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A Hidden Battlefield

The Representation of the Border and the
EU in the Israel/Palestine Conflict

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Introduction

The dispute over land and borders lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As in other cases of nation building this embodies political, cultural and social aspects as well as questions concerning identity, class formation and the symbolic production of space (see: Passi, 1999; Agnew and Corbridge, 1995; Smith, 1985; Anderson, 1983). Notions of political homeland, the symbolic and mythical territory which constitute a central part of national identity and attachment, are central to our understanding of the way in which Israelis and Palestinians formulate their respective border and territorial discourses.

This argument coincides, among others, with Edward Said's claim (Said, 1978) that no single person, nor any society, are beyond or outside the struggle over geography which is fought, he maintains, using not merely weapons but also ideas, images and imagination. This struggle escalates when the issue is discussed within a context of national space and borders, which represents a geopolitical and social order aimed at sustaining congruity between the population's homogeneity and the outlining of geographical borders, and formulating the connection between the national identity of that population and the collective significance it associates with that space.

Following this line of argument in this working paper we aim to deal with the representation of the border conflict and the representation of the EU. Both dimensions will be analysed for both conflict parties, emphasising the way in which these two dimensions relate to the wider societal level on both Israel and Palestine, and how and why these representations have changed overtime.

The Representation of the Border Conflict

In the following section we will briefly outline the way in which the borders and territorial dispute has been shaped, transformed and reproduced at specific political junctions. We do not aim to present a comprehensive and detailed historical analysis here. Rather, we focus on those events which have shaped the main contours and transformations of the conflict through the different phases which have been identified in
the theoretical framework of this project, namely: conflict episode, issue conflict, identity conflict and power conflict. This description is important in order to understand Israeli and Palestinian attitudes and perceptions to be presented later.

A significant shift in the border conflict is marked in the partition plan of 1947. Integrating identity into the conflict was clear in this stage; the discussion around Israeli territory – a Jewish state - and borders cannot be separated from the wider context. The end of the World War II and the tragic circumstances of the holocaust are important as a background. Yet, it is important to note that while the international community changed its attitude towards the Zionist project, the Jewish-Arab conflict in general and within Mandatory Palestine was still dominant. Additionally, the need to find a solution to the Jewish refugee problem in Europe and the struggle of breaking off the British Mandate policy were articulated in the Zionist Movement demand to encourage the migration of Jews.

The 1948 war was a clear example of power conflict. It was based on violence as the main communication style; physical force was an acceptable means of dealing with the other side. For the Israeli side the war marked the independence of the new Jewish state while for the Palestinians it is the Al Nakbe (the disaster). At the conclusion of the 1948 all of the Arab countries signed a cease-fire agreement with Israel, starting with Egypt and concluding with Syria. These agreements specified the interim borders between Israel and the Arab states (the "1949 Armistice Line" that became known as the "Green Line").

The 1967 War caused many significant changes in Israeli social, political and cultural reality. This power conflict phase involved many issues of identity and historical belonging supported by religious, often messianic, arguments. In the context of this paper it is important to mention the territorial aspect: i.e., vast territories were now under Israeli control including Jerusalem, and demographically, a large Palestinian population came under Israeli rule. Most of these changes were not seen as permanent by the Israeli government. After long deliberations for a number of days the Israeli government accepted a decision (which was kept secret) in which Israel was ready to give back the Sinai and the Golan heights in return for a peace agreement. The question of the West Bank remained open. Following the annexation of the territories an intensive process of
colonisation (in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Height) started, encouraged by a different Israeli government using security discourse and often religious reasons for justifying it. The results of this policy are visible; the West Bank, for instance, is broken up by Jewish settlements, Israeli controlled roads and large tracts of Israeli controlled land designated as military areas or nature reserves. Colonisation, indeed, must be seen as a violent act that radically interferes into a previously accepted autonomy of identities.

Officially called the "Declaration of Principles," the Oslo accords were negotiated secretly by Israeli and Palestinian delegations in 1993 in Oslo, Norway, guided by Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst. They were signed at a Washington ceremony hosted by U.S. President Bill Clinton on September 13, 1993, during which Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook hands. From the territorial point of view, the Oslo accords included gradual withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and the Palestinians' right to self-rule in those territories.

In parallel to the diplomatic efforts of implementing the road map a different reality is on the ground. In summer 2002, during an intensive period of attacks on Israeli civilians, the Israeli Government started the construction of the "security fence". The International community demanded a report concerning the impact of this wall on Palestinian livelihoods as well as on the humanitarian aspects of such project (World Bank Report, 2003). It is important to note, in the context of this paper, that the wall's alignment does not coincide with the green line; in some points the wall is located six km inside the West Bank and as a result, 12,000 Palestinians in 15 villages will find themselves on the western "Israeli" side of the wall, disconnected from the rest of the West Bank. Additionally, the wall is also constructed in the Bethlehem and Jerusalem area. The cost of such project is 6.5 milliard shekels and when it ends, the length of the wall will be around 600 km (twice the length of the green line) (Haartez, 30/4/2003).

In Israeli discourse the term "fence" is widely used, while in reality the system of fortifications currently being erected on Palestinian lands in the West Bank combines an eight meters high concrete wall, wire fences and electronic sensors, a path to reveal footprints, an area into which entry is forbidden, a two-lane road for army patrols, and
watchtowers and firing posts every 200 meters along the entire length.

The consequences of constructing a "security wall" are highly political; it creates facts on the ground that might define the borders of the future Palestinian state to be dictated in the framework of the road map: three enclaves completely cut off from each other, without the Jordan Valley, without part of the agricultural lands between Jenin and Qalqilyah and without metropolitan Jerusalem. This phase, indeed, points to the shift in the situation from power conflict into a phase of identity conflict; the responsibility for disaccord is attributed to and identified with the other side. This "justifies" Israel's one-sided act of bordering which obviously embodies a potential of returning to the power conflict stage.

But beyond the problematic nature of this specific project, we would suggest that it reflects the very notion of historical process described above. It tangibly produces a separation between Israel and the territories. The notion of separation was pushed forward to the Israeli public discourse supported by academics (Schueftan, 1999) as well as by different organisations who tried to depoliticise this action, using a securitisation discourse, such as the "Gader LaHaim" (A Fence for Life), neutralising identity dimension and transforming it to an issue conflict.

In relation to the above background, let us move in the following section to the way in which the border conflict is represented in both Israeli and Palestinian discourses. More specifically, our aim is to understand (a) How representatives of NGOs and other targeted individuals from the wider societal level perceive the border and the conflict; (b) How these representations are constructed in the media, school books and other cultural material; and (c) How these representations of the border (conflict) shape the identities on both sides of the border.

**Israeli and Palestinian NGOs Representatives**

How is the Israel\Palestine border conflict perceived by NGOs representatives from both sides? It is important to note that all interviewees refused to accept the term "Border conflict". Rather, both Israeli and Palestinian emphasised the identity issue attached to it,
the historical circumstances of both parties and their narratives. Samir Hazboun (19.7.2004), for instance, highlights the image of the "Other" as it is constructed following the last Intifada:

"I don’t see Israelis! All we see are soldiers! The Israeli military face is imposed on us by the occupation. If we could see the human side of Israelis, it would be of difference. We see for example Palestinian merchants who deal with Israeli merchants rarely report any trouble! In the past, we only dealt with Israeli army us being under occupation, but after the P.A. came they separated us from each other by checkpoints, and we were put into ghettos restricting our movement and our whole life! Now dealing with any Israeli, I only manage to see the soldier in him, he is the one terrifying me by my ID, requesting my permit… there is fear. It’s all about security! If I am a Palestinian businessman who works between the West Bank, Israeli areas, and Jordan I would need 14 different basic requirements to be constantly with me for my job to go well, and this is all security… it would definitely be different if we were more human to each other".

Professor Salim Tamari (21.7.2004) argues that the current conflict "is one of future destiny determination that is leading in the end to NO real determination of any borders". According to him this is "leading the new generation to a state of desperation because the current situation is obviously not leading to real borders of a real Palestinian state". Lilly Habash (21.7.2004) refers to it through the history of the "Other" stating the following:

"Concerning the border conflict, we look at the history of the Zionist movements and compare the decisions taken about the conditional states that coexist on the basis of the 1967 borders with the current situation; we see that Israel is totally ignoring this decision. We can’t say theoretically that we want two states on the borders of 1967 knowing that what happens now will never lead to that aim! The Apartheid wall is a huge obstacle in the way of such an aim. I don’t want to sound very frustrated but the facts of
what’s going on in the West Bank is an indicator of all this. Ghettos are being formed with complete Israeli control over the borders, same happened in Oslo when we were not fully aware of this. What I want to say is that I can’t see a horizon to this peace process. Some steps are taken and thought of to be very positive but they are actually not. In the same time, we have to be more professional and less stupid in giving the other an excuse for all the violence and the acts that are taken against Palestinians”.

At the Israeli side very similar approach is raised by the interviewees. For Jeff Halper, the head of ICHAD, the conflict is not just a territorial one, rather "it is about identity" (4.3.2004). In an interview with Prof. Gerald Steinberg (26.2.2004), who can be politically located in the opposition to Halper, this attitude is also expressed:

"I do not see it solely as a border conflict. Rather, it is an ethno-national conflict in the same category as the Balkans, Northern Ireland etc. This is an existential conflict and not just a border issue. If it was a case of border conflict it could be solved. This is the essence of my criticism towards the European perspective – it is not a technical issue of border marking".

But beyond the critical view of Europe by Israel, there are some other voices that are in favor of the EU. An example is the Council for the Integration of Israel in the EU (www.israel-in-eu.org) which "represent[s] a growing group of Israeli citizens from all walks of Israeli life who are committed to the idea of integrating Israel into the European Union". The historical narrative that "justifies" this initiative is emphasised in the text stating that "As a matter of fact, Israel was already fully integrated with that first and ancient European Union, known as the ... Roman Empire". Furthermore, the Council uses another argument that justifies such integration; yet this argument is also used by many of the critical social scientists in Israel that point to the colonial characteristics of Israel in the region:
"The modern State of Israel was envisioned by Europeans. It was established by Europeans, and created as a nation state after the European model. Israel adopted the European political system. Israeli law is based, in large part, on European law. Israel and Europe share common cultural and liberal values. Europe is in fact the democratic cradle of Israel's configuration”.

**Media, schoolbooks and other cultural materials**

In the following section we will analyse the way in which the border conflict is constructed, reproduced and represented in the cultural sphere. This sphere, we would suggest, has a significant influence on many Israelis and Palestinians.

According to Podeh (2002) there is a significant importance to the role of schoolbooks, which are an official expression of ideology and ethos within a given society. Schoolbooks (as one of the mechanisms of the education system) produce and shape social values, goals and identity of the new generations. Moreover, schoolbooks are perceived as authoritative as well as factual and often they are the only exposure to knowledge. In this context it is important to examine the contents of both Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks and their role in the conflict. As we will discuss in the following section, schoolbooks are used as a central tool in the Israel\Palestine conflict; on one hand (as in many other cases) they are the main source of "official" knowledge and construct the perception of the border conflict, while on the other hand they are symbolic battlefields where each party points at the "other" side’s manipulation.

An Israeli organization – Palestinian Media Watch (www.pmw.org.il) – reports on Palestinian text book indoctrination which compliments PA music videos and other forms of popular culture. According to this report, the aim of these materials is "to convince children that their place is in the heart of battle zones". The example given in the report refers to a 6th grade schoolbook which teaches Palestinian children to follow the example of a young child, who according to Islamic tradition fulfilled these combat support roles. According to this tradition, while Muhammad and his companion Abu
Bakr hid in a cave, Abu Bakr’s young daughter aided them by passing them information about the enemy and giving them water. These Palestinian schoolbooks, according to Palestinian Media Watch, teach children to see themselves in similar roles:

"Asma, Abu Bakr’s daughter, was my age when she played a role in supplying provisions and water and passing information about Kuraish [Tribe] to the Prophet and his companion during their secret Hegira [emigration] from Mecca to Medina. What role can I play in order to support the national resistance movement against the occupier and colonialist?" (History of the Arabs and Muslims, sixth grade, p. 34, translated by CMIP emphasis by CMIP).

Beyond the story which demands the identification of the new Palestinian generation with Asma, Israel is defined as colonialist; an approach which stands against official Israeli narrative. Moreover, the Palestinian Media Watch critic emphasises the use of the term “resistance” which is used by the PA leadership and media "to refer to all terrorists, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others".

Another Israeli source - The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (C.S.S.) (www.intelligence.org.il) - stresses that "Children and teenagers, who are often used as cannon fodder by the Palestinian terrorist organizations, are brought up in an environment instilling in them deep-rooted hatred and indoctrinating them with the ‘armed struggle consensus’ against Israel". Part of this consensus, this source argues, "is the portrayal of martyrs (shahids), including suicide bombers who perpetrated acts of murder in Israeli population centers, as role models and objects of admiration" (emphasis in the report). The means to achieve it are through "games with their friends; in mosques; through television broadcasts; through the education system (both formal and informal - such as summer camps); and by a wide variety of other means". A special emphasis of this report is on school notebooks and scrapbooks "reflecting the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli violent confrontation and commemorating the Palestinian martyrs".
Indeed, the above examples are the expression of a partisan (pro-Israeli and right wing) opinion. Yet, it is important to note that the IPCRI (Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information) also reports on recommendations for reforms in Palestinian text books (2003, 2004). The report shows that Palestinian text books deliver confused messages; this is mainly in relation to the fact that reading through these texts it is not difficult to come to the understanding that the main political theme imparted to the students is that Israel should not exist and that is essentially the Palestinian goal. The report states (2004: 3):

"… curriculum designers and materials writers, historically, have been more exclusive than inclusive of the wide range of ethnic and cultural diversity that exists within a particular society, nation or region… Palestinian students are also going to need to be citizens of this planet and neighbors of the State of Israel".

Among the different issues mentioned in the IPCRI report, let us mention those that refer to the border-territorial conflict:

"- The new text books still reflect an inadequate and imbalanced representation of the Jewish historical connection to Greater Middle East…
- The practice of ‘appropriating’ sites, areas, localities, geographic regions, etc. inside the territory of the State of Israel as Palestine/Palestinian … remains a feature of the newly published text books…
- …the recently published textbooks … include a good number of neutral as well as negative references to Israel
- A good number of maps presented across the curriculum show Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza strip as one geographic entity… Historically Palestinian cities (e.g. Akka, Yafa, Safad, al-Lid, Ar-Ramla, Beer As-saba’) are included in some maps that lump together the areas controlled by the PA with those inside Israel…
- Jihad is indirectly glorified. References to martyrs, martyrdom, and the need to defend the ‘homeland’ and regain it appear both in historical and present-day context, especially the language, arts, social studies, national education, and religious education textbooks.
- Although multiple references are found in the new textbooks that call for respecting, accepting and showing tolerance to the "Others", the textbooks fail to directly and clearly extend the principles and concepts of peace, religious and political tolerance to include non-Muslims and non-Arabs and to apply them in present-day contexts to the Jews and the State of Israel" (IPCRI Report II, 2004: 4-9).

However, it should be noted that IPCRI is planning to issue a parallel report on needed reform in Israeli textbooks. The need to also study comparatively Israeli textbooks is highlighted in a recent comparative study that shows how both sides narrate the conflict from their own perspective, ignoring the other side.

A recent research conducted by Dr. Ruth Firer of Hebrew University and Dr. Sami Adwan of Bethlehem University (a book published by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Germany, entitled The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in History and Civic Textbooks of Both Nations) aims to study both sides comparatively (Haaretz, 9.12.2004). The study covers Israeli and Palestinian textbooks and presents a "mirror image" in which each side pins responsibility for the violence on the other. For example:

"…what the Israeli books call ‘events’, the Palestinian ones call ‘uprising’; the 1948 war in the Israeli textbooks is the ‘War of Independence’, and in the Palestinian books, al Nakba (The Catastrophe). Israeli textbooks regard Palestinian nationalism as a political reaction to Zionist and British policy, whereas textbooks in the territories see Palestine as a nation existing of its own accord that is at the same time part of the Arab and Islamic world" (Haaretz, 9.12.2004).
This research also suggests that while in the Palestinian representation the core of the conflict is over the land; in the Israeli eyes it is over security:

"The Palestinians claim to be the descendants of the Canaanites, and thus being indigenous to the land, while the Israelis regard the Palestinians as a new nation of the 20th century born in response to the Zionist repatriation and the British Mandate. According to the Israeli version, the Israelis have rights to the land because of their religious, historical and cultural legacy. The national self-image of the Israelis includes all the layers of the past, starting with the ancient Hebrews, to the suffering Jews in the Diaspora, the victims of the Holocaust and the revived modern Jew in the Zionist Renaissance" (Haaretz, 9.12.2004)

Interestingly enough, the research found some parallel aspects between Israeli and Palestinian representations as they appear in books:
(a) In both cases periods of relative calm and coexistence are ignored - for instance in 1921-1929 - or mentioned as a misleading interval in a prolonged conflict.
(b) Neither party mentions the "other" narrative of the conflict.
(c) In both cases details of the human suffering of the other side are ignored.

The year 1995 is mentioned in this research as a turning point at which a change for the better took place in peace education in Israel. The research quotes a statement made by the previous education minister Yossi Sarid in January 2000, that he had given instructions to purge from the textbooks any hint of anti-Arab stereotypes and to initiate a free discussion of less positive events in Israeli history. However, since the beginning of Al-Aqsa Intifada and the return of the Likud to power the research points to a move back to the previous values and representations that marginalise peace education and abandon any attempt to understand the Palestinian side. This trend is also approved by Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of the Tel Aviv University School of Education, who analysed the contents of all 124 textbooks, covering the subjects of literature, Hebrew, history, geography and citizenship, all of which were approved in 1994 for use in the Israeli education system. He found that the decline in the representation of Arabs in the 1980s
and 1990s began to seep back into the education system after the outbreak of the Intifada.

Dr. Nurit Peled-Elhanan from the Hebrew University School of Education recently completed an in-depth study of six Israeli textbooks published in the past few years. One of her major findings is the blurring of the Green Line. For example: the book "Israel – Man and Expanse", published by the Center for Educational Technology, features a map of Israel's institutions of higher learning, with colleges in the occupied territories such as Ariel, Elkana, Alon Shvut along with colleges within the green line such as in Safed Ashkelon. Moreover, the book's maps do not refer to any Arab city in Israel, although holy sites in the West Bank are presented as an integral part of the State of Israel.

On most of the maps appearing in the books examined by Peled-Elhanan, Ariel (the West Bank) and Katzrin (the Golan Heights) are marked as part of the State of Israel. A map of the national parks ignores the green line. Peled-Elhanan argues that this is a sophisticated way of ensuring that the pupil will espouse certain basic political assumptions. "When the Palestinians write 'Palestine' on the maps in their textbooks, it is considered incitement," she says (Haaretz, 9.12.2004).

To sum up this section, let us conclude that the way in which the border conflict is constructed in the cultural sphere plays an important role in the Israel/Palestine conflict; it creates the image of the "Other", it creates a selective imagined geography and produces mental border between both peoples. Hence, the EU sees the cultural sphere as an important space for intervention, aiming to promote "reconciliation and peace, both in Israeli and Palestinian society" (http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations). This is of particular importance given the generalised and ongoing Israeli critique that the PA has not done enough to change the structural conditions of socialisation through which Palestinian children are taught about Israel and Judaism in their schools (Brown, 2001; 2002; IPCRI, 2004a; 2004b). Although the European Commission has not recently committed funding for education, "it is fully supportive of individual EU Member State and other donor efforts to develop a modern system of Palestinian education":

"This is one of the essential building blocks of a future democratic Palestinian state living in peace with Israel. Rather than ignoring Palestinian
education, international donors should be encouraged to support these efforts and do all they can to generate a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding between peoples. Withdrawal of donor support to the Education sector would have severe repercussions on these early efforts of the Palestinian Authority to introduce a more balanced education curriculum".

The European Commission has called on the PA and President Arafat to speak out against incitement to hatred and violence, particularly in schools. In this context the Commission was encouraged by the Palestinian Authority's 100-day plan of 25 June 2002, in which it declared its intention to "renounce fanaticism in the educational curricula and spread the spirit of democracy, enlightenment and openness on a wide scale".

**Israeli and Palestinian Attitudes towards the EU**

"Normally, when we go abroad, we are respected … Here, it is exactly the contrary." "There is a sentiment of humiliation," he adds, referring to an episode earlier this year when Israel refused to allow EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana visit Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat (Ambassador Chevallard, *Jerusalem Post*, May 13, 2002).

"They say they expect more from Israel, well, we expect more from the EU... We expect a much more balanced and unbiased approach." "What can Israel do when confronted with continuous negative statements from the EU?" (Victor Harel, Israel Foreign Ministry, *Jerusalem Post*, May 14, 2002).

In the following section, we aim to examine how representatives of NGOs and other targeted individuals from the wider societal level perceive the role and impact of the EU in the conflict, and how it is seen in media. Through this analysis we aim to understand to
what extent the EU affects identities on both sides of the border and whether this has any impact on the conflict.

Overall, there is a strong critique of the role of the EU in Israel/Palestine. While the Palestinian Authority welcomes direct EU intervention as a means of balancing what they see as pro-Israel bias from the USA, Israel has developed an ambivalent relationship towards the EU and, in recent years, has become quite antagonistic towards Europe for what they perceive as a pro-Palestinian bias. This is reflected in anti-European statements from political leaders and anti-European articles in the main media. Leading the way in recent years has been the right wing newspaper, the *Jerusalem Post*, in continual editorial and leader articles, which demonstrate a strong anti-European bias and polemic (Stephens, 2004).

Furthermore, while examining official Israeli political parties' manifestos, almost a total ignorance regarding the EU in general and its role in the conflict in particular is evident. The labour party presents its attitude towards the conflict (mentioning disengagement and the construction of the separation wall) without any reference to the EU. The Likud party emphasises the economic dimension and the interest towards upgrading Israel's economic links to Europe. As for the political link, there is a general statement that there is a need to "deepen the political understanding with the EU". Meretz party mentions the EU in relation to the law forbids advertising cigarettes, which is "backed with the recommendation of the EU". Balad party (which is dominated by "Israeli-Arabs") also ignores the EU in its manifesto. Interestingly enough, the only manifesto that mentions the EU is the right wing Ichud Leumi party:

"Israel's foreign relations can not be only with the US. There is a need to act to strengthen Israel's relations with the European community, and to develop the national and economic interests of Israel in the European countries, both in the East and the West".

The anti-European sentiments are clearly expressed in the results of the Peace Index research which is conducted by Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann from Tel Aviv University (spirit.tau.ac.il). For example, the April 1997 Peace Index points to the fact
that most of the public is opposed to external assistance to the peace process, including Western Europe (40% for and 54% against). Furthermore, the United States is considered as the only country whose increased involvement in the peace process the public generally approves, and whose involvement the public desires or even greatly desires (81% in favour and 15% against, the remainder having no opinion). This tendency is also expressed in the May 1998 Peace Index. The findings show that the majority of the public are not in favour of the increased involvement of any actor other than the US, and that only 43% support increased European involvement, while 53% oppose it.

However, EU policy on Israel/Palestine does not differ greatly from the USA policy in terms of their demands for a two state solution, a complete freeze of all settlement activities, the cessation of violence, the cessation of unilateral construction of the separation fence, and internal economic and democratic reforms in the PA. The EU and the USA are equal partners in the quartet (the other two being Russia and NATO) which drew up the Road Map plan for peace and which was formally presented to both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships immediately following the Iraq war. The EU has stated its preference for the establishment of a "democratic, viable, peaceful and sovereign State of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders, if necessary with minor adjustments agreed by the parties" (Euromed Report, June 25, 2002).

In this context Steinberg (2004:1) argues that Europe’s policies towards Israel, in the Middle East peace efforts, and in the broader EU Barcelona/Euromed framework have produced little, if any success. Moreover, he proposes that "the evidence demonstrates that Europe’s approaches and initiatives have been highly unrealistic, and relations with Israel are marked by sharp confrontation, including politically and ideologically motivated boycotts". Such arguments are familiar within the Palestinian public discourse and thus Dr. Majdalani emphasised in an interview that indeed "Europe is a main partner in the peace process, a partner of the Palestinian Authority, and a main financial supporter". Yet he stresses, "We are not asking from the EU to be biased towards us!" (Dr. Ahmed Majdalani, Birzeit University, 15.5.2004).

Realising that the government had taken their anti-European sentiment too far, current Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom stated, in his first public statement on assuming office in February 2003, that he would make an effort to improve relations between Israel
and the EU, while Prime Minister Sharon made a number of pro-European remarks on his visit to British Prime Minister Tony Blair in July 2003, although at the same time castigating European leaders for continuing to make official visits to PA President Yasser Arafat even after the current Prime Minister Abu Mazen had been appointed to take charge of peace negotiations. Sharon warned the European leaders that by continuing to visit Arafat they were undermining the status of Abu Mazen and, by association, undermining the continuation of the peace process.

The major issue to have aroused the anti-Europeanism concerns the use of some of the EU assistance to the PA for the purchase of arms, which were then used in terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens. The EU denied this, although they did admit that not all the funds were used in the way intended and that there had not been an adequate system of control over the use of these funds. An article in the daily newspaper, *Maariv* (11.5.2003), makes this point strongly:

"I expect some cynical reactions of some of the readers: ‘paranoid’, ‘xenophobe’... however, unfortunately I can prove my arguments with facts... The EU, consciously or sub-consciously, transfers money to the PA that is used by terror organizations. Actually the EU knows about it and refuses to investigate… The EU prevents Israel from protecting its citizens from the terror attacks of the enemy, it prevents political support to Israel and boycotts it economically and militarily… The EU supports Yasser Arafat, its forever ‘darling’, despite his involvement in terror attacks."

The EU "carrots" to the Palestinians are perceived negatively inside Israel – an attitude best expressed in a recent paper by Bar Ilan University political scientist, Gerald Steinberg who, in his criticism of the large budgets provided by the EU, as well as by individual member states, to the PA and to Palestinian NGOs, argues that:

"… EU officials spoke repeatedly of ‘Palestinian state-building’ while the funds went to the corrupt and anti-democratic elite. In the absence of any controls, the money provided by the EU’s taxpayers was diverted into the"
pockets of and bank accounts of officials and for the purchase of weapons" (Steinberg, 2004:6-7).

This argument is reiterated by the security agencies in Israel. Avi Dichter, the head of the General Security Services, argues that 8 million U.S. dollars from the PA budget go to Arafat, who transfers the money to finance terror (Ynet, 23.11.2003). This atmosphere serves as the background for the prosecution of the EU by two families that lost their relatives in a terror attack. More specifically, the lawyers of the families argue that the EU transferred 230 million Euro in 2002 and that the "European tax payer must know that he gives money to the PA that instigates murder".

The matter could have been resolved if the EU Commission agreed to set up a Committee to examine the accusations but this was initially turned down by EU Commissioner for External Affairs, Chris Patten. It took a formal request on the part of a large group of EU members of Parliament for the committee to eventually be set up. Patten himself did not succeed in endearing himself to the Israeli public by his continuous refusal to visit Israel, despite invitations on the part of the Foreign Ministry and a number of Israeli universities which would have provided him with a stage for delivering a statement on EU-Israel relations and ironing out some of the differences and misunderstandings which have developed over the past few years. Many Israelis viewed Patten as the most anti-Israel of the EU Commissioners, contributing to the poor relations between Israel and the EU (Pardo, 2004).

Israeli critics of the EU have also argued that EU money has been used to promote "offensive political pamphlets that reflect an extremist 'post-Zionist agenda" (Steinberg, 2004:8-9). The fact that the EU sponsors other pro-peace initiatives, be they grass roots such as the People to People programs, or the Partnership for Peace programs, or such groups as Bereaved parents or Rabbis for Human Rights, is only seen by the right wing government and media as an expression of European pro-Palestinian sentiment.

These arguments have been rejected by the EU Representative in East Jerusalem:

"I would accept this critique if we were financing NGOs in Israel who are fighting against the government. We are supporting NGOs that are trying to
find a solution for peace. That's it. These NGOs should be free to develop some ideas. I don't see anything bad in it… It is not a political tool, it is intended mainly to support associations which are trying to cope with problems on the ground. I don't think it's bad for the government in Israel, to have some people who are supporting peace" (Jean Breteche, the EU Representative in East Jerusalem, 28.4.2004).

His counterpart, the head of the EU delegation in Israel, Ambassador Chevellard also shares this point of view, emphasising the EU efforts to create a civil society in both Israel and Palestine:

"What we are trying to achieve is basically two things. To keep alive some sort of dialogue, a variation of exchanges … Israeli-Palestinian civil society … people-to-people … And secondly, what we are trying to achieve is a peace camp in Israel which supports a non-military solution… So we support the groups which are the NGOs… we are talking about centre and left … even though there are some religious groups that we support, basically, most of the NGOs are situated on the centre left" (Ambassador Chevallard, Ramat Gan, 24.4.2004).

Indeed, one of the paths of involvement of the EU in the conflict is via the direct approaches of "societal actors and activities in a conflict region, in particular those actors which are regarded as possible agents of successful conflict transformation, thereby connecting conflict societies with the institutional and discursive framework of the EU. Connective impact often takes the form of financial or organizational support for peace-oriented non-governmental organizations' (Diez et al, 2003). This connective impact approach is perceived as being problematic not only in the eyes of the 'anti-Europeans' but also by Israeli NGOs funded by the EU who points to the unclear agenda of the EU:

"From my contact with the EU I can say the 90 percent is a passive financial resource – they did not have a specific coherent agenda that reflects their
interests; they do not use us. We have a technical contact with them and they do not even use our reports. The only thing that started this month is that they took someone to work with the NGOs that are supported by them – mainly on marketing their agendas” (Dr. Jeff Halper, ICHAD, Jerusalem, 4.3.2004).

In a more 'centre-right' popular daily newspaper, the Israeli attitude towards the EU is presented in a more 'tactical' and sophisticated way, aimed at differentiating between the different European voices:

"Israel must clearly define its objectives with respect to its relations to the EU… Jerusalem must not hesitate to use divide and rule tactics (between the different European countries) as well as the carrot and stick. If Europe is not united [in its approach to Israel], Israel must use this split reality between Rome, Paris, Berlin and Athens for its own interests. Hence, the supportive European countries are welcomed to help in the peace process. The hostile countries… must stay out of the game" (Maariv, 11.8.2003)

But this approach is not limited to the centre or centre-right of the Israeli political spectrum. Interestingly enough, recognising the different approaches towards Israel within the European countries is identified by Jeff Halper, the head of ICHAD – a left wing NGO funded by the EU:

"Europe is not one state – there is no one clear policy. Chris Patten is like a Minister of Foreign Affairs and there is no consensus. You have Germany, Holland and Britain – they are quite conservative in relation to Israel. Despite their critique they support Israel. There is a new Right circle: Denmark, Italy, Spain, Austria. East European countries are much more pro-Israel than west European countries, they are also pro-American in a way that by-passes Europe. Hence there is no critical policy and sanctions, it is also not a central issue in Europe, it is still on the margins of their agenda…"
The EU prefers to leave the job to the Americans" (Dr. Jeff Halper, ICHAD, Jerusalem, 4.3.2004).

The divide and rule policy sometimes pays off, as in the following example. During her official two-day stay in Israel this week, Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds said she avoided meeting with Palestinian leaders in accordance with the Israeli government's request; 'these were the conditions of the Israeli government and we had to respect them because we decided that it is most important to have a dialogue with Israel', she stated.

Recognising the different European voices was also mentioned by Dr. Samih Shbeib, a Palestinian Academic from Birzeit University, who stated that 'there is always difference. The EU is a union of different members with different interests and visions' (Interview, 22.5.2004).

A different EU vision which is closer to the constructive impact is suggested by Breteche, the EU representative in East Jerusalem. This path, which is indirect, is based on the assumption that the EU can put in place completely new discursive frameworks in which novel ways of constructing and expressing identities are created within conflict regions:

"It's very clear. You have a policy, which may be simplistic, but it is very clear for us. We consider that what we want in this region, or what we would like to see in this region, which is neighboring on Europe, is peace. Not only between Israel and Palestine, but also with Lebanon and Syria, and it's done more or less with Jordan, Egypt… Without this state of Palestine, side by side with Israel, without that peace couldn't be achieved. So if we want to do that… we need a state. So if we need a state, we need a strong, transparent, well managed, peaceful state" (Jean Breteche, the EU Representative in East Jerusalem, 28.4.2004).

The statement also said that the Commission would check whether the law contradicts international law and basic human rights, to the extent that Israel's relations with the EU might be affected (Jerusalem Times newspaper, 8.7.2003, at: http://www.jerusalem-
times.net). These perceptions of an anti-Semitic Europe have strongly infiltrated the public image of Europe, as can be seen in the questions/answers column in Haaretz newspaper where Adar Primor, the Foreign Editor, answered readers' questions on Israel's relationship with Europe (www.haaretz.co.il, 23.7.2003):

"Question: "I deeply distrust the EU, but even more their press that reflects the anti-Semitism of the European population. How can this persistent trend be changed?" Jorge Gross MD San Antonio, Texas

Answer by Primor: "To the best of my knowledge, the European media, or at least the serious media, do not support anti-Semitic propaganda, neither directly or indirectly. It sometimes even illustrates greater sensitivity to instances of anti-Semitism than the Israeli media. In addition, when it needs to cover dark scandals in which Jews are involved, the European media does so with kid gloves and with great caution, due to the fear of offending Jews..."

And:

"The Europeans are pushing themselves and that all they want is either to disturb the process or to damage it. Here [in Israel] they are also perceived as those that feel guilty because of the holocaust - in this view they try to say that we repeat these same crimes against other people. Generally speaking, this is how the average Israeli views Europe, which is the basis for demanding the Europeans to be as little involved in the conflict as possible” (Adar Primor, The Haaretz Editor of Foreign News, Jerusalem, 9.3.2004).

But, as though to undermine all efforts at Israeli-European rapprochement, the EU published the findings of a poll take in October 2003, in which the majority of respondents stated that they saw Israel as the single greatest threat to global stability, closely followed by an Italian poll which underlined some strong anti-Israel sentiment on
the part of the country’s population. No amount of public statements to the contrary on the part of both French President Jacques Chirac and Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi, was helpful in resolving the growing emotional antagonism between Israel and the EU. For most Israelis, the findings of these two polls demonstrated that anti-Israeli policies were akin to anti-Semitism and that Europe was not to be trusted as a serious third party player in the peace process. At the diplomatic level this approach is expressed in a yet softer manner. An example of this was the meeting of the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Silvan Shalom, with the 25 European Ministers, at which he requested a more balanced approach from the EU to the conflict since he assumes that the EU can have a central role in the peace process.

The discourse of anti-Semitism is also expressed through other channels. Following the publication of the EU survey, The President of the Jewish Congress, and the President of the European Jewish Congress charged the EU delegation for encouraging anti-Semitism (Ynet, 3.1.2004). International Jewish organizations have often fuelled the flames of tensions and misunderstanding between Israel and other countries, when the Government of Israel would have preferred more diplomatic solutions.

A more cynical, but perhaps realistic, expression of the view vis-à-vis European pressure was published in Nekudah, a popular journal among the Israeli settlers, reflecting the anti-European and anti-external interventionist positions of the Israeli right:

"International pressure - if it at all occurs - will be expressed in two dimensions: the denial of American financial support, and economic embargo from the European countries and some others... Apparently, a European economic embargo is more problematic... but economic interests will always be stronger than political interests. Belgium already called to excommunicate commercial relations with Israel. France, on the other hand, avoids calling an embargo on Israel from the European Common Market side. What is the difference between the two? The French like us more? - Definitely not. They just sell us more; Israelis like driving Peugeot, Renault, Citroen and the French people will not give up such a serious market. On
the other hand, our commercial relations with Belgium are negligible (Belgian chocolate is good, but "Elit" chocolate [an Israeli chocolate firm] is not bad), and hence the Belgians can state such declarations. Israel imports from the European Union twice that it exports, and economically speaking - Europe has no interest to cancel its agreements with Israel" (Feiglin 2003: 34-35)

Prof. Salim Tamari (21.7.2004), a Palestinian sociologist, presents a different view vis-à-vis the Palestinian dependency on the EU:

"We want the EU to implement the theoretical announcements it has been supporting, to try and act practically about it. We don’t have an accurate idea about the EU. We believe that the EU is one big country that can act and influence as one… this is a fault in our media, but the fact is that the EU has its own internal problems, conflicts and contrasts that restrict its influence in this matter. Nevertheless we will achieve nothing if WE don’t do something to help ourselves instead of waiting for the EU to do all the work for us".

A similar view is put forward by Lilly Habash (Interview, 21.2.2004) who accentuated the fact that the EU nowadays is a great power 'that can compete with the USA which is trying to control the world through what they call globalization'. A stronger and more severe critic and demand to an EU clear intervention is critically expressed by Dr. Mahdi Abdel Hadi, Head of Passia who states that 'Europe accepted to play a very marginal role at the very beginning and be in the wagon drove by the Americans' (Interview, 17.8.2004, Jerusalem).

Yet, here again we can see the gap between the way in which the EU defines its role and the way in which some of the Palestinian actors perceive it. Dr. Sami Musallam, Director of the PA President's Office states that the EU 'does not officially have a position on refugees, hiding behind vague rhetoric'. The financial assistance programmes
are no more than a way of avoiding the root political issues of the refugee problem. Musallam argues that:

"The Venice Declaration states that the Palestinian question is more than a refugee problem. The EU formerly referred to UN Resolution 194, but no longer does so, deferring to the results of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Shawki Armany, Palestinian ambassador to Brussels, presses the EU to adhere to resolution 194 as the only resolution dealing with refugees. The EU has given significant aid to refugees through UNRWA and is the largest single donor to the organisation, providing 38% of the budget" (www.passia.org/seminars/95).

Discussion

In this paper, we have explored some of central concepts related to Israeli and Palestinian perceptions of the border conflict and the role of the EU in it. Indeed, as we argued the border conflict is articulated within a wider context that involves the struggle over identity, legitimacy, and the production of geopolitical/cultural "order". Following this, both parties' representations of the border conflict and the representation of the EU can be understood. The representation of the conflict as it is expressed in school books is mentioned in our paper as a significant sphere in which the "hidden struggle" between Israelis and Palestinians is taking place. On one level, it is clear that official schoolbooks are the expression of formal ideology and ethos and thus an educational tool constructing and shaping social values, goals and identity of the new generations. At the same time schoolbooks are considered authoritative and hence an "unquestionable" knowledge.

This paper also discussed how the EU is represented in the public sphere. As the analysis shows, the EU does not benefit from good public relations in the region, with no clear public statement of its intentions, even when it argues that it has been misunderstood or misconstrued by the interested parties – especially Israel. However, it must be emphasised that there have always been efforts at transforming the conflict via
civil society agents in Israel and Palestine. As our analysis of the relevant source material and interviews has shown, this form of intervention has not helped to reach the goal. One obvious reason is the fact that Israel/Palestine relations can best be described as constituting an escalating power conflict, which is based on violence as the main form of communication, and in which physical force is regarded as an acceptable means of “dealing” with the other side. Another reason raised by both Israeli and Palestinian interviewees points to the vague aims and objectives of the EU.

The connective path seems to be the main form of EU intervention in both Israel and the PA. However, while on the Palestinian side it is often perceived positively, and to some extent it paves the road to independence (the establishment of civil society etc), on the Israeli side it is perceived by many critics as another way of supporting 'post Zionist' agendas. Even Israelis who are supportive of the EU point to what they see as its unfocussed aims, making it all the more difficult for them to play a greater role in the political process.
List of interviews:

1. Hisham Mustapha, Palestinian the Planning Ministry, 22.5.2004
2. Samir Hazboun, Associate Professor in Economics and Commerce at Al-Quds University, 19.7.2004
3. Lilly Habash, Senior Special Assistant to the Bureau Chief / Cabinet Secretary / Palestinian National Authority, 21.7.2004
4. Dr. Mahdi Abdel Hadi: the Head of Passia, 17.8.2004
5. Ambassador Giancarlo Chevallard head of the EU Delegation to Israel,
6. Jean Breteche, EU Representative for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 28.4.2004
7. Dr. Ahmed Majdalani, Birzeit University, 15.5.2004
8. Dr. Jeff Halper, Director of ICHAD,
9. Professor Gerald Steinberg. Bar Ilan University, 26.2.2004
10. Adar Primor, Head of the Foreign News Desk, Haaretz Newspaper, 9.3.2004

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