Societal Beliefs

The expression of societal beliefs trough documentaries

By
Maritte Sørensen
&
Markus Hjortsman

Abstract

The Israel-Palestinian conflict has always had the interest of many academic fields. We will in this thesis look into some of the social-psychological mechanisms that can occur in, what we address as, an intractable ethnonational conflict. We will use theories of societal beliefs, clash of narratives, irretraceable ethnonational conflicts and identity. Through two documentary films, "Promises" and "To die in Jerusalem", we will analyse how societal beliefs are reflected and how they are conveyed. We will implement these theories through discourse analysis and film analysis. Our results will contribute to understanding societal beliefs in Israel-Palestine.

Keywords: Documentary film, *Promises, To die in Jerusalem,* Israel/Palestine, Societal beliefs, identity, social-psychology, peace and conflict resolution
Signs: 46 730

Contents

Introduction

The documentaries we have chosen deal with the period 1995 to 2007, the first movie is from 1995 to 2000 and the epilogue is filmed in 2004. The third film is set in 2006 -2007. This is a period that saw a resurgence of violence between Israel and Palestine. Following the Oslo accord in 1993, there was hope for progress regarding the conflict in the region. The fall of 2000 saw the start of the Al-Aqsa intifada, which lasted until 2005 and was a regression in the region regarding a potential peace. The relations were already fragile with a large amount of distrust and a great societal rift between the two sides. The Al-Aqsa intifada put an even greater strain on these relations, which is central to the documentaries we will analyse.

Statement of purpose

With this paper we want to try and identify societal beliefs as expressed through documentary media, about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This is a conflict with each side having deep rooted senses of righteousness and belonging. Both sides have developed beliefs of victimization and a deepening entrenchment within its own culture and religion. Which is why theories of societal beliefs and identity are interesting and useful to apply, when analyzing different types of information and reporting from the Israeli-Palestinian situation. We hope with this thesis to reach a better understanding of identity and societal beliefs held

by the people in Israel-Palestine. Also we hope to get a developed sense of the weight and possibilities provided by documentaries to convey these themes. We have chosen documentaries before other types of media because of the channel it provides to the people depicted. Of course when using documentaries it's important to be as critical of the material as with any other type of source, or even more so. Documentaries, as with other types of reporting, may be biased or working a specific angle[1]. Of course no film is objective, no matter how hard it tries, and we are not arguing that these films are, but more highlighting that these films, have tried to take on another angle to emphasize the complexity, not framing one side as the bad guy. For this reason we saw a few different films and choose documentaries that are first and foremost driven by the participants' stories and dialogue, rather than pushing its own narrative, which minimizes the risk of agenda. Therefore these documentaries suits our purpose since it is a rather unfiltered portrayal of the people immersed in this complex situation. This gives us a beneficial possibility to apply our chosen theories on the content. These films fits our context as it is an exposition of people in the region and let the people participating be the narrative rather than having it pre-determined. By trying to simply observe events it gives us the opportunity to simply analyze the words and actions of the people depicted.

We have chosen to keep the number of documentaries down to two as not to risk being too broad or get repetitive. The themes found in each differ and we thought it best to keep it to these two films rather than involve another one in a comparison and risk confusing the analysis. These two are similar yet different enough to keep the analysis most optimal.

Method

We will use theories of societal beliefs and identity to apply and analyse our chosen films. No definite answer to our question is possible and we believe it would be false to try and provide one. We rather try to gain a deeper understanding of societal beliefs through analysis of the films.

By way of our analysis we will then discuss the films and how the theories can explain the differences and similarities. We will therefore use discourse analysis as a method to aptly

---

[1] Bordwell David, Thompson Kristin. 2010. "Film art: an introduction" 9th edition. New York. McGraw-Hill. p.350
2   Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman,

research our question. Discourse analysis allows us to study our question even though no definite answer can be provided. Discourse analysis does not try to reflect a reality but rather analyse and shape it.

With this method we are able to analyse the limited material we have chosen and still provide some form of insight. Discourse analysis has its flaws. The lack of definite answer and empirical data leaves a lot open for interpretation. It's important to make sure one have a clear line of reasoning from material to analysis.

Film analysis: There are several ways to analyse film. By aesthetics, style, themes or content. We have chosen material that relies heavily on the participants of the film. Therefore our analysis will be almost exclusively focused on content. Our research question require us to describe certain scenes or quote the films as to accurately convey our analysis of how societal beliefs are reflected.

To operationalize our research question we hope by the end of our paper to contribute to a better understanding of societal beliefs in Israel-Palestine. With such knowledge be able to better analyse and understand media regarding Israel and/or Palestine.

Theory

By including a social-psychological perspective to conflict theory, it becomes possible to get a multidimensional understanding of conflicts and by this deepening the understanding of a conflict, which other perspectives lack. A social-psychological approach differs from traditional theories, like realism, where the focus lies more on international relations or has a more structural character[2].

The social-psychological perspective is not meant to dismiss other theories, but should be seen as a complimentary element that could increase the understanding of conflicts. It should be seen as an integrated part when analysing international relations, where social-psychological processes contributes to create how a nation takes form, since these processes,

---

2   Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman,
    I.William (ed.), *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques.* Washington, D.C: United
    States Institute of Peace, p. 62

not only happens on the individual level, but also on the collective level[3].

A more psychological approach can help identify why individuals react as they do, when they are exposed to stress or help explain the cognitive processes. But these individuals reacts through organized social structures and social-psychology present tools, that can be used for analysing the relationship between individuals and the social interaction that happens in a social system[4].

The examination of the cognitive processes in conflicts does not make them irrational. Though psychological analysis is based on the thought that subjective factors plays a central role, when it comes to how one experience and interprets events. In conflict situations these subjective elements can be a cause for the development of a conflict, because they generate the difference that parties in a conflict experience as reality, this withhold the rational goals, since the subjective elements becomes the focus point[5].

These psychological processes must always be seen in relation to their context. International conflicts must be treated as societal and inter-societal processes, which have occurred, do to actions and interactions between a large number of individuals, who acts trough a network of groups that is driven by collective feelings and historic and ideological roots.[6]

Social-psychological perspective enriches the analysis of international relations, by exploring the subjective factors that sets the limits for the rationality. It moves away from the stat-centric view and analyses the processes that takes place in and between societies, and are the basis for how a state acts the way it does, by expanding the perimeter on which processes that should be examined in international relations and by viewing international conflicts as dynamic processes, sculptured by changing realities, interests and relations between parties in a conflict.[7]

Ethnic conflicts must be addressed as processes where the collective human needs and fears are being exploited. People who lives in deep-rooted conflicts, or intractable ethnonational

3   Ibid
4   Ibid
5   Ibid
6   Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman, I.William (ed.), *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques.* Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace, p.63.
7   Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman, I.William (ed.), *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques.* Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace, p.64.

conflicts, develop psychological mechanisms to cope with the stress, they are exposed to in everyday life. These mechanisms make it possible for societies to adapt to the conditions in the conflict[8]. These conflicts are often driven by threats against basic human needs. It is not only material needs, such as food and physical well-being, which are being threatened but also the psychological needs, like identity, security and ideas of justice. What is categorized as a need has its base on an individual level, but since these needs, can be the force behind conflicts, the individual needs gets articulated in society trough different groups[9].

How these psychological conditions are formed is closely connected to what Daniel Bar-Tal address as societal beliefs that appear within each society concerning the conflict, the self and the other[10].

Members in a society, define themself by societal beliefs, which are the cognitions on issues. It refers to characteristics, structures and processes of development in society, which include a long list of beliefs (societal goals, self-image, aspirations, norms/values, image of out-group ect)[11]. When these beliefs are formed they become integrated into ethos (ethos reflect the societal beliefs, that give society its dominant characterization[12]) and are further reflected in the group's narrative[13].

Clash of narratives is central when analysing societal beliefs in Israel-Palestine. It pertains to how, in an intractable ethnonational conflict, the different parties view their version of history[14]. As such the same historical events are described and interpreted in widely different ways by the two sides. Centrality of the conflict is another important factor when analysing a conflict such as this. How much of the everyday life the conflict preoccupies is important to understanding the psychological and societal impact of the situation.

This correlates to another concept, *perception of irreconcilability,* the belief that when each side see their own goal as essential and as such are unwilling to concede to the necessary requirements to negotiate or make peace with its opponents[15]

---

8   Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 765
9   Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman, I.William (ed.), *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques.* Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace, p. 64f.
10 Bar-Tal, Daniel, 2000. *Shared Beliefs in a Society.* Califonia: Sage Publications, Inc. p. xiv.
11 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 765
12 Bar-Tal, Daniel, 2000. *Shared Beliefs in a Society.* Califonia: Sage Publications, Inc. p. xv
13 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 765
14 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.763
[15] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts.

As mentioned earlier people in intractable ethnonational conflicts, live under constant stress, and develop mechanisms to cope with the stress. These mechanisms mostly concern the differentiation between the in and out-group. Mostly there is a determination of a just goal in the in-group or the society, this goal is integrated in the society. When the in-groups goal is just, the out-groups legitimacy gets degraded, and dehumanization can happen. By removing the human trait from the out-group, a justification of violent acts can be accepted in society. It is most obvious when one group links negative trait to another, they will attribute their own group with positive traits, like courage, humaneness and sacrifice. Even though the in-group, associate them self with positive traits, they often have a self-perception as a victim of the other side. Then there can be a victimization of ones group[16].

Of course it is not every group in a society who share the same beliefs and intragroup differences can occur[17].

The societal beliefs that emerge in these conflicts are in different ways maintained in society. Usually in societies, the members actively negotiate the societal beliefs; they evaluate them, make judgments and try to convince other members in society of the rightness of certain beliefs[18]. But when exposed to stressful or threatening situations cognitive freezing can happen. Here members in a society commit themselves to specific societal beliefs, without questioning them. There can be biased selection, interpretation and elaboration of information. Members in a society seek the information that confirms their already existing beliefs and degrade incoherent information. When individuals only seek, or are exposed to, information consistent to already existing beliefs, the interpretations support these beliefs. New beliefs are formed based on the already existing beliefs, and this process reinforces old beliefs, with the new ones. These processes reinforce society's beliefs about the conflict and strengthen the in-group's goal, justification and self-image while also confirming the image of the enemy[19].

Even though social-psychology is helpful in explaining the social processes, identity is still a core subject in explaining why people act as they do. Identity plays a role in societal beliefs,

---

    The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.762
16 Ibid
17 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational
    Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 766
18 Bar-Tal, Daniel, 2000. *Shared Beliefs in a Society.* Califonia: Sage Publications, Inc. p. 154
19 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational
    Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 766

since the fear of losing once identity can be present, but also because the identity interacts in social processes, contributing to create societal beliefs. One theory of what identity is, and how it is created is primodialism. Primordialism view ones ethnic identity as something that cannot be changed, it is defined by blood ties or kinship. The ethnicity one have when born, is unchangeable. Ethnicity is rooted in history and is tied together with descendants. Also the idea of a homeland is a primordialistic trait[20]. Cultural primordialism suggests that it is culture that binds people together, they view culture as an integrated part of ethnicity and ethnicity as inborn. When people claim that culture is a foundation of ones identity it is extended not only to include blood ties, but a group who share religion, language and other cultural traits. This can give people a common political goal[21]. It is not necessarily the ties of birth and origin that is important, but far more the values and narratives people associate these ties with and the importance of fitting in to a specific ethnic group[22].

Jorieman, talks about 'soft' primordialism, this category sees ethnic identity as evolving from history and a myth of a common homeland. Therefor the biological identification is not essential, but the emotional and psychological ties are. The most important is shared beliefs and myths of origins[23].

---

20 Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. p. 19f..
21 Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. p. 24f..
22 Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. p. 27.
23 Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. p. 28f..

Analysis

In the following we will make a shot presentation of the documentary film we have chosen, followed by an analysis of the film.

Promises

Promises (2001) is a documentary film, directed by Carlos Bolado, B. Z. Goldberg and Justine Shapiro. It follows a group of children living in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The film has been made over a period of five years, from 1995 to 2000. B. Z. Goldberg (B. Z.) interviews a group of seven children with different backgrounds, three Palestinian children and four Israelis[24]. They all explain how they experience the conflict and B. Z. follows them around during everyday life. At the end of the film, the children are given the opportunity to meet one another, and four of the seven children meet in the Deheishe refuge camp, playing around, but also exchanging thoughts about the meeting and there new friendship. The children are: Moshie Bar Am, a Jewish boy living in the Beit-El Settlement. Shlomo Green a Jewish boy living in the Jewish quarter in Jerusalem. Sanabel Hassan a Palestinian girl, living in the Deheishe refugee camp. Faraj Adnan Hassan Husein a Palestininan boy living I Deheishe refugee camp. Mahmoud Mazen Mahmoud Izhiman, a Palestinian boy living in the Moslem quarter in the Old city, in Jerusalem, and Daniel and Yarko Solan, twins and secular Israelis, living in West Jerusalem.

The epilog from the summer 2004, follow up on what has happened to the children since the film was made. Not all of the children are represented here, Shlomo is absent due to his religious studies and Daniel is doing military service, and did not have the opportunity to be there. In the follow up the children, who now has become adults, talks about how their lives are and the aftermath of the meeting.

---

24 http://www.promisesproject.org/film.html

We believe that the kids in this film express societal beliefs very explicit. Since we in this analysis do not have the time or space to go trough every scene in the film, we have selected scenes, where the children express the cooping mechanisms trough their societal beliefs.

The belief concerning once just goal is seen in several scenes, both on the Palestinian and Israeli side.

Both Mahmoud and Moshie have very strong religious beliefs on who have the right to live on the land – which is expressed in several scenes. In the scene where we meet Moshie for the first time he says, "God promised us the land. The Arabs came and took it!"[25], this underlines his believe of the justness of his goal to establishing a Jewish state, since it is the ancient homeland, as he further explains, by referring to the Book of Genesis, where God tell Abraham to "rise and walk the land"[26]. Even though he is no more than ten years old, he dehumanizes the Arabs. This can be a tool for cooping with the fear of living in a settlement, surrounded by Arabs, he believe is a threat to his existence, as he says, when talking about the army protecting the settlers "[...]and if the soldiers aim poorly, it's OK 'cause they might shoot an Arab!"[27].

Mahmoud, also believes that the land is his, but on the opposite site – he refers to the Koran when justifying his right to be in the land, "The Jews say this is their land.[...] If it's their land, why does The Koran say that The Prophet, Mohammmed – Flew from mecca to the Al Aqsa mosque in JERUSALEM!"[28].

But it is not only religion that is used to justify the Palestinians goal of returning. Faraj, talk to his grandmother who show him the deed to her and the families land in Ras Abu-Ammar, which is on Israeli territory. B. Z. and some of the other members of the film crew sneak Faraj and his Grandmother through a checkpoint, to visit the land. His grandmother tells Faraj about the massacre in the village, which in further can be seen as the victimization of the Palestinians, which is centered about the Israeli aggression against innocent Palestinians, the displacement and the destroying of property[29]. Faraj also comments on Ras Abu-Ammar, saying, "My right is to return to Ras Abu Ammar."[30].

The victimization is thus used to underline the positive beliefs about the Palestinians, this is seen in a scene where Faraj is demonstration, together with a large group of people, both

---

25 "Promises" 00.19.19
26 "Promises" 00.19.37
27 "Promises" 00.21.22
28 "Promises" 00.08.20
29 Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational
    Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.766.
30 "Promises" 00.54.11

children and adults. He and many others of people participating in the demonstration hold up keys, who belong to their former houses or slingshots, to show their resistance. The shouts in the demonstration both express the victimization and the positive traits in the Palestinian society some of the things shouted are "From Deheishe to Baghdad! One indestructible Front!"[31]. This promotes positive traits, not only to the Palestinians, but the Arab world as a group who the Palestinians can trust. The shout "Let the flag fly high!"[32] promotes traits of patriotism and courage. During the whole demonstration, positive traits of the Palestinian people are expressed, while negative traits, both towards Israel, but also to peace negotiators are shouted[33].

Even though the theory says that the fear of ones basic needs is threatened in a conflict, and this is why some conflict can go on, it is not all people living in a conflict, who reacts in a negative way, by dehumanizing the other side. It is not all of the children who feel this strong hate, or illegitimacy, towards the other side. These intragroup differences is expressed when we meet Daniel and Yarko. The twins talks about the fear of getting on the bus every morning, because of the terrorist attacks, even though they might implicit mean Arabs, when they talk about the subject, Yarko mostly look for "suspicious people"[34]. Yarko has the most concern, while Daniel tries to cooperate the fear of a terrorist attack more into his every day life, by saying, "It's rare. It only happens once a year"[35]

During the whole film, the twins are the ones to question the conflict the most, and they are also the only Israeli/Jewish children, who wants to meet the Palestinian children. They differ a lot from both Shlomo and Moshie, who both have hostile or non-friendly opinions about the other side. When B. Z. brings the Twins to the Western Wall, they both get scared of the orthodox Jews and Yarko says, after leaving a note at the wall, " I was scared to death. I'd rather visit an Arab village than be here with – All these religious people"[36].

Faraj is tricky to figure out. He often changes his mind, which doesn't have to be a bad thing. During most of the film he expresses hatred towards the Israelis, and he is absolute sure they are all evil – and up to no good. A small group of children from the camp, including Sanabel

---

31 "Promises" 00.54.41
32 "Promises" 00.55.16
33 "Promises" 00.54.28-00.55.44
34 "Promises" 00.04.40
35 "Promises" 00.05.19
36 "Promises" 00.35.43

and Faraj, meet up and discuss, why they should meet Israeli children and why they should not meet them. Faraj is very hostile against the idea of meeting the other side[37], but when he get the chance of meeting them, he gets curious and actually looks forward to it[38].

Both the twins, Sanabel and Faraj change opinions or are less hostile than Moshie, Shlomo and Mahmoud. One possible explanation to this, could be their relationship to religion. Moshie, Shlomo and Mahmoud's identities are very closely related to religion, they justify their actions based on religion, which indicate a primodialistic identity. Moshie shows a strong bond to his ancient history and a lot of his argument is based on religious texts.

Mahmoud finds out that B. Z. is Jewish, first he tries to make excuses, because all that he has learned about Jews or knows about them does not fit into his narrative[39].

The crew behind "Promises" has made an epilog, following up on the kids in 2004. Here the complexity of maintaining change in narrative becomes clear, or at least to withhold the relationship between the two sides. The childish innocence has disappeared. In "Promises", the twins visit their old babysitter Matan, who is a soldier in the Israeli army, in the hospital. He has been injured in battle. They talk about the army and Matas asks them on their thoughts of joining the army, Daniel and Yarko replyes "There's no rush" and "It's and open question"[40]. In the epilog, we learn that both Daniel and Yarko have joined the army. Growing older, Daniel explains how he feels obligated to join the army, and that he wants to protect his country. His national feeling towards Israel has grown stronger. He feels torn about the conflict but justify his actions by saying, "[..]Even as civilians we were part of the occupation. But once we became soldiers, we actually carry out the occupation, so it doesn't matter if we were once friends and how nice we are[...]"[41]. What might be even more obvious or underline how ones beliefs are changed, is also very noticeable, when looking at Daniel. He does not see the justice in why, some have to go military service why others can just stay in school and learn or "learn" as he puts it[42]. And as written above, he has now joined the army, feeling strongly about protecting Israel.

"Promises", we believe, is not made to anchor societal beliefs in the conflict. It wishes to give the children an open space where they can express their thoughts and offers the opportunity to

---

37 Annex 1 & 2
38 "Promises" 01.17.54
39 Annex 3
40 "Promises" 01.07.23
41 Epilog, part 1, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g25pKlM5Lb8 00.04.04 min
42 "Promises" 01.09.08

meet the other side. So the information the children get during everyday life gets challenged when they get a sneak-peak into the other sides beliefs. The film also establish, though several frames, how these children, are constantly reminded of the conflict they live in. In several of the scenes concerning every day life, military or weapons are present: when Mahmoud helps his dad in his coffee shop, there is military at the marked keeping an eye on everything. When the twins have a volleyball tournament, a man is sitting with a weapon. Shlomo and the other kids who go to the religious school have military protection[43]. Moshie, who lives in the settlement, is also protected by the army.

Faraj and Sanabel, who lives in the refuge camp, are also exposed to this, a constant reminder of being under occupation since they do not have the opportunity to move freely, outside the camp. When Sanabel and her family wants to visit her father, in prison, she has to go through checkpoints and long waiting hours and B. Z. has to sneak Faraj and his grandmother, to their land on the Israeli territory. As we have learned, the stress of a conflict can establish cognitive freezing. These children have never experienced their land in peace, and the cognitive freezing and the coping mechanisms, has created societal beliefs, that has become their ethos.

To die in Jerusalem

"To die in Jerusalem" is a documentary about a case where a16-year-old Palestinian girl, Ayat, carried out a suicide attack by blowing herself up in a supermarket along with almost equally aged Israeli girl Rachel Levy. The story was covered in international media and gained attention because of the similarities between the girls in both looks and age. "To Die in Jerusalem" contains fewer standout scenes than "Promises" to convey themes but instead relies on the testimonies of the different parties. On the one side there is the family of the murdered Rachel Levy and on the other side, the family of Ayat al-Akhras, the suicide bomber. The focus lies heavily on the mothers and their struggle to understand the surrounding events and find reason behind their daughters' deaths.

An overall theme is the concept of occupation and resistance and the different families reasoning at who is to blame and how to act and respond. Both sides show signs of having non-violence philosophies but often conclude that such concepts are not possible when under attack, as both sides conceives themselves to be.

---

43 "Promises" 01.08.19

"I always teach my children to love others, unfortunately occupation practices like killings, demolitions and imprisonment have changed the way boys and girls think"[44]. This is said early on by Ayats father and is a line of reasoning that he continues throughout the film. It is an example of Bar-Tals theory of victimization in a conflict[45]. The father believes that his daughter's death is an inevitable consequence of the actions of the state of Israel. This puts him in the position of victim. He continues to state that resistance becomes a duty when under attack[46]. The film cuts directly to Rachel Levy's brother who argues that Israelis is dying for no reason in the Palestine territories but continues to say that it is necessary to control the terror coming from the Palestinian side[47].

This once again exposes the victimization from both sides and also reveals an obvious clash of narratives as they describe the same situation[48]. One considers it the root of the terror while the other considers it the consequence of terror. Rachel Levy's brother and Ayat's father have obvious militant tendencies in their reasoning even though they claim to prefer peace. In an intractable ethnonational conflict violence is common and, as seen here, has become part of their respective societies. It reflects the theories of *centrality, violence* and *perception of irreconcilability*[49]. Even though Ayat's father and Rachel's brother come from two different generations the violence, prolonged conflict and its integration in everyday life has given them a sort of zero-tolerance attitude towards their perceived tormentor and enemy. Both of them are essentially arguing that their actions are necessary for survival.

Rachel Levy's mother explains in a scene how they have to go through metal detectors when boarding a bus, entering a mall etc. in the downtown area of Jerusalem[50]. She explains how this is part of their everyday life. This shows how she does not just see her daughter's death as a random act of violence from the other side but more as an expected one. Here she shows signs of considering the attacks to be unprovoked and unwarranted, something she will be more explicit with later on. This could explain why she is so eager to meet the parents of Ayat since she cannot conceive herself why someone would want to kill oneself to hurt Israelis.

---

[44] "To die in jerusalem" 00.19.18
[45] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.765
[46] 20.34 "To die in Jerusalem"
[47] 20.55 "To die in Jerusalem"
[48] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.762
[49] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.762
[50] "To die in Jerusalem" 00.21.07

Once again one can see signs of both victimization and the belief that her side do no wrong[51].

It once again cuts to a scene of Ayats parents explaining events in their daughter's life that they believe drew her towards more radical beliefs[52]. It functions as a response to Rachel's mothers earlier questions. Ayat's father explains how Israelis killed a boy and how Ayat tried to save him. He notes how this affects ones psyche. Ayat's mother continues and claims a turning point for Ayat was the Israeli raids. Ayat had heard about them but when she witnessed them herself she was deeply affected. This once again serves as response to Rachel's family's reasoning, and highlights the different narratives held by the two sides. They are constantly describing the same situations but each being the victim of their own version. The problem with a prolonged ethnonational conflict is the entrenchment from the different sides, which becomes obvious here. Ayats parents are obviously mourning their daughter and wishing she had never committed such an act but they indirectly continues to argue and justify why she did it. Ayats mother claims she would have stopped her daughter by force if necessary if she knew what Ayat was about to do, but, in the end, the focus is on the pain of losing a child and not why it might be ideological or morally wrong to do such a thing[53].

One of the more focal scenes in the film is when Rachel Levy's mother visits a women's prison that holds 20 women who tried to but were prevented from carry out suicide attacks[54]. Rachel's mother meets with a young girl who was caught trying to commit a suicide attack and initially try to say that Islam forbids killing of innocents. The girl responds by saying that during times of peace it's forbidden but martyrdom is an act of resistance and argues that it is the only way to show Israel how far the Palestine are willing to go for their freedom. This correlates with Bar-Tal's theory of politicizing religion. The young girls statements indicates that the goal is political, with freedom for the Palestinians, but they uses religion to excuse their actions and as a mean to reach that goal[55].

Even Rachel's mother argues against the killing of others with Islamic religion, which further goes to show how religion and politics has become intertwined or at least how it is their respective societies perception that it has. The young girl also delegitimizes Israel and uses

---

[51] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.765
[52] "To die in Jerusalem" 00.21.35
[53] "To die in Jerusalem" 00.24.49
[54] "To die in jerusalem" 00.26.00
[55] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p.764

this to justify her actions and the actions of other radicals.

Later in the same sequence, the young girl is shown a picture of Rachel and comments on how beautiful she is and that she is sorry that Rachel had to die. She continues to argue for the necessity of the attacks however. This is an indicator at how rooted in society the conflict is.

To the girl it is not on a personal level but a much deeper rift, stemming from all the years of conflict. She avoids Rachel's mother attempts to use her daughter to put a face on their victims and instead quickly launches in to a line of reasoning concerning the Israelis false claims on the land which she says is rightfully Palestine's. She points to the Israeli prison guards and points out their different origins, such as Iraq, Morocco and Russia and argues that it confirms her belief that they obviously don't belong in Palestine and that there is no such thing as Israel since they are not indigenous[56].

This reveals a belief in a sort of natural primordialism and how the Palestine own the land because of their ethnic tradition compared to what she perceives is Israel constructed identity[57], even though modern Israel could be argued to be a cultural primordialism[58]. With that argument she feels she can delegitimize Israel claims on the land, which makes her hard to convince otherwise. This indicates another heavy obstacle in regards to solving the conflict as such beliefs leave little room for negotiation and reasoning between the parties.

When Rachel's mother meets with a support group for parents who lost children in attacks and explains how she wants to meet with the mother of her daughter's killer, she is met with mixed response[59]. Some of the parents does not want to know anything about them and does not see the point. They try to tell her that they cannot expect anything from them, indicating a dehumanization of the Palestinians. This could perhaps be a coping mechanism for living both with their grief, finding reason for the death of their children and also to be able to endure the state of constant conflict and danger their society operates in.

"She enjoys her freedom in this land but I am a native and not allowed to"[60]. This quote is from Ayat's mother when explaining why she cannot visit Rachel's mother even though she wants to. Once again this could go to show the sort of resentment that exists between the two

---

[56]"To die in Jerusalem" 00.29.00
[57] Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. P. 21
[58] Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum. P.24

[59]"To die in Jersualem" 00.44.34
[60]"To die in Jerusalem" 00.46.43

sides. It serves as an example that for Ayat's mother, the conflict is deeper than just the death of her daughter as she indicates the unjustness of the Israeli occupation. In the same sequence Rachel's mother claims she is afraid to visit the camp as she believes she would be killed even though Ayat's parents say they would welcome here to talk with them in peace. It is another example of how the distrust puts them apart as they have created images of each other as villains.

When Rachel's mother later tries to visit Ayat's parents, some in the film-crew are stopped and taken in for questioning, so she spends the afternoon with a Palestinian christen priest[61]. She says how she wishes for Ayat's mother to stand up and say that what her daughter did was wrong and set an example for other Palestinians. The priest then explains how that will not happen since their suffering would be worse as their daughter would have died for nothing.

This hearkens back to a previous scene where Ayat's father claims there is no better thing than to die in martyrdom and Ayat's mother saying they are all preordained to be martyrs[62]. This could be another example of coping mechanisms as even non-radicals, and in their heart peaceful people, has adapted to the situation of their society and in ways accept the actions of the radicals who resist with violence. If they see their goals as just they might see the violence as inevitable and on some levels reasonable[63].

In the final part of the documentary, unable to meet in person, Rachel's mother and Ayat's parents talk via video and satellite[64]. The meeting begin well with both mothers stating their belief that their daughters would have been friends in another place. As they try to talk about their daughters, though the conversation quickly switches to an argument about the Israeli occupation, violence and the Palestinian attacks on civilians. The discussion gets more heated and they both argue their cause with similar arguments. Both say they are the innocents under attack and both believe that the other side is the instigator.

This final scene summarizes the major theme throughout the film, the difference in narrative. In a way they embody Bar-Tals clash of narratives-theory that in its core is much about negating the other sides' version of events[65].

---

[61]"To die in Jerusalem" 00.50.36
[62]"To die in Jerusalem" 00.39.55
[63] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 765
[64]"To die in Jerusalem" 00.54.50
[65] Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts.

Conclusion

Both films is more of an exposition of people living in the current situation in Israel-Palestine rather than trying to tell its own story. This makes it easy to get a perception of societal beliefs and recurring themes. *"Promises"* deals with a younger generation's life and ideas. Most of these children formulate opinions and beliefs that seem to stem from their parents and the adult society they operate in. Mostly so because they can be perceived to talk about things they seem unlikely to have knowledge about. As the film progresses and some of the kids get more informed they are forced to relent on the reality they have hold for certain. This culminates when the kids meet and can't resist enjoying each others company. They seemed almost confused and also sad because they realise it is unlikely to last. This goes to show how societal beliefs, dehumanization and perception irreconcilability is not unchangeable factors but something created through shared beliefs in groups. A strong factor in a prolonged intractable ethnonational conflict is the unwillingness to accept the opponents view and to delegitimize and in some cases dehumanize them. "Promises" highlights how these obstacles are both easy to overcome but hard to accomplish.

This can be compared to "To die in Jerusalem" where an older generation also holds firm beliefs that are even more entrenched because of personal losses, which are perceived to be solely caused by the opposing side. Just as in "Promises" there is a meeting of the different side but where the children reached a realisation that they were not so different after all, the adults only retreat into their own ideological encampment. Whether this is because of the open minds of younger people or the circumstances surrounding their exchange is not possible to conclude based on the material.

In the epilogue to "Promises" some of the children have in variable ways changed their societal beliefs. Some of the children are less radical though not turned around completely but they all convey emotions of being tired of conflict. The same can certainly be said about the parents in "To die in Jerusalem" but they don't indicate to be willing to concede their opinions about each other to reach and end.

The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 762

Trough both of the films it becomes clear how big a role fear of the out-group has. Rachel's mothers goal of meeting Ayat's mother, and discuss the sorrow of losing a child is overshadowed and hindered by the fear established in society, caused by the negative traits constructed towards the Palestinians.

As mentioned earlier this fear is socially constructed and can be changed. Mahmoud is an obvious example of this, in "Promises" the dehumanized image of the Israelis is an anchored belief. In the epilogue one learn that this dehumanization is caused by fear. He explains that at the premiere of "Promises" he was one of the few Palestinians present in a theatre with mostly Israelis. His primordialistic identity is still present since he still belief that Palestine is for Palestinians but the fear of the Israelis is diminished.

The most positive example of change in narrative is Faraj. Even though he expressed fear and hatred towards the Israelis the meeting of Yarko and Daniel began to challenge his established societal beliefs. In 2001, Faraj moved to the United States and for a while lived with a Jewish foster family. Some of the cultural and "soft"-primordialistic identity traits he expressed during "Promises" have changed towards a non-primordialistic identity. This becomes obvious when he uses the United States as a positive model, where people of many cultures and religions are able to live side by side without constant violence, fear and oppression. His own wish for the solution of the conflict is tolerance, as he says: "We're not gonna throw them in the sea, and they're not gonna throw us out. We're going to live in the middle, live, and eat fish"[66].

---

[66] Epilog, part 2, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g25pKlM5Lb8, 00.08.08

References

Bar-Tal, Daniel, 2000. *Shared Beliefs in a Society.* Califonia: Sage Publications, Inc.

Bar-Tal, Daniel – Rouhana, Nadim N., 1998. "Psychological Dynamics of Intractable Ethnonational Conflicts. The Israeli – Palestinian Case", *American* Psychologist, Vol. 53, No. 7, p. 761-770

Bordwell David, Thompson Kristin. 2010. "Film art: an introduction" 9th edition. New York. McGraw-Hill.

Joireman, Sandra F., 2003. *Nationalism and Political Identity,* London & NY: Continuum.

Kelman, Herbert C, 1997. "Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict", in Zartman, I.William (ed.), *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques.* Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace,

The Promises Film Project. Website [electronic] 2005. Filmmakers. Available: http://www.promisesproject.org/film.html
Date: 2012-12-19

films:
Promises – the children of Israel and Palestine, 2001, directed by Bolado, Carlos – Goldberg, B. Z. & Justine Shapiro, produced by B. Z. Goldberg & Justine Shapiro.

Epilog, 2004, directed by Bolado, Carlos – Goldberg, B. Z. & Justine Shapiro, produced by B. Z. Goldberg & Justine Shapiro.

       Part 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y__peQ0QAxc 10.01.13

       Part 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g25pKlM5Lb8 10.01.13

To die in Jerusalem, 2007, directed by Medalia, Hilla, produced by Hilla, Medalia – Priddy, Ed & John Priddy

Annex 1

Dialouge 1

01.13.48 -1.14.58

B. Z.: Do you want to meet Jewish children?

Children: I'm willing!

Faraj: i don't want them to come here. Even if he understands me, when he grows up he'll – take his father's side against me – otherwise his father would kill him. He'd rather displace us than join us and be displaced.

child 1: you're dogmatic. You have to understand their thinking. THEN respond.

Faraj: of course I'm dogmatic! What do you expect after all we've been through?

Child 2: maybe he'll understand you. When he grows up he might come to help you. Maybe he'll be displaced just like you.

Faraj: he could never handle one tenth of what we went trough! They killed your brother, and you want to make friends with their sons?

Child 3: but THEY didn't kill Bassam.

Faraj: their father might have

child 1: i believe all children are innocent.

Annex 2

Dialouge 2

1.16.26 - 1.17.45

child 1: I'm sure we'll never return to our villages. I'm absolutely positive. We will never have our homeland. I just want one thing: remove the borders. Take away the checkpoints. We want to live with them!

Child 2: if we refuse to meet Jewish kids and they refuse to meet us – there will never be peace between us and the Jews. Nor between any two countries.

Faraj: we Arabs are killing each other because of THEM – and you want me to become friends with them?! Israelis will never understand us. Neither adults, nor kids!

Sanabel: why is it the childrens fault?

Faraj: the children will grow up!

Sanabel: they might feel with us!

Faraj: they won't feel.

Sanabel: no Palestinian child ever tried to explain our situation to the Jews. Arabs and Jews should meet –

Faraj: but Netanyahu –

Sanabel: Not politicians! I want CHILDREN to meet.

Annex 3

Dialouge 3

1.14.59 – 1.15.57

Mahmoud (M): do i want to meet Jewish children? no.

B. Z.: but I'm a Jewish boy.

M: you are an AMERICAN Jewish boy. Do you speak Hebrew? Speak Hebrew!

B.**Z:** (Shalome)

M: that's all!?

B. Z.: no i speak perfect Hebrew. Because i studied here. Here in Jerusalem, Israel, Palestine. I'm half Israeli.

M: you're also half American, not just Israeli. It's not a problem. I was talking about AUTHENTIC Jews. Not Americans. Not mixed.

B. Z.: Ok. My brother is an authentic Jew. And I'm an authentic Jew too!

M: he's an authentic Jew? [addressed to the film crew]