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Fictional Reality or Real Fictionality? The Relationship between Fictional Texts and Psychological Perceptions of Societies in Conflict

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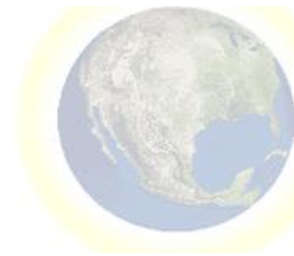
Abstract

The study of groups' behaviors in conflicts has shown that societies favor the in-group, delegitimize the out-group, and provide explanations for members of society as to why the conflict erupted and how to cope with it. It has been claimed that societies share a psychological in-group repertoire, an ethos of conflict, and that they develop a culture of conflict. As part of societies' mechanisms, culture and fictional products – films, books and plays – have an important role in shaping the way people perceive, think and act in conflicts. Yet fictional texts, by their mere characteristics, provide a discourse which is more ambiguous and more equivocal: They speak in different voices, have many layers, and present the fictional reality in complex and even self-contradicting ways. There is therefore a contradiction between the role cultural texts supposedly have in an ethos of conflict, and the complex discourse they present. Looking at novels and films produced in Israel in the 1980s as a case study, the article shows that cultural products do not necessarily go in line with what one could expect from texts produced in a society in conflict. It is shown that in this particular case the cultural products provide a picture that resembles the ethos of conflict that will take the forefront 20 years later but not of the time in which they were produced. Three hypotheses are suggested in order to explain this gap.

Keywords: *ethos of conflict, Israeli-Arab conflict, fictional cultural texts, group behaviors in conflicts, peace agreement, societies in conflict*

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Fictional Reality or Real Fictionality? The Relationship between Fictional Texts and Psychological Perceptions of Societies in Conflict

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Abstract

The study of groups' behaviors in conflicts has shown that societies favor the in-group, delegitimize the out-group, and provide explanations for members of society as to why the conflict erupted and how to cope with it. It has been claimed that societies share a psychological in-group repertoire, an ethos of conflict, and that they develop a culture of conflict. As part of societies' mechanisms, culture and fictional products – films, books and plays – have an important role in shaping the way people perceive, think and act in conflicts. Yet fictional texts, by their mere characteristics, provide a discourse which is more ambiguous and more equivocal: They speak in different voices, have many layers, and present the fictional reality in complex and even self-contradicting ways. There is therefore a contradiction between the role cultural texts supposedly have in an ethos of conflict, and the complex discourse they present. Looking at novels and films produced in Israel in the 1980s as a case study, the article shows that cultural products do not necessarily go in line with what one could expect from texts produced in a society in conflict. It is shown that in this particular case the cultural products provide a picture that resembles the ethos of conflict that will take the forefront 20 years later but not of the time in which they were produced. Three hypotheses are suggested in order to explain this gap.

Introduction

In his influential book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson claims that unlike earlier times when communities were small enough for members of society to meet and know each other, modern communities try to find ways that will help them imagine their shared identities (Anderson, 1991) and cultural texts have an enormous role in doing that. Continuing that school of thought, Bhabha (1990) argues that nations are in a constant process of creating themselves through narratives: there is a continuing dialectical interchange between the nation which creates a master-narrative for its cultural texts on the one hand, and the cultural texts that provide a narrative for the nation on the other hand. As

Bruner (1991) notes, when discussing the different features of narratives, “There seems to be some sense in which narrative, rather than referring to ‘reality’, may in fact create or constitute it, as when ‘fiction’ creates a ‘world’ of its own” (Bruner, 1991, p. 13).

For these and other reasons, as Jameson (1981) claims, it is a mistake to try to differentiate between cultural texts which have social political aspects and those who supposedly do not. Everything that is poetic is also political, and “...there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (Jameson, 1981, p. 20). Therefore, every cultural text should be looked at as a political text; and analyses of such texts should reveal the underlying assumptions, the unconscious political worlds, and the hidden ideologies that they are based on. As Dowling (1984) explains it, taking the Freudian interpretation of dreams as a reference, when a dream is dreamt the unconscious supposedly does not exist because the dreamer experiences it as a full independent story. Yet the unconscious actually dictates the dream. Likewise, cultural texts are supposedly autonomous, but they are actually constructed and based on ideologies, schools of thoughts, social perceptions and collective shared values. That is why genres change as times change (Bruner, 1991) and different nations at different times produce different kinds of narratives in their cultural texts.

Fictional texts produced in societies in conflict have an important role in shaping the conflict and introducing it to the societies involved. It is even claimed that societies in intractable conflict actually share a culture of conflict in which “the socio-psychological infrastructure... is not only widely shared but also appears to be dominant in public discourse... (and) is expressed in cultural products such as literary books, TV programs, films, theatre...” (Bar-Tal, 2010, p. 191). Cultural products help the members of society cope with the stressful experience: they illuminate the conflict situation, justify problematic and violent acts toward the enemy, create a sense of differentiation and superiority, prepare society for difficult conditions, motivate solidarity and contribute to strengthening the social identity.

Although fictional cultural texts are part of the building of the national narrative and of the culture of conflict, they suggest a different discourse by their mere definition: they are more ambiguous and more equivocal than the way societies supposedly think and act during conflicts. Fictional texts are not obligated to tell a mimetic story about reality; they do not have to be true or false and do not necessarily have any conclusion. On the contrary, what makes them interesting and unique is the fact that they have many layers, talk in different

voices (see for example: Bakhtin, 1981) and provide different perspectives than one can see in the non-fictional discourse. Therefore, there is a gap, a kind of contradiction, between the fictional texts' complex characteristics and the claim that they actually not only take part – but also have a significant role – in shaping societies' experiences and actions in conflicts.

Although there seems to be an understanding that cultural texts do not have a “bottom line”, that they are not manifests or political pamphlets, the discipline of conflict research commonly looks at them as such. For example, relying on scholarly research – from both social science studies and humanistic studies – Bar-Tal concludes that society's narratives emerge through these cultural texts that “provide a ‘good story’ that is well understood and meaningful. The plot of the story is simple and clear, elaborated in black-and-white form with unambiguous villains, victims, and heroes” (Bar-Tal, 2013, p. 257) and that “through these cultural products, societal beliefs and emotions of the socio-psychological infrastructure are disseminated and can reach every sector of the public” (Bar-Tal, 2013, p. 260).

The picture is more complex because of the special traits of fictional texts which are not the same as other kinds of discourses. In what follows, by studying how the Israeli-Arab conflict is manifested in Israeli cultural texts of the 1980s, the complex relation between the conflict and how it is seen in fictional texts will be viewed. The decision to focus on Israeli cultural texts of the late 1970s and the 1980s was done for three main reasons:

1. The end of the 1970s and through the 1980s was a time of change both in how Israeli society perceived the long-lasting Israeli-Arab conflict, and in the way Israeli cultural texts dealing with the conflict represented it (Benziman, 2013; Oren, 2009). Therefore it provides an opportunity to view the changes that occurred in the two different discourses – the social-political and the cultural-fictional – which can be compared.
2. Israeli culture – and more specifically Israeli literature and films – has always had an important and influential part in shaping Israel's collective ethos and national identity (Hever, 2002; Miron, 1993; Schwartz, 2005; Shohat, 2010). Therefore, studying the dynamic relation between reality and fictionality in this case is of special interest.
3. One of the basic traits of a protracted conflict is that it influences a large portion of society's daily lives and wide aspects of its behaviors (Azar, Jureidini, & McLaurin, 1978). The Israeli-Arab conflict is one of such conflicts, as the core disputes between the sides are real and have to do with lands, infrastructures, money and more; yet this conflict has lasted for so long and became so complicated and connected to other conflicts, that it influences almost all parts of the societies' conducts to a point where

it is sometimes hard to tell what is the real conflict and what are its consequences (Kriesberg, 1980). Its influence is rooted so deeply in the daily lives of the societies involved, that the tendency of Israeli-Jewish society (the in-group) to favor itself over the Arabs (the out-group) is seen in almost any comparison between the two groups (Maoz, 1996) and reaches a point where the in-group holds extreme positions like support for violation of human rights of the out-group (Maoz & McCauley, 2011). It is therefore argued that in order to end the conflict, a just and fair distribution of real infrastructures might not be enough, and that psychological and cultural dimensions should be overcome in order to solve it (Kelman, 1999). Therefore, the immense and widespread influence of this conflict on all sections of the Israeli society and culture makes the study of the role of cultural texts in the ethos of conflict all the more important.

Methodology

The methodology described in this article is an innovative combination of scholarly studies from two different disciplines: social political psychology and cultural studies. Looking at these two different academic fields, which are not too often studied together, provides a new and richer picture about cultures in conflict, narrative discourse produced by fiction texts, societies' perceptions of conflicts and the relations between them.

The research done on fictional texts derives its roots from interpretations of culture. Its origins can be summarized in Clifford Geertz (1973) well known sayings about the study of culture: "...the analysis of it... be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) in which the scholar "characteristically approaches such broader interpretations and more abstract analyses from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters" (Geertz, 1973, p. 21). On the other hand, the data about the public perception of the conflict is mostly quantitative, based on interpretation and analyses of social science surveys and polls. By combining these two different approaches, it is possible to compare the discourse of the fictional texts about the conflict and society's perceptions and ethos of conflict.

The Context: Israelis' Perception of The Israeli-Arab Conflict in the Late 1970s and the 1980s

Major developments occurred in the Israeli-Arab conflict during the late 1970s through the 1980s. These changes – in the relationships between Israel and its neighbor Arab countries, Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and between Israel and its

Arab-Palestinian citizens – influenced Israeli public perception of the Israeli-Arab conflict as a whole:

1. Israel and its neighbor Arab countries – In 1979 Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty and by 1981 Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula. This peace agreement demonstrated for the Israeli public that the Israeli-Arab conflict was no longer a threat to Israel's existence; the notion that Israel could be secure due to the fact that it has peace agreements and that the land-for-peace approach could be implemented, changed the way Israeli society perceived the conflict (Horowitz & Lissak, 1990). In 1982 the Lebanon War took place and also fundamentally changed the way the Israeli public viewed relations between Israel and its neighbors; Israelis implicitly acknowledged that Israel was not only a peace-seeking country that fights no choice and just wars (Ben-Porat, 2008), but that it also initiates wars.

These two developments, taken together, weakened fundamental elements of the Israeli traditional narrative, including the belief that Israel is always right, is always reaching for peace, doesn't have a partner to sign a treaty with on the Arab side, and the popular conviction that more land equals more security. Israel appeared to its own citizens to be a country that is not always right, that has a partner for peace in the Arab world, and for which a peace agreement is essential to help stabilize the region and to ensure Israel's security more efficaciously than victories of wars did.

2. Relations between Jewish and Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel – On March 30th, 1976, a brutal clash took place between the Israeli police and Arab-Palestinian-Israeli citizens demonstrating against government expropriation of lands. Six Israeli Arab-Palestinians were killed in these clashes and the Arab-Palestinian minority vehemently claimed that Israeli police used disproportional force solely because the protestors were Arabs. This day, which later became known as Land Day, brought into the open the dimensions of Israeli Arabs' distrust of the Jewish Israeli state, and is considered a landmark in the conflict between Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens (Smootha, 1993).

Israeli scholars provide different explanations about the causes for the outbreak of the conflict between Jewish and Arab-Palestinian citizens in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. Some believe it emerged because of the Palestinianization of the Arab minority and the rise of Jewish nationalism after the 1967 War. Others maintain that the political change in Israel after the elections of

1977, ending the dominant Labor Party-led regime and bringing the Likud Party to power for the first time, was the important factor (see Eisenstadt, 1989; Kimmerling 1998; Smootha, 1993). Regardless of causation, the Jewish–Arab conflict inside Israel underwent an important transformation. Even though the conflict had been there for almost a century, particularly since the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state and the 1948 War, its intensity increased at the time. It is therefore not surprising that a new generation of Arab-Palestinian Israeli citizens, born in the 1970s, would become unprecedentedly demanding in its struggle against the Israeli establishment. This new generation, labeled by Israeli sociologists as the Stand-Tall Generation, grew up during the 1980s and 1990s with no illusions of being able to achieve the civil equality that their parents had thought they could acquire (Rabinowitz & Abu Baker, 2005).

3. Relations between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank – During the 1980s crucial changes occurred in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. These included an increase in violence, Israel Defense Forces' harsher policy against the Palestinians, a crisis of the Palestinian economy, and the establishment of a local Palestinian leadership as opposed to the traditional exile leadership (Kimmerling & Migdal, 1999; 2003). These components were some of the factors that led to the outbreak of the Intifada in late 1987. The Intifada itself was a very important milestone in the relations between the rival sides and influenced the beginning of the peace process which started in the 1990s. Yet, even more important than the Intifada itself was the growing realization by Israelis that the Palestinians could no longer be seen as isolated groups fighting for local rights. Rather, they must be perceived as a people or a nation struggling for an independent and autonomous state (Kimmerling & Migdal, 1999; 2003).

Israelis' Ethos of Conflict and Psychological Inter-group Repertoire

These changes in the conflict led to a dramatic change in the Israeli ethos of conflict, psychological inter-group repertoire and in the perception of the image of the Arab (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Oren (2009) shows that it is during the late 1970s and through the 1980s, and until the beginning of the 1990s that Israel's ethos of conflict changed. For example, in the late 1970s delegitimization of Arabs in Israeli textbooks had significantly dropped (Firer, 1985) and less pejorative terminology was used in describing the Arab violent resistance to Jewish immigration and settlement (Podeh, 2002). Public polls of the time show that

perception of Arabs as intending to destroy Israel dramatically lost strength after Sadat's visit to Israel in 1979 (Stone, 1983). Public polls of that time also show an influential drop in Israeli Jews' belief that Israel can successfully wage war against all the Arab states (Oren, 2009). Textbooks transformed from a didactic patriotic approach to a more academic one (Dror, 2004) and Israelis' willingness to sacrifice themselves for their state dropped (Oren, 2009). It is also at this time that peace beliefs became more central in Israeli society and more concrete than an abstract idea as it was before.

Oren separates the changes of the Israeli ethos of conflict into five different periods. She claims that when comparing the ethos of conflict of the years 1977-1987 to the ethos during earlier years, there is a "general weakening of the ethos of conflict as a unifying element for Israeli society and its various divisions" (Oren, 2009, p. 15). This weakening is mainly related to contradictions between the old elements of the ethos and the new reality in which Israel did sign a peace agreement with Egypt. Israeli society realized that there was not one unified Arab population in conflict with it, but rather there are a few different conflicts between Israel and its Arabs neighbors. The third period, defined by Oren as the period between 1987 and 1993, although starting in the Intifada, also showed "a further decline in the strength of the ethos of conflict in Israeli society" (Oren, 2009, p. 16). This decline had to do with contradictions between valuing greater Israel and keeping Israel as a Jewish democratic state, and a decrease in the perception of continuing the status quo as good for Israel (Goldberg, Barzilai, & Inbar, 1991; Shamir & Shamir, 2000). It is at this period that Israelis showed more optimism about finding a way to end the conflict, and less fear of the Arabs wish to exterminate Israel (Oren, 2009).

These changes all lead to the period between 1993 and 2000 when the ethos of conflict was the weakest with "a reduced tendency to consider the conflict as a zero-sum game" (Oren, 2009, p. 19). Yet in the year 2000, after the failure of the Camp David talks and the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the ethos of conflict strengthened due to the new perception of Israeli society in which Israelis perceived themselves as wanting peace but not believing it can be reached because of their adversaries (Oren, 2009). This can be seen, for example, in the platforms of both the leading right wing and left wing parties running in the Israeli election at the time (Oren, 2010).

Although Oren (2009) separates her analyses to different time periods, in the time-frame discussed in this paper, it is important to note that the general picture is one in which a

decrease in the ethos of conflict started from the late 1970s and through the 1980s. This trend continued in the 1990s but completely changed in 2000 after the second Intifada.

The Conflict's Representation in Israeli Cultural Texts of the Late 1970s and the 1980s

Societies in conflict form a culture of conflict that is rooted in the themes and symbols of society; in its mass media, theatre, literature and films. These have an important role in influencing society, making it understand the conflict and coping with it (Bar-Tal, 2010). It could be assumed that the changes discussed above in the “real” conflict, in public opinions, in the inter-group psychological repertoire and in the ethos of the conflict – will be in line with the changes in the cultural texts. And so, while the shape, focus, and perception of the Israeli-Arab conflicts and ethos of conflict started to change in the late 1970s, the representation of the conflict in cultural texts of the time also changed. But although the changes happened simultaneously, they weren't identical and at times even showed contradicting perceptions of the conflict.

Some aspects of the changes in the ethos of conflict were similar to the changes that occurred in the cultural texts; it is at this decade that Israeli films became more critical of the national narrative and changed the way they portrayed the Israeli-Arab conflict. After decades in which they almost fully embraced the Israeli-Jewish national narrative (Shohat, 1989) the perception of the conflict became more complex and less focused on the Israeli-Jewish perspective (Shohat, 2010). Scholars debate whether the films of the 1980s truly brought a new narrative to Israeli cinema or only proposed a new way to tell the same Israeli-Jewish narrative (see Gertz, 2004; Loshitzky, 2001; Ne'eman, 1995; Shohat, 1991), but all agree that a significant change did occur in the representation of the conflict. Interestingly, at this same time some important changes also took place in the Palestinian cinema (Gertz & Khleifi, 2008).

It is in this decade that Israeli theatre plays were more focused on the conflict; as Orian (1996) shows, between 1982 and 1994 Arab characters can be seen in more than a hundred Israeli plays, in central roles, a number that exceeds the number of all plays dealing with this topic in the previous seven decades combined. It is not only that the quantity of Arab characters increased, but their representation was also transformed: from stereotypical characters, presented as the other, whom the Jews fear but to whom they are also attracted, they became non-stereotypical, rounded characters who more authentically present the Arab narrative (Orian, 1996).

It is in this decade that Israeli literature also changed as more novels were written on the Israeli-Arab conflict than before (Benziman, 2010). The primary genre in which the conflict was represented changed as well, from short stories to novels (Morahg, 1987). As Bruner (1991) notes, a change in genres “may have quite as powerful an influence in shaping our modes of thought as they have in creating the realities that their plots depict” (Bruner, 1991, p. 15). And so this change at this time should be related to a general perception that more must be written in order to understand the conflict; and it allows, at least theoretically, a more polyphonic (see Bakhtin, 1981) representation of the conflict, in which a variety of voices from the Israeli-Jewish narrative can be heard and in which even the Arab voice could be audible.

The Arab characters in these texts became more rounded and complex (Levy, 1983; Morahg, 1986). They were no longer stereotypes (Ramras-Rauch, 1989), who only project onto the Jewish hero (Ben-Ezer, 1999). Instead, they stood for themselves, and exposed the reader to the Arab perspective of the conflict, and not only the Jewish-Israeli one (Perry, 1986). This new representation of Arabs and their more visible presence also resulted in ending the dichotomy and hierarchy between Jews and Arabs, and posited a more equal discourse (Gertz, 1993).

Yet other aspects of the representation of the conflict in cultural texts show that they did not change as did the ethos of conflict, but actually went in a different direction. The focal point remained an Israeli-Jewish one; even when the Arab characters became more complex, they still told the story of how the Israeli-Jewish narrative looks at them. As Oppenheimer (2008) points out, these texts, like most of Israeli texts that represent Arab characters, were written with an Orientalistic approach, framing the topic from a supercilious perspective of how the Jewish-westernized society sees the inferior Arab-eastern one.

What actually happened is that even though important changes occurred in the conflict and in the cultural texts of the time, the texts did not endorse the changes that occurred in the ethos of conflict. Looking at the tendencies shown in these studies and based on Benziman’s (2011) study of the representation of the conflict as a whole and not solely on the representation of the Arab characters, at least four themes of the representation of the conflict in the 1980s can be seen which contradict the changes in the Israeli ethos of conflict of the time. The tendencies listed below exist in most of the major texts of the decade which deal with the conflict, but in what follows only a few examples will be given to illustrate them:

1. Although the conflict is their main topic, the texts dealing with the conflict are mostly concerned with the feeling that it is impossible to grasp and understand it. In a way, these texts are oxymoronic as they tell a story about the inability to tell the story of the conflict (Benziman, 2011). For example, David Grossman's (1983) *The Smile of the Lamb (Heyuch Hagdi)* is a novel in which the question of what is true and what is false is the light-motif and in which the characters "understand that they cannot understand" (Gertz, 1993, p. 96). This novel is rendered by four different narrators (an Arab, two Israeli officers, and a psychologist who is married to one of the officers and has an affair with the other officer) as if to say that in order to describe the conflict one needs several distinct points of view because one perspective is simply insufficient. In addition, the characters involved in the conflict cannot construct a coherent narrative that will give them a clear perspective on it. The identity of each of the characters seems split and embroiled in itself. They cannot manage to find a full and coherent prism through which to view the world. As a result of the absence of a stable identity, the characters seek group-belongings that will help them understand and define themselves, but their attempt fails. The image conveyed is one in which everyone sees the conflict differently and no communication between the different prisms materializes. However – as opposed to a regular Rashomon in which each narrative is full and coherent in its own way and competes with the others – the chaos and fragmentation in this text results in the collapse of the prism of all the individuals who cannot tell a full and coherent story about the conflict.

As mentioned, this is an example, one of many, of texts of this time which present the same tendency. *The Lover (Ham'ahev)* by Yehoshua (1977), *Delusion (Ta'atu'on)* by Yitzhak Ben-Ner (1989), *Martyr (Shahid)* by Avi Valentin (1989) and others are all told in the same divided, multi-narrators technique, which splits reality in order to try to understand it. *Arabesques* by Anton Shammas (1986), a novel written in Hebrew by an Arab, is also structurally divided into portions titled "The Teller" and "The Tale." *The Road to Ein Harod (Haderech l'Ein Harod)* by Kenan (1984) tells a story that is set partly above ground and partly underground, in which "whatever happens above ground level has no meaning for what happens underground" (Kenan, 1984, p. 71).

In other texts of the decade, the inability to present the conflict comprehensively through one stable prism is dealt with by presenting the interaction between Israelis and Palestinian-Arabs as a dialog between deaf people. In the movie *Fictitious Marriage (Nisuim*

Fictivium), for example, the only way the Jewish-Israeli protagonist can create a dialogue with his Palestinian co-workers is by pretending to be mute, and so only by not talking can he attempt to speak a common language with them. Likewise, in the novel *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (*Hatsutsra bavadi*) by Michael (1987), the only dialog of equals is between Alex, a Jewish-Russian immigrant who does not speak Hebrew, and Huda, the Arab who teaches him the language of the nation that oppresses her. And some of the Israeli movies of the period are bilingual, spoken in Hebrew and Arabic (e.g., *Cup Final*, [*Gmar Gavia*], and *Avanti Popolo*), but not translated into both languages (only to English subtitles).

Other texts manifest a total confusion between fiction and reality. The characters deal obsessively with questions of truth and falsity, signifying that in the conflict one cannot determine what has really happened and what is imagined. The obsessive preoccupation with these questions paints a picture in which the characters find it difficult to believe in the reality in which they are involved and to organize it in some rational narrative. Then there comes a moment, as in *The Smile of the Lamb*, when “the question if something is real or not is no longer important” and “that there is a lie that two believe in, and then it is no longer a lie, but a new kind of a more tolerant truth” (Grossman, 1983, p. 156, 125). The same is seen in *Ta'atu'on* when “everything is so confusing and complicated. Everything turns out to be the opposite of what you think. What a mess. How can you know what is correct and what is not. What is truth, say, and what is false?” (Ben-Ner, 1989, p. 47). This can also be found in *Refuge* (*Hasut*) by Michael (1977) when “Fatki... has long since learned that his future brother-in-law believed his own lies” (p. 48). Another such example can be given from the movie *Time for Cherries* (*Onat Haduvdevanim*) in which the story of the conflict goes through three different filters in order to be told: it is seen through the eyes of an international news crew who have come to tell the story of the war. They choose to follow an advertising copywriter who has been mobilized as a military reservist and who confuses himself, the crew, and the audience about the question of what is reality, what is news, and what is an advertisement.

Consequently the conflict is seen in these texts as a never-ending event that can be understood as a fairy tale or through undermining the credibility of a particular narrative, but not as reality. While Israeli ethos of conflict and public perception of the time started to see it as a conflict that can be rationally understood and even solved, the texts produced a different narrative. More than anything else, these texts of the 1980s tell a story of not being able to tell a story; a story about a fictional-reality that is too complicated to grasp and understand.

2. Many of the characters in these texts lose their minds, get hospitalized in institutions for the mentally ill, or otherwise disappear from society. For example, in *Ta'atu'on* a strange and noisome odor comes from Holy, the protagonist, who serves as an Israeli soldier in the Palestinian territories which Israel occupies. Only after he is forced to take a shower it is understood that this smell – symbolizing the situation as a whole – cannot be changed, and he is hospitalized in an institution for the mentally ill. Shortly afterward, another soldier from his unit, Michael, is also hospitalized there. The other two main characters of the novel have no better future: Holy's father disappears, while the fourth character gets fired and his end is likewise unknown. A few other examples of the same phenomena are: Chava and Kita, a daughter and her mother, both lose their minds and die in *A Good Arab (Aravi Tov)* by Kaniuk (1984). In almost every movie about the Lebanon war, like *Ricochet (Shtei Eitzbaot mitzidon)* and *Time for Cherries*, some of the Israeli soldiers become mentally unstable. In *The Smile of the Lamb* the Arab Hilmi completely mixes fiction and reality, he lives in an almost imagined world of his own, which distances him from his society. But this made-up world of his is the reason that the Israeli officer Uri tries to connect with him and learn how to leave in a world that is detached from reality.

Based on Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965), Benziman (2011) claims that the societies that continue to function despite painful conflicts should be questioned, and not the characters who are unable to live a normal life in them: the mentally ill, who are removed from them, seem to be messengers of the insight that it is the conflict itself that is insane and that people cannot contain it. The fact that these societies seem to function in the midst of the conflict and to expel those who try to convey a message about its terrible effects can provide better testimony about the conflict than about the characters that, understandably, cannot live in a reality full of hatred and violence. Therefore, the majority of texts dealing with the conflict at the 1980s, while presenting characters that lose their minds, actually tell us something about the conflict which is crazy, illogical, and not understandable, in which normal people cannot live. This, once again, is in contrast to growing tendencies in Israel at the time to understand the conflict, put sense into it, rationalize it, and understand how it can be solved in a logical and rational way.

3. The texts tell a story in which the conflict is not only tragic but also offers no optimistic future hope. All these texts have bad, tragic and unhappy endings. In almost every text that deals with the conflict in the 1980s, death is an important

factor. The Israeli soldier Alex of *A Trumpet in the Wadi* dies as he goes to war. While going to fight against his lover's brothers he is killed, leaving the Arab Huda pregnant and not knowing how she will be able to raise a half-Jewish/half-Arab baby (Michael, 1987). In *A Good Arab*, Chava, supposedly a national hero, dies when she takes the wheel from her peace-seeking Arab husband and roles their car over (Kaniuk, 1984). Yuad in *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* by Emile Habibi (1984), Katzman in *The Smile of The Lamb* (Grossman, 1983), the child Anton Shammass in *Arabesques* (Shammass, 1986), Khaled in the movie *Heat-Wave (Hamsin)*, Rauf in *Ricochet*, almost all the Arab characters in the movie *Cup Final*, and more – all die.

The crucial role assumed by death is not only evidence of the horrors of the conflict, but also of the inability to end it. The texts tell a story in which the conflict is not only tragic but also offers no future hope. The authors, screenplay writers, and filmmakers could, at least theoretically, have written texts with happy endings. They are, one should remember, not obligated to the “truth” or to a mimetic representation of the conflict; yet they all chose to end their texts with death, tragedy and no hope. While Israelis started to see how at least parts of the conflict can be resolved, the texts told stories in which conflict does not end, not even when the texts' producers have the liberty to choose any ending they want.

4. Jewish and Arab characters in these texts cannot establish normal relationships or romantic relationships in Israel/Palestine. The characters can have such relationships outside the holy land, but not in it. Anyone who is seen as too close to someone from the out-group is immediately condemned. The only places in which Jewish and Arab protagonists do meet in these texts are, therefore, outside of Israel or in extra-territorial Heterotopian venues (Foucault, 1997) such as hospitals, isolated spots, or mental institutions. For example, *A Good Arab* tells a story in which individuals from the opposing sides can be friends and lovers outside of Israel but not in it. In Germany, the Arab Azuri is involved in a love-triangle with the Jewish couple Kita and Franz. It ends when they arrive in Israel. Azuri meets Kita and Franz's daughter, Chava, and they marry, but are unsuccessful in establishing a normal life in Israel and so they move to France; when they return to Israel their relationship fails again. Their son, Yosef, half-Arab--half-Jew, fails in establishing any kind of intimate relationship, either with Jews or with Arabs (Kaniuk, 1984).

It seems as if it is only by physically distancing themselves from the conflict can Arabs and Jews meet and establish some kind of dialogue. Likewise, most of the texts that narrate love stories between Jews and Arabs have an unhappy ending with the relationship breaking off. Significantly, when a relationship takes place outside Israel—it prevails.

In the movie *A Narrow Bridge* (*Gesher tzar meod*), the love story between Laila, a Palestinian widow, and an Israeli officer ends when she leaves for Jordan due to societal pressure. In *Heat-Wave*, Chava's brother releases an ox that kills her Arab boyfriend, Halad. In *Arabesques*, (Shammas, 1986) the Jewish writer Yosh Bar-On gets acquainted with an Arab-Israeli and a Palestinian only when staying in Paris and in the United States. In *The Smile of the Lamb* the Israeli officer Uri and the Arab Hilmi have an equal status that can permit a dialog only when Uri comes to Hilmi's isolated cave (Grossman, 1983). In *Ta'atu'on*, the place where Palestinians and Israelis meet in order to try and have a dialogue is an institution for the mentally ill (Ben-Ner, 1989). In the movie *Fictitious Marriage* the only place where the Palestinian workers and the Jewish protagonist can meet is in a construction site (significantly, not a constructed house, for example). Likewise, in *A Trumpet in the Wadi*, the love story between Alex and Huda does not take place in a house but in the attic (Michael, 1987).

The Contradiction

When comparing the Israeli cultural texts of the time and the Israeli psychological repertoire and ethos of conflict of the time – one can see that they do not go in the same directions. Although both changing at about the same time, and undoubtedly influencing one another, they do not share the same characteristics of change.

The most revealing fact is that while Israeli public discourse showed a reduction in viewing the conflict as a zero-sum-game, the texts do not: they end in death, the protagonists lose their minds, and no chance for a positive future is presented. The dialogues are not between equals and – according to the cultural texts of the time – the only place where Jews and Arabs can meet and sustain a normal relationship is outside of Israel/Palestine.

The most important trait of these texts is that they tell a story of not being able to tell a story and so the texts are confusing. They deal almost obsessively with the questions of what is true or false and question what is reality and what is not. At the same time, though, the perceptions of Israelis about the conflict changed after the peace treaty with Egypt and the new belief that there is a rational way to understand the conflict and even to solve it. The concept of Land for Peace, proven to be a solution, was a way of understanding the conflict

rationality and it proposed a way to end it (Ben Porat, 2008) which brought optimism to the public discourse (Oren, 2009) while the fictional texts told exactly the opposite story: no rationality, telling the story of the inability to understand it, showing no future hope and no Jewish-Arab relations that prevails in the conflicted land.

While Israeli public opinion towards Arabs transformed, it included less stereotypes and prejudices (Smooha, 1998; Stone, 1983), Israel's literature was Orientalistic even when trying to present a more balanced perspective of the Arab (Oppenheimer, 2008). The texts continued to present the Israeli-national narrative, even when the overall picture is not one of black and white.

The texts deal with almost all of the topics that comprise the inter-group psychological repertoire and the ethos of conflict – security, self-identification, group belongings and more – but show them in a different light than the public discourse of the time. Why is it, then, that while Israeli society's beliefs became more exceptive of other narratives and less pessimistic, the cultural texts became more confusing? Why is it that while the texts did become consistent with the public discourse by giving more voice to the Arab other, they at the same time told a story in which there actually cannot be any coexistence between Arabs and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians? How is it that these texts actually told a story that might not have been the story of Israeli public discourse of the 1980s but certainly reflects the Israeli discourse after the year 2000?

These findings challenge the well-known concept that cultural texts are part of the narrative of societies in conflict. They show that while both cultural texts and political public discourse changed at the same time – they went in different directions. The cultural texts were more pessimistic and confused than the public discourse. Interestingly enough, although not completely in line with the discourse back in the 1980s, they – in a way – present a picture similar to what would become the Israeli ethos of conflict two decades later. After the year 2000, the Israeli perception and ethos of conflict included beliefs about the inability to have a dialog with the Palestinians; a perception that there is “no partner” in the rival side; belief that the conflict cannot be solved as Israel has done extensive efforts to do so but could not strike a peace agreement; total confusion about the question of how to end the conflict, as all the efforts done did not prevail; perception that peace treaties signed outside of Israel (Oslo or Geneva for example) can only last outside of Israel-Palestine but collapse in the middle-eastern reality; beliefs that people who were talking about a peace-agreement, a “new middle east” and a coexistence between Israelis and Arabs were day-dreaming or living in a

fantasy world that is not connected to reality. All these are, of course, much closer to what Israeli novels and films of the 1980s showed than to the ethos of conflict of the 1980s in which they were produced.

Potential Explanations

Various explanations can be given to this gap between the ethos of conflict and the psychological inter-group repertoire, and the way cultural fictional texts present the conflict. I would like to suggest three explanations, not necessarily competing ones – and sometimes even overlapping – although many more can be thought of:

1. Fictional texts can present a different perspective of conflicts than the one shared by society because they are not obligated to a mimetic representation of the conflict. Their fictionality allows them to tell different stories and they show a more complicated picture of the conflict. Their role, as being part of society but also outside of it because of their fictionality, gives them more freedom in their ability to deal with the conflict. It allows them to produce works that are not consistent with what their audiences are used to hearing, reading or seeing – and to still be appreciated and loved. And so, they are capable of being much more critical of the national narrative and the ethos of conflict, and might even foresee future events just because they are based on the imagination of their producers.

In the case study discussed above, although the real conflict transformed at the time and so did the public opinion (Oren, 2010), the cultural texts – while going through dramatic changes – did not go with the flow. Although changing the representation of the Arab characters (Ben-Ezer, 1999; Orian, 1996; Shohat, 1991), although challenging the dichotomy between Jews and Arabs (Gertz, 1993), although presenting a more multi-layered perspective of the conflict (Benziman, 2011) – their essence is actually rooted in viewing the conflict as a dead-end one, which was the basic understanding of the conflict in Israeli society before the 1980s and came back to be the main belief of Israeli society after the year 2000.

2. Fictional texts do not present claims or positions. They tell stories which can be interpreted in a variety of ways. One reader or scholar can understand them in one way and the other in another. They also, as mentioned, contain different layers to them. And so the text can at the same time contain elements of the ethos of conflict and criticize the national narrative, they can preserve the ethos while presenting crucial variations from it. Knowing that conflicts influence the way individuals and societies understand and perceive information (see for example Markus & Zajonc,

1985) – it is fair to believe that while the texts contain a complex view of a conflict, the audience sees only parts of it. For example, while a text can show that characters of both sides are to blame – the reader might only see that one side is to blame.

Therefore, texts can be canonical, mainstream and loved by their society just because they can be interpreted differently and because different people and different portions of society understand them in different ways. In practice, the members of society reading or watching them might perceive these texts as strengthening their beliefs, as proving their cases, and as enforcing their perspectives – even if the texts have other (more controversial) sides to them as well.

In the case studied above, it is fair to believe that the change in the representation of Arab characters went in the path of changes of Israelis perception of Arabs (Oren, 2009; Smooha, 1998). But the readers did not notice that this supposed change still keeps the texts' Orientalistic approach (Oppenheimer, 2008).

3. There are certain elements in these texts that do correspond with the ethos of conflict and psychological inter-group repertoire. Even when presenting a different perspective, these cultural texts do share common elements with the public discourse.

For example, the pessimistic endings of the texts discussed above do not show a light at the end of a tunnel for society or a brighter future as the Israeli public started to perceive it. But at the same time, their unhappy endings are completely logical and reasonable for a society that at this decade went through two wars that were on-going and without a clear ending (The Lebanon War and the Intifada). Likewise, their confusion and their tendency to deal with the fact that they cannot deal with the conflict does not present an illuminated picture of the conflict which could help members of the in-group understand the conflict and provide a coherent picture of it (see, for example: Burton, 1990); however, they might comfort the audiences' feeling of misunderstanding and show them a fictional-reality in which the confusion does not make the situation wrong or weaken society's national narrative.

It is possible that in this specific conflict, texts which say out loud that the conflict is unresolved and problematic, and which do not wholeheartedly support one side, but at the same time still retain elements of the national narrative – are the kind of national texts which preserve the culture of conflict. And so, although not completely consistent with expectations, cultural texts do have some characteristics which are part of the culture of conflict. These are difficult to generalize and almost impossible to make inductive

conclusions from because they differ from one case study to the other, but they still have some elements which actually align with the national narrative and the psychological inter-group repertoire of each specific society.

Conclusion

Fiction novels, art works, theatre plays, films and other cultural texts sometimes tell stories which differ from the way societies in conflict perceive and understand the conflict in which they live. Fictional cultural texts – by their mere characteristics – tell a more complex and multi-layered story about conflicts than other kinds of discourses. This study is a first step in identifying the contradiction between cultural texts and the discourse they produce on the one hand, and the ethos of conflict and culture of conflict on the other hand. Three different explanations were given to try to understand this contradiction: it could be that the fictionality of these texts enables them to be appreciated and still tell a different story than what society expects; it might be that they are not fully understood by society; and it might be that portions of them do align with parts of the in-group narrative. Maybe all is true. Yet much more research has to be done in order to understand how these texts can be at the same time canonical mainstream texts in a society, and tell a different story from the typical ethos of conflict narrative shared by it.

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