into the army; the state is guarded by civilians who are also soldiers. The civilianization of the military led to the militarization of all society, acquiring the status of "style and ideology" (ibid)[27]. "[L]ike it or not, ours is a militaristic society par excellence. This militarism is the central organizing principle around which Israeli society revolves, works, determines its boundaries, its identity and the accepted rules of the game" (Kimmerling 1993)[28]. Israeli militarism establishes itself parallel to victimhood, and both facets of the Israeli identity have been politicized by the state to rally public support (Segev 1994). Militarism denotes empowerment and duty, tailored to symbolize the pioneering[29] accomplishments of Zionism. The "war of independence" against the Arab enemy is glorified for its state-making rewards (Tilly 1985), the state symbolizing Jewish redemption and the Hegelian end of history (Brown 1992). The state's "hegemonic ideology" is composed of four basic elements (Newman and Ram 2004): 1 - Israel as a Jewish state, i.e. a homeland for all Jews around the world; 2 – Israel in a state of existential threat where it is the patriotic duty of every citizen to defend the state; 3 – the Jewish population of the state constitute a single homogeneous group, regardless of where they came from and have more in common with each other than any other group; and 4 – Israel is at the same time a Jewish and democratic state, providing formal rights to the Arab-Palestinian minority. These are the parameters of the Israeli social contract, but what about those who are excluded from it or have no say?

The Israeli example is an exception to other state-society models in that the state is not separated from civil society, concealing an "intriguing system of domination, which is based on intensive activity and responsiveness of the population, and on a blurred distinction between the rulers and the ruled, between

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[27] p.14

[28] quoted in Peri, Y. (1996). "The Radical Social Scientists and Israeli Militarism." Israel studies **1**(2): 230-266.

[29] Hebrew: *Halutz* – refers to the pioneering Israeli spirit of duty to the state

objects and subjects, and between the state and society" (Ben - Eliezer 1998b)[30]. This limits the range of knowledge conceived as "truth", stifling dissent based on grounds other than the established rules. Furthermore, the state-led communitarian tendencies of Israeli identity is reinforced and reciprocated from below. The old civil society negotiates the meanings and constructions of an Israeli identity through a social contract that defines its parameters under ethno-nationalist and statist terms (Barry 1999). This is a convergent struggle to the extent that it enlarges the particularistic rights of the ethno-political community, but divergent in its uncovering of the rift between civic and ethnic projects of the different actors of the old civil society order. Consequently, "[t]he continuing hegemonic existence of civil militarism is best seen in terms of an open-ended process of negotiation and conflict between the state and forces within the civil society" (Feige 1998)[31]

De-Shalit (2004) argues that Israeli identity is caught up between two conflicting claims: "centriperal" claims of universal values and "centrifugal" claims of particularistic morality. Israelis tend to define themselves in a centrifugal way, as different from the rest of mankind. This is a "self-fulfilling prophecy", the more Israelis define themselves as unique, the more "paranoid" they get, contributing to the atmosphere of suspicion and fuelling a "vicious cycle" of exclusion from external others in their conceptions of the self (ibid)[32]. The bifurcation of Israeli identity is attributed to a greater interconnectedness derived from the processes of globalization, where Jewish-Israeli nationalism is being challenged by two different forces: universal post-nationalism – "post-Zionism" - and "glocalized" nationalism – "neo-Zionism" (Ram 2008)[33]. The former emerged in a context where the national could no longer be seen in isolation from the global, forcing the redefinition of "both inside and outside" (Beck 2006)[34], whereas the latter is a radical twist to Zionism in an attempt to cling to the old order and fight back the new. Gelber (2003) criticises post-Zionism, arguing that the adoption of a pluralistic ethos will lead to Israel's "national self-destruction". Epstein (2003)[35] goes as far as labelling the cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society as anti-Semitic, arguing that it denies the existence of the Jews as a particular historical group. This opposition is reflective of the obstacles the new civil society has to overcome to firmly establish itself within the Israeli society. Notwithstanding these "major transformations" and the subtle "shift in ideology", post-Zionism is still "frightening" to the majority of the Israelis (Kelman 1998)[36] This is because the Israeli psych is plagued by a security fear (and self-righteousness) stemming from its collective memory of suffering (Neslen 2006).

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[30] p.370
[31] p.89
[32] p.82
[33] p. 208
[34] p.33
[35] p. 124
[36] p.47

Jewish Israelis are as a result "entangled in a complex web of transnational connections", the weakening of the state's influence, territorial shrinkage (Gaza, Sinai) and a newfound solidarity between Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied territories (Rabinowtiz 2004). Society is now composed of four groups of Israelis who do not necessarily subscribe to Zionism as a dominant ideology (Newman and Ram 2004)[37]: 1 – disenfranchised groups in society such as the *Mizrahim*, women and ultra-orthodox who are now demanding a greater say in decision making; 2 – the Palestinian-Arab minority who have been excluded from the economic, political and social life of the Jewish state; 3 – third and fourth generation Israelis who are part of a globalized generation aware of the reality outside Israel and were born into a state which is not perceived to be in risk of extinction; 4– recent immigrants, specially those that arrived from Russia in the last decade, many of whom do not identify with Zionism.

Despite these subtle changes, the state has largely retained its centrality and strength, Jewishness and a strong national security paradigm remain the "metacultural codes" common to the fragmented Israeli Jewish identity (Kimmerling 2001)[38]. Thus, Post-Zionism does not signify the end of ideology, but the beginning of an interesting exchange that takes place primarily within the Israeli civil society, between the old and the new, that will shape the future direction of Israel. Israel is at the cross-roads of particularistic and universalist projects, the latter of which being new in its implication to the core meaning of the state, from a Jewish state, to a "state for all of its citizens"[39].

Communal identities have come under pressure in a globalized world, creating the need for the reconstitution of identities to bridge a sense of community belonging with universal human values (Parekh 2008). Civil society plays a key role in this long and complex process. This paper therefore stressed, as a precondition for this process, the need for civil society to identify and mitigate its conflicts and incivilities. Civil society's narrative may conceal subjugation, oppression and be inciting against external others. This is primarily true with the Israeli narrative which with time has become narcissist; "narcissism means that they see only themselves and their own unique suffering in the mirror of history" (Chandhoke 2003)[40]. The danger with this is that suffering becomes monopolized and the politics of civil society become self-centred and ethno-centric. The Zionist mythology sought to romanticize the creation of the state and concealed the dispossession of the Palestinians whilst, the Holocaust has been used as a bargain card to stifle legitimate discourse (Finkelstein 2000).

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[37] p.11
[38] p.173
[39] A slogan commonly invoked by Palestinian citizens of Israel to demand equality beyond Jewishness
[40] p.161

On the other hand, civil society can be a force for "civil repair" (Alexander 2006). Struggles may develop in the civil sphere to oppose its oppressions and incivilities. The new cosmopolitan post-Zionist civil society is such a force. It represents a new form of politics which presupposes a universal equality that for so many years has been suppressed, to the detriment and enormous cost for those who dared to oppose Zionism's exclusionary politics.

CONCLUSIONS: PROSPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS

"Once we were afraid of the possibility that the reality in Israel would force a bi-national state on us. In 1948, the obstinate policy of all the Arabs, the anti-Israel fanaticism and our strength and the leadership of David Ben-Gurion saved us from such a state. For 60 years, we fought with unparalleled courage in order to avoid living in a reality of bi-nationalism, and in order to ensure that Israel exists as a Jewish and democratic state with a solid Jewish majority. We must act to this end and understand that such a [bi-national] reality is being created, and in a very short while it will be beyond our control" (INA 2008).

This is a stark reminder Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert gave to a conference of Israeli leaders, warning them about the perils of a civic state founded upon cosmopolitan values, where Palestinians under Israel's domination would claim equal rights to Jewish Israelis. Today, between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, the territory of historic Palestine now in control of the state of Israel, there is a population parity of Jews and Arabs, with the Palestinian Arab population poised to become once again a majority. This "demographic threat" to the sustainability of the Jewish state is fuelling concerns for the Zionist leadership of Israel instigating Israel's lethal policies of survival (Cook 2006).

Communitarianism tends to extremes. Conflicts over identity politics have resurfaced claiming hundreds of thousands of innocent lives (Kaldor 2007). The question of the sustainability of the Zionist project is therefore as relevant as it was in 1917, when Britain issued the Balfour Declaration promising a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At the time, Palestinians constituted over 90% of the population. Despite the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians in 1948 to give way for the creation of a state with a Jewish majority (Pappe 2006), Zionism's flawed logic is once again giving way to its wounds. The fragmentation of Jewish Diaspora, once unconditional supporters of Israel, has become "inevitable" and many no longer identify themselves with Zionism, actively contesting the state as an embarrassment to Jewish humanistic values (Nimni 2003). Since its creation Israel has struggled to strike a balance between its democratic credential and its Jewish nature. Due to the legal system of discrimination of the non-Jewish population it rules over and a dual process of de-Arabization and Judaization of the social sphere, Israel can be best described as an ethnocracy (Yiftachel 2000).

Israel is consequently at a cross-roads. Will Israel choose the path of democratic equality or will Israel continue its oppression of its non-Jewish population? This paper argued that there is hope. A new civil society, organically developed in Israel and formed primarily of Israeli Jews, is seeking to reclaim

humanistic cosmopolitan values and democratize its civil sphere. Cosmopolitan ideals are not new, historically and geographically. They have gained however a distinctly new character in Israel, where universal morality signifies the weakening of the *raison d'etre* of the state of Israel in its current particularistic form. The Palestinians have been excluded from the nationalist sphere, as citizens and as equal participants, and the resulting disempowerment has fuelled decades of conflict. Post-Zionism thus signifies a constructive development. Civil society can facilitate the process of nationalist transition to "overcome the unresolved tension between the Jewish component in Israeli identity, which may turn into a matter of private or sub-communal affiliation, and the democratic component of Israeli identity, which must turn into the state's constitutional basis. " (Ram 2005). The journey into this arduous aspiring project has now begun.

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