

## **A Question of Identity: On the Israeli Identity of Arab and Jewish Students on Two College Campuses**

**Prof. Dan Soen<sup>\*</sup>, Dr. Nitzza Davidovitch<sup>\*\*</sup>, Dr. Michal Kolan<sup>\*\*\*</sup>**

<sup>\*</sup> *Ari'el University Centre, Israel & Hakibbutzim School of Education, Tel-Aviv;*

<sup>\*\*</sup> *Ari'el University Centre, Israel;*

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> *Western Galilee College, Acre, Israel.*

### **Abstract**

The paper tries to examine whether any difference exists in the sense of Israeliness of Arab and Jewish students on two campuses of higher education in Israel. The main focus of the paper is the Arab students. The point of departure of the research team was that the Israeli Arab citizens feel divided between their (Arab) nation and (Israeli) State. Analysis of the participants' responses to the questions posed to them points to a series of interesting findings. Of foremost importance is the fact that the Israeli identity component in the overall aggregate identity of the Arab students is significantly smaller than that of their Jewish colleagues. Yet, this sense of Israeliness is nevertheless **deeper** than the one revealed formerly in similar studies on other campuses. A favourable surprise is to be seen in the fact that **differences** in the Israeli identity between Arab and Jewish students do exist, however- they are not dramatic.

Two other findings of the study are important. First, the level of Israeli identity among Jewish students was found to be significantly lower than that indicated forty years ago among Jewish high school students in Tel-Aviv. Second, a significant minority among the Jewish students states that the term "**Israeli**" is altogether inappropriate to describe their sense of identity. Which raises a very interesting question.

**Keywords:** National identity; civic identity; Israeliness; ethnic national State; bi-nationalism; exclusion of minority groups.

### **1. Introduction: Colleges operating in a bi-national context**

The study whose findings are analyzed below was conducted in two public colleges in Israel, the Academic College of Judea & Samaria – ACJS – and The Western Galilee College – WGC. It is based on a sample of 459 students, 182 of whom, from the ACJS, and 277 of whom from the WGC. 225 of the students were Arabs; 234 were Jewish. Of the ACJS sample 85 students were Arabs. They constituted 89.5% of the Arab students in the academic tracks. There were more Arab students in the Practical Engineering school and in the pre-academic Preparatory school. These students were not included in the sample. The 97 Jewish students were a representative sample picked up from amongst 1<sup>st</sup> year students of the college. Of the WGC 140 students were Arabs. They constituted about 63% of the Arab students in the academic tracks. The majority of the Arab students studying in the WGC when the research was done attended the non-academic tracks. These were excluded from the study. The Arab students included in the sample were chosen randomly. The 137 Jewish students were chosen randomly from among the 1<sup>st</sup> year students. The questionnaires were administered to the selected students by research assistants.

The study was intended to focus on the relationships between two study groups – Arab and Jewish students. Inter alia the research studied the students' concept of their identity. Against the background of the current social discourse, which promotes post-nationalism ideas, it seems that the Israeli public still recognizes nationality as a prime basis for identity and self determination. The research strived to find out what are the differences – if any - in the perceptions of Israeli identity among the two groups.

The researchers' point of departure was that the colleges operate in a bi-national, pluralistic society under unique geopolitical and historical circumstances that contribute to the spirit of the times (pluralistic in terms of a situation, in which society is comprised of groups that differ by ethnic origin, cultural background, national affiliation, etc. Such societies are sometimes defined as **plural** rather than pluralistic societies [Novice-Deutsch, NA]). Central Bureau of Statistics data indicate the population of the State of Israel was 7.1 million on the eve of the Jewish New Year in September, 2006. Of this population, 5.37 million (76%) were Jews and 1.40 million or 20% of the population were Israeli Arabs (or Israeli Palestinians as they are often referred to). The remaining were "others": new immigrants and their offspring who are not registered as Jews. (CBS 2006, 209/2006).

These data are crucial to understanding the Jewish-Arab relationships in Israel. They highlight the fact that the Jews, who constituted roughly 40% of the population at the end of the British mandate became a majority overnight as a result of the War of Independence. They also draw attention to the fact, that whereas the remaining Arabs numbered a mere 69,000 at the first national census carried out in 1948 (roughly 11% of the total Israeli population at that time) (Lustick, 1985, 62) their number swelled about twenty times (!) since then.

Israel, then, is a bi-national society immersed in a conflict. The Arab-Jewish conflict termed “*an intractable conflict*” by two Israeli researchers Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998), evolved from what were grasped as “mutually exclusive national rights” (Mar’i, 1988, 1). In fact, the conflict is the result of a real battle over resources that are necessary for survival such as competition over land and material resources. It is also grounded in a political and social power struggle over self-determination (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). To make it worse, the conflict has been ostensibly accompanied by a psychological process, which defined the dispute as a zero-sum situation. All in all, this concept enhanced the construction of societal emotions, perceptions and attitudes toward the self as well as the “other” that warranted coping with the situation through the use of radical measures (Bar-Tal & Rouhana, 1998; Bar-Tal, 1996). Since Jews perceived the Arab states as the enemy they treated those Arabs who remained in what became the state of Israel as “*an enemy affiliated security threat*” (Mar’i, 1988, 4).

This distrustful perception was not confined to the Jewish segment of the Israeli population. The negative perceptions and attitudes manifested by Jews towards Arabs were reciprocated (Kaplan, Abu-Sa’ad & Yonah, 2001). Basically, the treatment of the Israeli Arabs gave rise to a sense of threat, sometimes even hatred that they felt towards Zionism and the Jews, who were at war with the Arab nation and who confiscated about half of their land (Hugeirath, 2006). Thus, a survey carried out in 1980 found out that 70% of the Arab respondents maintained that most Jews are exploitative and racist (Smooha, 1988).

The political kaleidoscopic changes in the area are reflected in the collective perceptions of both “self” and “other” among Jews and Israeli Arabs alike (Rekhess, 1998). These perceptions are dynamic, they change over time. The study will try to analyze these perceptions as they emerged from the answers given by the respondents to the questionnaire.

## 2. On the National Identity of Majority and Minority Groups

Social identities are based on individuals’ tendencies to classify themselves and others using a series of social categories, including nationality, religion, ethnic group, sex, income, seniority etc. The group identities that emerge as a result of these classifications create the distinction between “us” and “them” (Tajfel, 1981: Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Needless to say, individuals may concurrently belong to and identify with several groups (Stryker, 1991). These identities are organized in a hierarchical system, in which each identity is positioned on the basis of its centrality or salience (McCall & Simmons, 1978: Rosenberg, 1979).

Collective social identity is considered by sociologists to be one of the most important attributes distinguishing one society from all others (Blau, 1977). Collective identity transforms inter-group relations into the major source of social integration. As early as in 1957, Coleman (1957) stated that when people do not identify with their society, destructive internal disputes may erupt and endanger the society’s existence. This implies that the concept of identity is essential to a society’s existence. The basic identification of society members can be perceived as an indication of the degree of importance society members attribute to their society (Ben Sira, 1979). One of the most important foundations of a society from a sociological perspective is therefore a group of people who identify themselves as members of the society (Parsons & Smelser, 1965).

The key to identity development is found in the conditions that facilitate such development. Since solidarity is a pre-condition for identity development, identities may develop under different conditions or circumstances. When the common denominator of a *lifestyle* is the first and foremost factor of solidarity, lifestyle is a key to identity development. When *ethnic origin* is the factor that generates solidarity, ethnic identity will develop. When *religion* or *language* are the factors of solidarity, identity will be based on these factors. Thus, from the perspective of national identity formation, multi-cultural and multi-national societies contain the seeds of their own potential destruction.

In view of the above, it is important to stress that bi-nationalism is relevant in understanding the relationships between students on campuses. Furthermore, bi-nationalism in Israel is also relevant because Israel is defined as an **ethnic national** state, and is officially defined as a **Jewish** state. In this context it is important to distinguish between multi-national countries, which recognize the importance and the expected continuity of the national diversity of their communities (Switzerland, Belgium,

Canada, for example), and nation states that have a significant connection to a single nationality. Nation states, however, may also be one of two types - ethnic nation states, which provide explicit dominance to one of the resident national groups, and civic national states that wish to obliterate national, ethnic, religious or other factors of diversity that divide the nation (Klein, 1987).

As noted, ethnic national states are characterized by ethnic nationalism founded on a pattern of inter-community relations also known as the ethnic paradigm (Saban, 2000). This nationality is also defined as “exclusive nationalism,” or “restrictive nationalism” that is founded on deep, emotional and relatively confining foundations of identity, on a unique culture or shared history, all emanating from the ethnic origin of the dominant group. Effectively, this is the realization of the approach that believes that a nation is no more than an “invented tradition” or an “imagined community” that emphasizes the cultural foundations of its national identity and the politics of a collective memory (Benedict, 1983).

Identity forms on two levels - cognitive and emotional. On the cognitive level, collective identity is dependent on awareness of the attributes of the national collective, a recognition of its past, and the assimilation of a national discourse. On the emotional level, collective identity depends on a sense of belonging to the national group as well as a spontaneous sense of “shared destiny” or shared purpose.

In view of the nature of Israel, the researchers believed that an examination of the national identity perceptions of students of both national groups was of special significance. In this context, two groups of students – Arab and Jewish - were presented with an identical questionnaire, **with the aim of exploring the degree to which the term “Israeli” appropriately describes their sense of identity**. In fact, who and what is an Israeli is a complex question of identity. As mentioned by some (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Newman, 1998), at the simplest level, an Israeli is a person who holds Israeli citizenship. Yet the question of Israeli identity is also tied up with Jewish-Arab relations and majority-minority status as well as with a variety of ideological, cultural and religious considerations (ibid.).

At this point, an elaboration of the issue of Israeli identity is warranted. This definition is problematic for the Jewish sector and, a fortiori, for the Arab sector as well. The source of the problem for the Arab sector, as many have already stated, is that Israel is effectively a bi-national state with a (Jewish) majority group (76% of the population) and an (Arab) minority group (approximately 20% of the population). The State of Israel was a priori established as a state for the Jewish nation and therefore, its citizens’ definition of identity is extremely significant. Basic civic rights stemming from ethno-religious belonging are grounded in this identity (Haider, 2006). The structuring and labeling of identities are extremely important when discussing minority groups in a multi-national society. Any definition or inclusion of minorities as an integral part of society poses a threat to the ideological framework of the national state (Garland, 1977). The problem becomes more complicated when the establishment of a state by one national group encounters the opposition of another national group based on competing territorial claims. This is the situation in Israel (Zureik, 2001). Matters become even more complicated because the State of Israel is not only defined as a **Jewish** state, it is also defined as a **democratic** state. Therefore, citizenship was granted to Arab residents of Israel - who hold essential resources for state-building, i.e., lands. On the other hand, the State of Israel is “characterized by a deep anxiety regarding its united cultural character” (Shenhav, 2001). In view of all the above, Israel does not allow the assimilation of its Arab citizens. Moreover, it also adopts a offensive and suspicious approach towards them (Hujeirat, 2006b).

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority has been replete with tension and discord. The ongoing dispute over beliefs and worldviews reinforced the inclinations toward segregation, repulsion, suspicion, hate and mutual disregard (Amara, 1994).

It is therefore not surprising that the issue of “Israeliness” is one of the most difficult dilemmas encountered by Israeli Arabs. Rafik Alhaj Yehiyeh, the head of the local council of Taibeh, one of the largest Arab towns, stated, “*We are all torn apart. The question is only where exactly the tear is located.*” (Neuberger, 1991), or, as one Israeli Arab intellectual commented:

*“The fact is that the soul of the Arab who lives in Israel is divided between his people and the state in which he lives, and there is not much comfort in that fact...in this, the Israeli Arab feels that he is in a special position - he must find a compromise between maintaining loyalty to his Arab nation on one hand, and to his Jewish state on the other hand. As a result, the problem of identity is created, or more precisely, the identification with one side or the other”* (Kenaza, 1981).

But the problem does not end there. Ostensibly, since identity implies attributed significance to association or belonging (Bishara, 1999), where the individual perceives himself part of the collective to which he belongs, we could expect a high sense of shared destiny and support for the concept of “Israeliness” at least among members of the Jewish majority. From this perspective, it is

ostensibly simple to define collective national identity as a state of awareness of individuals who see themselves as part of a distinct national group and therefore feel committed to the “truths” presented by this group (Zamir, 2005). We could therefore expect complete identification of members of the Jewish majority with “Israeliness.” Nevertheless, it is a fact that a decreasing number of the Jewish citizens identify with the single, socially constructed, national ethos of Zionism. This is a testament to the fact that Israel has become a very heterogeneous society. It is also increasingly critical in its search for alternative forms of meaning and identity (Shefer, 1997; Ram, 1998).

As noted above, identity emerges on two levels, the cognitive level and the emotional level. A sense of identity is a multi-dimensional concept, which is strongly tied to cultural symbols, ideologies and individual attitudes. A sense of identity also relates to perceptions, emotions and behaviors on the individual and group level (Farago, 1999). Group identity is expressed in identification and communications with the group, and concurrently, in separation and segregation from other relevant out groups. From this perspective, we would have expected the slogan for Israel’s 50<sup>th</sup> independence day, “All together in hope, all together in pride” (Kaspi-Dror & Levin-Epstein, 1998), to be expressed unequivocally at least among the Jewish students belonging to the majority group on both campuses. However, the situation is apparently more complex and the identity issue is not simple at all, even for members of the Jewish majority (Soen, 2003). In fact, Zionist national identity in Israel is today challenged by two mutually antagonistic alternatives: on one hand, a liberal, secular Post-Zionist civic identity; on the other hand, an ethnic, religious, Neo-Zionist nationalistic identity (Ram, 2000).

### 3. To what extent is the term “Israeli” appropriate to describe the identity of Jewish students at both colleges?

That the issue of Israeli identity is not simple even for the Jewish majority, as mentioned above, is expressed in the finding that 10% of the Jewish participants in the current study from the ACJS, responded that the term “Israeli” does not appropriately describe their sense of identity, while a mere 38% of the same group responded that the term “Israeli” is a “very appropriate” description of their sense of identity. At the WGC, the sense of Israeli identity among the Jewish students goes deeper. Yet it does not cancel out the findings at the other college. This picture of a tepid degree of Israeli awareness is a considerable surprise.

The key question emerging from these findings is **why** Jewish students feel that the term “Israeli” does not adequately describe their sense of identity. Is it because they don’t view themselves as Israelis, or is it *because they see themselves, first and foremost, as Jews, and Israelis only in second place?* Needless to say, there is a material difference between these two possibilities.

This ambiguity in interpretation which students attribute to the term, has already found expression in another, earlier study. From this perspective, the picture obtained in that study is remarkable. Several years ago, the following question was posed to a sample of new immigrants from FSU countries who arrived in Israel in the 1990s: “For the following groups, to which do you belong first and foremost: Russians, Israelis or Jews?” Merely 8% of the participants of this early study selected Israeli identity (Lizice & Peres, 2000). However, when identity categories were elaborated to include hyphenated, dual construct - Russian-*Israeli*, *Israeli*-Russian, *Israeli*-Jewish and Jewish-*Israeli* - 42% of the participants selected an identity that included an Israeli element. Since identity is comprised of several strata, secondary layers are sometimes subsumed under primary levels of identification, but **that does not mean that they do not exist!**

The Jews in Israel had to define themselves in relation to three identities: An Israeli, a Jew and a Zionist. To complicate things even further one has to bear in mind that none of these components of identity has a single meaning (Newman, 1998). Israelis spend much of their time trying to figure out just who they are. Several intriguing studies have been published since the 1970s on the clash between “Jewishness” and “Israeliness” with regard to the identity of the Jewish majority. One of the first studies conducted on this issue among secular high school students in Tel Aviv in 1965/6 found that 67% viewed themselves as Israeli, first and foremost (Hoffman & Farago, 1970). Yet, a study conducted as early as the post- Six Day War period found a significant increase in the weight of the *Jewish* identity component among secular high school students (Herman, 1979). In this context, an interesting point emerges from a study on Israeli identity conducted in 2003 by the B.I. and Lucille Cohen Institute for Public Survey Research at Tel Aviv University. This study was part of the ISSP project (International Social Survey Program), that was designed as an international comparative study using identical surveys in various countries. After analyzing the findings of the survey conducted by the Institute, the researchers noted that the Israeli public did not abandon **nationality** as a key basis for identification and self-determination, despite the backdrop of a social discourse that promotes post-national concepts. Approximately one half of the Jewish and Arab participants noted nationality as one of the three most important common denominators of self-determination (together with religion and

family) (Glickman, Oren & Levine-Epstein, 2005). Nevertheless, findings of this study also indicated that approximately *one quarter of the Israeli public define themselves as Jews, first and foremost*. Only 22% define themselves as *Israelis*, first and foremost. Apparently, the Jewish component increased in weight at the expense of the Israeli component. These findings undoubtedly are issues to ponder.

These findings are very different from those obtained in the study conducted in the mid-1960s among high school students in Tel Aviv, which indicated that students felt their sense of Israeliness superseded their sense of Jewishness. As already mentioned, of the participants, 67% viewed themselves as Israeli first and foremost, and only 8% viewed themselves as Jewish first and foremost (Hoffman & Farago, 1970).

**Table 1: Frequency of “Israeli” as a term that appropriately describes students’ identity, by nationality and college, 2005**

College	Nationality	Arab		Jew		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
ACJS	Does the term “Israeli” appropriately describe your sense of identity?						
	Very appropriate	19	26.4	32	38.1	51	32.7
	appropriate	29	40.3	44	52.4	73	46.8
	inappropriate	19	26.4	3	3.6	22	14.1
	Not at all appropriate	5	6.9	5	6.0	10	6.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>
WGC	Very appropriate	19	16.5	63	48.1	82	33.3
	appropriate	59	51.3	60	45.8	119	48.4
	inappropriate	21	18.3	7	5.3	28	11.4
	Not at all appropriate	16	13.9	1	0.8	17	6.9
		<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>246</b>

#### 4. How well does the term “Israeli” describe Arab students’ sense of identity?

As we noted, the first prominent finding that emerged from the analysis of students’ responses was a significant statistical difference between the frequency at which these two national groups declared themselves to be of Israeli identity. Approximately 90% of all Jewish students in the study declared that the term “Israeli” very appropriately or appropriately describes their sense of identity. Approximately two thirds of the Arab students made similar declarations.

This significant statistical difference was found at both colleges. The findings clearly show a connection between students’ nationality and the degree of “Israeliness” that students believe describe their sense of identity appropriately ( $X^2(3)=17.21, p<.001$ ). At the ACJS, 90.5% of the Jewish students felt that the term “Israeli” is appropriate or very appropriate for describing their identity, compared to only 66.7% of the Arab students who responded similarly. This was also the case at the WGC, where a similar connection was found between nationality and perceived appropriateness of the term “Israeli” ( $X^2(3)=42.99, p<.001$ ). Of the Jewish students, 93.9% felt that the term “Israeli” is appropriate or very appropriate for describing their identity, compared to 67.8% of the Arab students who responded similarly.

This discrepancy between the two groups in their sense of Israeli identity should not surprise us in view of the fact that the groups are effectively two camps: *the “exclusive” dominant majority and the “excluded” minority*. Nevertheless, the most interesting finding in the study is that **two thirds of the Arab students declared that the term “Israeli” was appropriate or very appropriate for describing their sense of identity**. This frequency is much higher than that obtained in repeated studies conducted in the Arab sector over the years. The single similar attempt to assess the sense of Israeliness of Arab students was conducted in a study published in 2001 (Kaplan, Abu-Saad & Yonah, 2001), which obtained completely different results. The 2001 study was based on a sample of 172 Jewish and Israeli students of the School of Education of a certain Israeli university. The researchers attempted to explore participants’ sense of belonging to the state by presenting a question on the appropriateness of the term “Israeli” in describing participants’ sense of identity. In that study, 86.3% of the Jewish students responded that the term is appropriate or very appropriate for describing their sense of identity (similar although a bit lower than the findings of the current study), while over 70% of the Arab students noted that the term “Israeli” is **inappropriate** for describing their sense of identity.

*The findings in the current study are diametrically different from the findings of the 2001 study, reflecting a change for the better!*

Another attempt to investigate students' perceived identity with the State was conducted at the Yizrael Valley College [YVC] (De Sevilla & Rottman, 2005), although the items used were different than those used in the current study.

Arab and Jewish students at the YVC were asked to what degree they were satisfied to be citizens of the State of Israel. Three quarters (75%) of the Jewish students responded that they were "certainly satisfied" or "sufficiently satisfied," while only 48% of the Arab students responded similarly. The difference between the two groups was significant ( $t = -3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As the questions posed in the Yizrael Valley study were not identical to the items used in the current, caution is warranted in comparing the findings. Nonetheless, the high rate of Arab students in the current study who declared that the term "Israeli" appropriately describes their feelings, supports the assumption that satisfaction levels are higher than at the YVC.

It is very important to complete the picture obtained from an analysis of sociological data obtained through other means, including individual open-ended interviews. The personal perspectives that surface in such interviews with students indicate that the encounter with Jewish students may affect the identity components of Arab students. Sometimes, despite a positive personal experience in relations with members of the majority group, Arab students' reservations regarding Israeli identity remain unchanged. An astounding illustration is the following confession of a female Arab student of Bezalel, Israel's prestigious academy of arts in Jerusalem:

*"At Bezalel, I did not encounter any discrimination. I feel very comfortable here and feel good. I have many Jewish friends.... Now, my dream is to become an international Palestinian-Arab plastic artist... Why did I chose to define myself as a Palestinian-Arab artist rather than an Israeli-Arab artist? It's very simple: **I am not Israeli** [emphasis added]. I cannot be Israeli. How could I be Israeli if my grandfather is Palestinian and my father is Palestinian and all my roots are Palestinian? There isn't and cannot be such a thing as an Israeli-Palestinian or an Israeli-Arab. That's an invention. For me, Israel is the country that took my land, and gave me an identity card. My flag is the Palestinian flag and my anthem is the Palestinian anthem... One day, when I was 15 years old, I understood that we will never have an Independence Day, and that no one will ever completely accept Palestinians in Israel. We don't belong anywhere" (Shavit, 2000, 24).*

The touching story of the following Arab student of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is set against this spontaneous confession above, replete with rejection of Israeli identity despite positive experiences in inter-personal relations on the campus. The unmediated experience of the next student with his Jewish peers created a genuine transformation in his attitude to his Israeli identity:

*"During the Gulf War, I think I wanted Saddam to win. I never said it in front of people. My mom, my dad, my brothers, they felt something else. They had met Jews. I believe so. I hadn't met any Jews before grade 12. I think I was for Saddam. Whenever he bombed, you know. I prayed that nobody will be killed. I think I enjoyed this. There was this revenge... I like Freud a lot. And Freud [says], if I'm not wrong, you know, revenge is part of us... So I enjoyed that a bit, not much but a bit. But then I came to the university here. And I guess it 100 percent. Meeting. Speaking point was really important. To know, understand. I did not know. I was a child... even if I was 16, I was a child with ideas filled from school. What like? I never imagined myself like. They took my home. OK. But "They". 50 years ago. But you know me praying that somebody will bomb their home, that's wrong, that's wrong, and so many innocent would have been there, so that's wrong. Not that I don't believe in Palestinians fighting the Israeli army. I believe they have their own right to defend their country. Freedom fighters. They're freedom fighters. But it changed. All of it changed in the university. I believe the university was the best forum for coexistence, for everything. It's excellent. You know like my roommate is Jewish, from Iran, a new immigrant. And we're living together. Now he went back to living with his parents because he was sick and he prefers that now. We were living excellent together. And he was religious. He used to pray. He used to put all this and kippa. The thing on the forehead. But it changed, my ideas about Israel changed. **Israel became all of a sudden a home I want to fight for not a home I want to destroy** (the emphasis is ours. The authors)... Now it's my focus in Israel to fight for my rights **as an Israeli citizen** (the emphasis is ours. The authors). And this main focus. And also I started to love this country as Israel. Call it. Or call it Pakistan, I don't care, it's my country. And I want to progress and to prosper" (Schiff, 2003, 289-290).*

In this context, no less impressive is the conclusion reached by Dr. Ghanem of Haifa University, who conducted repeated studies on the identity of the Arabs of Israel. In his ongoing study in 2001, he found that only 37.5% of the participants in his study defined themselves as Israeli, including 21.8% who viewed themselves as “Israeli Arabs,” 6.0% who view themselves as “Israeli,” and 9.7% who defined themselves as “Israeli Palestinians.” The peak of Israeli identity among Arabs of Israel was obtained in his 1995 study, prior to the assassination of PM Rabin, but even then only 54.9% of the participants defined themselves as Israelis one way or another (Ghanem, 2002).

**Table 2: Distribution of national identity definitions of Israeli Arabs in selected years between 1980-2001 (%)**

National identity	1980 N=1,140	1985 N=1,203	1988 N=1,200	1995 N=1,202	1999 N=900	2001 N=1,202
Arab	10.5	5.7	4.9	7.4	13.3	6.4
Palestinian Arab	22.1	21.6	20.6	9.5	15.7	17.5
<b>Israeli Arab</b>	30.3	21.1	24.1	38.4	18.3	21.8
<b>Israeli</b>	4.6	5.3	4.1	7.8	4.3	6.0
<b>Palestinian Israeli</b>	7.7	11.7	10.6	8.7	6.5	9.7
Palestinian or Palestinian-Arab living in Israel	21.1	27.0	29.1	27.4	38.2	36.2
Palestinian	3.6	7.6	6.5	8.0	3.7	2.5

source: Ghanem, 2002.

Sammy Smoocha, the foremost and persevering researcher on the identity of Israeli Arabs, has consistently repeated his identity study since 1976. In his studies, participants are requested to select one of 7-9 descriptions which they believe best describes their individual identity: Israeli, Arab, Palestinian, and the various combinations of these terms. He grouped these identities into three categories: Israeli-Arab identity (Israeli, Arab, Israeli-Arab), Israeli-Palestinian identity (Israeli-Palestinian, Palestinian in Israel, Palestinian Arab in Israel), and non-Israeli Palestinian identity. The latter was defined by Smoocha as a negating identity because it signifies pure Palestinian identity in which any Israeli component is absent (Smoocha, 2005). According to Smoocha, the most prominent finding emerging from his studies is the steep decline in the identification of Arabs in Israel as Palestinian-Arabs. The proportion of Arabs who identify themselves as Palestinian Arabs declined from 32.9% in 1976 to 8.7% in 2004. On the other hand, his 2004 study indicates that Arabs in Israel are divided almost equally between those who first and foremost identify themselves as Israeli Arabs, and those who view themselves, first and foremost as Palestinians in Israel (Smoocha, 2005).

Due to the status of the Arabs as a minority in an ethnic national state, their identification with the state has been the subject of intensive studies, articles and books, in Hebrew (Al-Haj, 1997) and in English (e.g., Amara & Schnell, 2003; Rouhana, 1997; Smoocha, 1992; Suleiman, 2002; Suleiman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1997). Nonetheless, the following statement by a prominent Israeli-Arab media figure may be representative of the attitude of the Arab majority: “*The Arab population is an integral part of Israeliness. but integration into state life does not obliterate origin or nationality at all, and, in particular, does not suppress history or its facts*” (Bahalul, 1998).

Various researchers proposed the following five models to explain the integration of the two identity components among the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel - *national* identity and *civic* identity:

- The bi-polar model (Tessler, 1977)
- The orthogonal or independent model (Suleiman & Beit-Hallahmi, 1997; Zak, 1976)
- The politicization or integration model (Smoocha, 1992).
- The accentuated model (Rouhana, 1993)
- Identity as a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Amara & Schnell, 2003).

The bi-polar model is accepted by historians and social scientists (e.g. Landau, 1993; Tessler, 1977). According to this model, national identity and civic identity are mutually exclusive as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Identification with any party to the conflict precludes identification with the other party. Therefore, alienation from the State of Israel is exacerbated by strengthening of Palestinian identity.

The orthogonal model rejects the bi-polar model and claims that a synthesis between the two elements of identity - the Israeli and the Palestinian - is feasible. Zak (1976) examined this argument

using factor analysis and concluded that national (Arab) identity and civic (Israeli) identity constitute two of the three domains which identify the collective identity of Arabs in Israel. Suleiman and Beit-Hallahmi (1997) concluded that the identity of Arabs in Israel is bi-dimensional: one dimension is Palestinian-national and the second dimension is Israeli-civic.

According to the politicization or integration model (Smootha, 1992), Arabs in Israel undergo two simultaneous processes. A “New Arab” is developing in Israel, one that undergoes a process of “Palestinization” and “Israelization.” The “New Arab” successfully merges both elements of collective identity. According to Smootha, the “New Arabs” are bilingual and bi-cultural; they feel solidarity with the Palestinian nation, but are loyal to Israel; they support the PLO and, at the same time, they strive towards a solution of two states, Israeli and Palestine, existing alongside each other. They view their future in the State of Israel.

In a more recent paper, Suleiman (2002) explains the adherence of Arabs in Israel to these two identities - the national and civic identities - through a painful process of marginalization that they experience simultaneously in both the Israeli society and the Palestinian society. On this point, he follows the analysis of Al-Haj (1993) of Haifa University, who claims that the Arab minority is undergoing a double process of marginalization. On one hand, the Arab minority is marginalized inside Israel by the Jewish majority, and on the other hand, it is equally being marginalized by Palestinians who live on the other side of the Green Line border. According to Al-Haj, it is this dual marginalization experience that allows Arabs in Israel to define their identities in national (Palestinian) and civic (Israeli) terms, without making a full commitment to either reference group. According to Suleiman (2002), this double marginalization allows Arabs in Israel to merge their two identities.

The accentuated model (Rouhana, 1993) states that the national (Palestinian) identity of Arabs in Israel is the only identity that has been assimilated by the minority group. Civic (Israeli) identity is of secondary importance and merely formal-legalistic in nature. According to Rouhana, complete ideological, normative and emotional identification is possible only with the Palestinian component. The relationship to the Israeli components is superficial and instrumental.

In contrast to the other models, the model proposed by Amara and Schnell (2003) assumes that identity is a composition of several different dimensions. Each dimension has a clear and significant meaning in a certain domain, and together the dimensions comprise the identity. Empirical studies by these two researchers found that the majority of Arabs in Israel are closely tied to three identity components - *Arab*, *Palestinian* and *Israeli* - with none dominating the others. The *Arab* component of identity is important in three contexts: cultural roots, Middle Eastern solidarity, and the common denominator of the Arab community in Israel. The *Palestinian* component is important in the context of national pride and a common Palestinian history. The *Israeli* component is important in the context of the assimilation of individual and civic liberties and welfare, but also to the negative connotation of everyday discrimination. According to Amara and Schenll, statistical analyses confirm low correlation values between the different identity components. Therefore, there is no inconsistency in simultaneously subscribing to more than one component. An individual could subscribe to the Palestinian component that is a source of national pride, and simultaneously accept the Israeli component that is a source of civic pride.

In fact, in view of the above, a more “subtle” attempt was made to explore ACJS students’ orientations of identification and self-awareness following previous attempts by Hoffman & Farago (1970) and Herman (1979). Use was made of Likert-type scales to ensure reliability of measurements of students’ inclinations. Students were requested to mark the extent to which (on a scale from 1 to 7) the term “Jewish/Arab” or “Israeli” characterizes them.

Jew/Arab ----- private individual  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Israeli -----private individual  
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

To examine differences in average scores, we conducted two-tailed t-tests for independent samples.

**Table 3: Averages, standard deviations and t-values of identity scales, by nationality**

Arabs (N=72)		Jews (N=82)		df	t
M	SD	M	SD		

<b>Jewish-Arab - individual scale</b>	3.85	2.06	3.50	2.03	152	1.05
<b>Israeli-individual scale</b>	3.97	2.28	3.29	2.02	151	* 1.96

\* p<.05

On the **Jewish-Arab individual scale**, no significant difference between nationality groups emerge ( $t(152)=1.05$ ,  $p>.05$ ). Data, however, do indicate that nationality is less salient for Arab students than for their Jewish counterparts. Only 42.3% of the Arabs were in the top three identification scales with nationality groups, compared to 52.3% of the Jewish participants.

**Table 4: Distribution of Jewish and Arab students, by salience of nationality**

Score	(N=71) Arabs	(N=82) Jews	Total
1 Jewish/Arab	25.0	25.6	25.3
2	6.9	12.2	9.7
3	4.2	9.8	7.1
4	22.2	20.7	21.4
5	12.5	13.4	13.0
6	22.2	7.3	14.3
7 Private individuals	6.9	11.0	9.1
<b>total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>153</b>

On the **Israeli - individual scale**, significant differences between nationality groups emerge ( $t(151)=1.96$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Arab students define themselves more as “individuals” ( $M=3.97$ ) than their Jewish counterparts. In other words, they *feel* Israelis to a lesser degree than do their Jewish counterparts. While the differences are statistically significant, they are not dramatic. In this respect it is worth mentioning that *feeling* Israeli is apparently not a pre-condition to *being* a true Israeli in the eyes of Israeli Arabs. Surveys conducted by researchers from Tel-Aviv University revealed that 74% of an Arab sample in 1996 and 93% of an Arab sample in 2003 held the opinion that in order to be a “real Israeli” one has to be born in Israel. A mere 60% of the Arab sample were of the opinion that in order to be a “real Israeli” you have to *feel* an Israeli (Glickman et al., 2005).

**Table 5: Distribution of Jewish and Arab students, by assimilation of Israeliness**

Score	(N=71) Arabs	(N=82) Jews	Total
1 Israeli	22.5	31.7	27.5
2	11.3	9.8	10.5
3	8.5	9.8	9.2
4	18.3	19.5	19.0
5	7.0	12.2	9.8
6	8.5	9.8	9.2
7 Individual	23.9	7.3	15.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>153</b>

P<.05

Yet, the very fact that the Arab students opt for *individualism* rather than *collectivism* in this context is indicative. Interdependence between the individual and the collective is a cultural ideal in collective societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). The Arab society is a collective one (Landau, 1993). Identity is not grasped as an independent entity in this society. Rather, it is part and parcel of a dependence fabric between the individual and his community. The individual is an integral part of the collective (Bolak, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Sagy et al., 2001). The individual and his identity are part of a perfect fabric, which is dependent on interaction with the other members of the collective (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Thus, one would expect the Arab students to be less individualistic on the scale. Which, as we have seen is not the case!

As to the “Israeliness” of the Jewish students, here too there was an interesting finding. Thus, a curiosity emerges when comparing the Israeli identity index findings of the study of *Jewish* students at the ACJS in 2004, to the corresponding index findings in 1965/6 from the study of Tel Aviv high school pupils. **Forty years ago, the emphasis on the national collective was much greater than today.** In 1965/6, 62% of the high school pupils classified themselves in the top three groups on the Israeliness scale (Hoffman & Farago, 1970), while in 2004 only 51.3% of the Jewish students on both campuses classified themselves in the top three groups on this scale. A mere 16% of the high school students, but 34% of the Jewish college students, classified themselves as belonging to one of the bottom three groups on the scale, close to the Individual pole. This relative decline in “Israeliness” as a

marker to students' identity was also exposed in the survey carried out in one of the Israeli universities already mentioned above (Kaplan et al., 2001). Israeli citizenship turned out to be the most important identity marker in so far the Jewish students were concerned. However, a mere 50.2% chose it as the most or second most important marker of their identity (ibid.). These findings ostensibly point to a shift from *a collective to an individual identity focus*.

The question is why. The answer lies apparently in the change of the socio-political climate that took place in Israel since the late 70's of the last century. Israel went through a transition from a culture of State collectivism to a highly individualistic, capitalist culture (Shapira, 2001; Soen, 2005). In any case, in contrast to what may possibly been expected, **no chasm was discovered between Jewish and Arab students on the issue of Israeliness**.

## 7. Summary

The current study attempted to examine whether any difference exists in the sense of Israeliness of Arab and Jewish students at the ACJS and the CWG. The researchers believed that this issue warranted special attention, in view of the fact that Israel is a bi-national ethnic nation state that affirmed, in its Declaration of Independence, its simultaneous obligation to two elements: Judaism on one side and democracy on the other. The special interest in the sense of Israeliness originates from the exclusion of its non-Jewish citizens, a result of the State's Jewish foundation.

The point of departure of the researchers in relying on written responses of Arab citizens was that the Arab citizens feel divided between their nation and the state in which they live. There is a special situation which compels them to find a compromise between loyalty to their Arab nation on one hand, and to the State of Israel, on the other. This situation *a priori* complicated the definition of identity.

The analysis of the participants' responses to the questions posed to them in the study pointed to a series of interesting findings. The first was a significant statistical differences between the declared Israeli identity of both national groups. In contrast to 90% of all Jewish students who declared that the term "Israeli" was appropriate or very appropriate to describe their sense of identity, only two third of the Arab participants made a similar declaration. The Israeli identity component in the total identity of Arab students was significantly smaller than that of Jewish students. Nonetheless, as indicated by a review of other studies on this issue in other institutions, the sense of Israeliness of Arab students on the two campuses in the current study was deeper than the one revealed in similar studies on other campuses.

Five models addressing the issue of the identity of Arabs in Israel were presented. All are based on the premise that identity is comprised of various dimensions. In view of the broad acceptance of this premise, the researchers sought to explore the orientations of self-awareness and identification on the two colleges. Findings on this point were interesting: No significant differences between Jewish and Arab students were found with regard to the assimilation of the national component in defining identity. The findings of the study indicated that, ostensibly, nationality is less salient an element in the identity of Arab students than in the identity of their Jewish counterparts. This finding, however, was not statistically significant.

The study also found a significant difference in the weight of Israeliness in the identity of both groups of students. It is more significant among the group of Jewish students compared to Arab students. In view of Israel's complex geopolitical situation since its establishment, and in view of the relationships between the Jewish majority and Arab minority that take place in the shadow of the geopolitical situation, the researchers were favorably surprised by the findings that indicated that *differences in identity between the two groups of students exist but are not dramatic*.

The researchers were similarly surprised by two additional findings that emerged from the responses of the Jewish students. First, researchers were surprised to find that 10% of the Jewish students at ACJS responded that the term "Israeli" is not appropriate for them, and only 38% of these students noted that the term is "very appropriate" for them. This raises an interesting question that has remained unresolved: why do the Jewish students believe that the term "Israeli" is not appropriate or only moderately appropriate to describe their sense of identity? Is it because they genuinely do not see themselves as Israeli? Or, perhaps, they see themselves as **Jewish**, first and foremost, and only secondly as **Israeli**. This issue certainly warrants a separate study. It touches upon the essence of contemporary Israeli identity.

The researchers were also surprised by the fact that while the level of Israeli identity was high (62%) in the survey conducted among Tel Aviv high school students approximately 40 years ago, it did not exceed 51% in the two colleges examined in the current survey. Ostensibly this means that the collective emphasis 40 years ago was much greater than it is today. Strengthening of the individualist axis out of all the identity components is evidence that the primary weight in identity has been relocated from the collective focus to other components. It is very interesting to examine whether this involves any form of a metamorphosis in Israel's social philosophy in the last decade, which was reflected in the disengagement from a deep commitment to social justice, and from the recognition that the individual must act for the good of society while society must act for the good of the individual. This metamorphosis is embodied in a shift to social Darwinism, which stresses individual achievements, sanctifies individualism and the predominance of personal achievements (Soen, 2005). This point is equally worthy of further study.

END

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