



ARTICLE

A time of peace

Divergent temporalities in Jewish–Palestinian peace initiatives

Erica WEISS and Nissim MIZRACHI, *Tel Aviv University*

This article considers the conflicting temporal models of peace among Jewish Israelis, specifically between liberal Zionists who populate the traditional peace camp, and the broader population that largely ignores or opposes such initiatives. We compare the mainstream peace process with budding alternative non-liberal peace initiatives on one issue—the relative importance of a signed peace agreement—to explore diverging visions of temporal progression as they relate to the shared value of peace. The article claims that peace initiatives emerging from the liberal worldview reflect a vision in which the transition to peace will be a concrete temporal event, and that the horizon of peace is achievable, qualitative, and permanent. By contrast, the non-liberal initiatives reflect a belief that peace is modular and relative, that the transition to peace is inherently gradual, never to be fully achieved, dynamic, and impermanent.

Keywords: peace, Israel, Palestine, liberalism, religion, temporality

One after another, people arrived at Beit Emuna in Tel Aviv from near and far. Many were visibly tired from a long day of work, and headed straight to the small coffee station set up in the corner. But, once the meeting got started, excitement flooded the room and people remembered why they had agreed to volunteer their time and energy to this effort. There are dozens of peace initiatives in Israel, but this one breaks the mold in many ways. This group is comprised of religious Jews, many of whom are settlers in the West Bank. In fact, these people come from demographic groups that are considered by many on the liberal Zionist left to be the enemies of peace.

Frankly, the suspicion is mutual. The first meeting of the group had been filled with complaints and grievances about what the peace camp had done and rumblings of not wanting to join them. A watershed occurred when one of the organizers of the group encouraged them to separate what they believed about making peace with Palestinians from their feelings about the “peace camp.” “Friends, friends! Please keep in mind that ‘peace’ does not mean ‘Oslo’ [the Oslo Accords]. Forget what the peace camp says for a minute. We want to hear what

you have to say about peace. What is the religious language of peace? What would peace be for you?” At the second meeting, this idea had caught fire.

In this group of 30, there was a high level of excitement and the designated moderator called on people who raised their hands to speak.

Ilana: We need to figure out how as religious people we can sanctify peace, while we and our community are so sick and tired of the peace process, which is not ours and doesn’t come from our world.

Oded: We must get the Israeli people to abandon the assumptions of the peace camp, that they own the idea of peace, because no one I know would ever follow their leadership.

Ariel: Yes, the peace camp stole the ownership of peace, but they have a different meaning of peace. And no one from the religious community, or from any other community, dares to say ‘peace is ours, too.’

Asher: They took peace from us. They pushed us out of the circle. They even took the dove from us, the dove is a religious symbol, and they stole it from our context. They



made our use of ‘peace’ to be not seen as legitimate. We shouldn’t let them take it from us.

These peace activists, like the others we have worked with, know precisely what they are rejecting, which is the mainstream, liberal Zionist, peace movement in Israel and the international peace process, for which the Oslo Accords stand out as a symbol of what they consider a misguided vision of peace. Defining and articulating their own vision and discourse of peace is still a work in progress. While liberal Zionist Israeli activists see their vision reflected in the secular and liberal language of international NGOs and academic literature on peace studies, these activists are more marginalized and have far fewer intellectual resources to rely on. In this article, we seek to elaborate on the differences between the “establishment” vision of peace and the grassroots alternatives that are currently emerging in Israel. “Peace,” unlike beauty or justice, is not often considered relative, but we wish to explore the ways that visions of peace are culturally and historically produced.

This article is the rare collaboration of two ethnographers. It pulls together many years of fieldwork by each. The first ethnographer has conducted extensive fieldwork with liberal Zionist peace initiatives (2007–2009) as well as with grassroots non-liberal peace initiatives (2014–present). The second ethnographer has many years experience conducting participant observation among Israeli human rights organizations (2009–2013) and their discontents (2008–2015). In our combined fieldwork experiences, we have encountered substantial resistance to the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, and in particular to the Israeli peace camp among vast swaths of the Israeli population. By itself, this is perhaps unsurprising to those who are familiar with the current right-wing “moment” that Israel has been undergoing for nearly two decades. But in our fieldwork, we have found that, quite often, the intense animosity towards the peace process and the peace camp cannot generally be extended to an antipathy for peace in general, or peace with the Palestinians in particular. Rather, these issues are separate for many Jewish Israelis. The rejection of the peace camp specifically is comprised of many factors, including a resistance to the ethnic and socioeconomic elitism that this group represents. But we have found that by and large the most fundamental rejection is to the vision of peace offered by the mainstream peace movement.

There are different visions of peace that reflect the diverse subjectivities, beliefs and values of the Israeli and

Palestinian populations. This diversity, however, has not been manifested in the mainstream peace process, which is culturally and ideologically secular and liberal, in contrast to much of the local population. As Yossi Klein Halevi, a religious journalist involved in peace and reconciliation efforts has recently written regarding this problem:

A successful Middle Eastern—not a Western—peace process would also draw on religious language. In the past, diplomats tried to circumvent the powerful religious sensibilities on both sides to reach a “rational” compromise. But for us, a peace process between secularized elites lacks legitimacy. Moderate rabbis and imams must be willing to probe their respective traditions to justify painful compromise. This is not far-fetched: Meetings between Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders have quietly occurred even as talks between political leaders collapsed. (Klein Halevi 2018)

In this article, we begin to attend to the alienation that parts of the Jewish Israeli population have felt towards the liberal Zionist peace process, the alternatives they have begun to articulate, and the significance of this case to the way we think about temporality, human values, and politics.

The peace process initiated by the Oslo Accords in 1993 is for the most part deceased, and the Israeli peace camp is for the most part defunct. The liberal peace movement’s heyday lasted from the 1970s through the 1990s Oslo era, before its steep decline during the Second Intifada (Barak 2005; Hermann 2009; Ben Eliezer 2019). Scholars have recently carried out important work to chronicle the rise and demise of this peace process and also to perform a post-mortem analysis. Yuval Feinstein and Uri Ben Eliezer (2018) have demonstrated the link between the failure of the peace process and the decline in liberalism in Israeli society. Ben Eliezer’s (2019) chronicle of Israel’s militaristic nationalism includes a description of the way the peace process was brought to its knees by religious and messianic elements of Israeli society that systematically blocked the implementation of the Oslo Accords. Tamar Hermann (2009) narrates the progressive decline and political marginalization of the Israeli peace movement from the signing of the Oslo Accords until today.

Indeed, today “peace” is widely considered a stale discourse and thought of very cynically in much of Israeli society. The Center for Israeli Democracy has found that during the most recent round of Israeli elections, peace



between Israelis and Palestinians was a very low priority for most voters (Heller 2019). Israeli society has abandoned the peace process and the peace camp. This is not because peace is no longer needed; in fact, the violence has escalated since the heyday of the peace process. Palestinians suffer the vast majority of this violence at the hands of the Israeli military, but Israelis are by no means unaffected. Rockets launched into Israel from Gaza and Lebanon have left Israelis throughout the country running for shelter, and life in the South of the country near the Gaza border has become unbearable by all accounts.

In the last few years, from the ashes of the peace process, a number of alternative peace initiatives have emerged spontaneously and with significant momentum. These initiatives are far removed from the usual peace activist networks, and are comprised of what many veterans of the peace camp consider “unusual suspects”: on the Jewish side the ultra-Orthodox and religious settlers; on the Palestinian side the Islamic Movement. These peace initiatives define themselves often explicitly (Citizens Accord Forum, Shaharit, Tikun, the Religious Peace Initiative) or implicitly (Roots, Eretz Shalom), in contrast to mainstream peace initiatives, in their rejection of the liberal assumptions embedded in the international peace process. It is worth noting that these peace initiatives are emerging from the same religious and messianic elements on both sides that have been blamed for sabotaging the Oslo peace process. While people often speak of peace as a transcendental signifier, this paradox points to the fact that visions of peace are culturally and historically specific. Our fieldwork suggests that many groups in Israeli society did not reject “peace” but rather the vision of peace presented at Oslo, and some among them are now seeking to offer an alternative vision. Given the appalling ongoing violence, these new initiatives demand urgent consideration.

We will begin by providing context about the diversity of the Jewish Israeli population, especially as it relates to participation in peace movements. We will then explore one example of a key difference between the liberal Zionist and alternative religious peace initiatives—the significance attributed to a signed peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. Analyzing this difference reveals the deep cultural roots of the rift between the liberal-secular left and their non-liberal religious counterparts. Here, we show that tacitly embedded within the mainstream Israeli–Palestinian peace process is a liberal understanding of time and the temporal progression to-

wards peace, one that does not resonate with a significant portion of the local population. More specifically, the liberal notion of time assumes a *linear temporal progression* towards a *peace agreement* that will usher in a permanent peace in accordance with democratic peace theory. By contrast, the temporal ideal of peace envisioned by many non-liberal Jews and Palestinians involved in the conflict is more prosaic and inherently impermanent. We argue that this gap is part of wider cultural differences that contribute to the widespread animosity held for the peace camp and the peace process.¹

Liberalism and its discontents in Jewish Israeli society

In this article we seek to anthropologize liberalism, much as scholars such as Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad have anthropologized secularism. In doing so, we follow scholars such as Gabriella Coleman (2013) who treat liberalism not only as a political philosophy, but also as a worldview and a system of justice, as well as Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) who seeks to explore liberalism not through its own normative lens, but, rather, from the perspective of the non-liberal subjects governed by its logics. Here, we examine liberalism as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon, and not as a political philosophy. Jewish Israeli politicians often describe Israel as a liberal democracy in order to defend the legitimacy of the country, and to compare itself favorably to surrounding autocratic regimes. These claims are misleading, but this is not the critique we seek to make here. Such a debate assumes the moral good of liberalism whereas we, seeing it primarily as a worldview, do not want to attribute it any special status.

The cultural assumptions of Western liberalism do not inform the subjectivities of large portions of the Israeli and Palestinian populations. For some populations who have lived for generations in the Middle East and North Africa, such as some of the first generation of Israel's

1. This article considers Jewish Israeli society, peace initiatives and visions of peace. The initiatives we work with have all sought out Palestinian counterparts who they work with to build a coalition around their vision of peace. Though we have significant data from these encounters, we do not claim to present Palestinian perspectives fully here, though of course, these perspectives are elemental and intrinsic to any future peace between Israelis and Palestinians.



Mizrahi population, ultra-orthodox Jews, national Zionist settlers, and a significant portion of the indigenous Palestinian population, the exposure to Western secular liberalism has been limited and, for many, lacks cultural resonance. Liberal politics often represent a kind of failed promise of liberation for many Palestinians (Allen 2013; Polisar 2017), while for marginalized traditionalist Mizrahi Israelis, liberal politics is often perceived as extremely threatening to their values and sense of core identity (Mizrachi 2016). Other groups, such as the Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox and many modern Orthodox who immigrated from Eastern European societies or who came from the West, have intentionally maintained cultural values and lifestyles that explicitly reject liberal norms (Fader 2009). Immigrants from the former USSR have also been found to reject liberal values and norms (Remmenik 2017). When we describe segments of the Israeli population as non-liberal, this is in no way an argument suggesting there is anything inherent about their worldviews. Rather, we consider their moral experience like that of liberals to be deeply ingrained within the world in which they live. That is, each group's gut feelings of "right" and "wrong" are shaped within their social networks of meaning (Mizrachi 2016).

Furthermore, in the face of deep diversity, these separate worlds of meaning coincide and share the same political space. They do not exist in isolation. On the ground, there is dynamic flow of norms and ideas between the camps. While each of the groups described as non-liberal contain individuals who selectively uphold some ideas and practices, it is also true that irrespective of their level of exposure to liberal norms and values, as groups, they have by and large rejected them forcefully (see, for example, Buzaglo 2009).

The main bearers of cultural liberalism in Israel have been those Baruch Kimmerling (2001) referred to by the acronym *Ahusalim*, which is comprised of the Hebrew words for Ashkenazi, secular, old guard, socialist, and nationalist. Historically, this group of secular European Jews has held disproportionate political power. They comprised the overwhelming majority (about 80 percent) of the Jewish population when the state was created in 1948, while today they are less than half. They defined the cultural norms of the public sphere and held most of the positions of authority in the political apparatus (Mautner 2011: 107). Duncan Bell (2016) and Uday Singh Mehta (1999) have demonstrated that liberal thought was an essential underpinning to European imperial expansion, of which the Zi-

onist project was also born. Until the late 1970s, this Western, secular, liberal ruling class governed a culturally diverse population which included large groups of non-Western and non-liberal Jews. Whereas in the last four decades the *Ahusalim* have lost much of their political power, they still maintain considerable control over the institutional foundation they laid and they continue to hold elite positions in academia, the media, public services, and the judicial system.

Specifically, despite the dramatic shift in power relations, today there remain two spheres that serve as symbols of liberal values, as beacons of light to liberals and a paragon of alienation to its discontents: the legal system and especially the Israeli Supreme Court (Mautner 2011; 2016), and the peace movement (Omer 2013). Jewish participants in the mainstream Israeli peace movement are largely drawn from the secular, liberal Zionist, Ashkenazi community. The Oslo Accords, negotiated by secular elites from within Israeli and Palestinian societies, were also a product of this liberal vision.

When we asked liberal Zionist peace activists about elite secular Ashkenazi dominance in the peace camp, they were unable to explain this phenomenon, and made it clear that it is a topic that makes them very uncomfortable. Ben, a long-time activist, explained it thus: "Look, I don't want to say that all Mizrahim hate Arabs. I think they've kind of been brainwashed into this position by Bibi and his friends." Our interlocutors from non-liberal peace initiatives reject this well-known stereotype and instead tell us that they reject the secular liberal version of peace, not peace itself. The alternative non-liberal peace initiatives attract a much broader contingent of Israeli society. For example, the Citizen's Accord Forum, which features prominently in the ethnography of this article, draws ultra-Orthodox participants (Mizrachi as well as Ashkenazi), Islamicists and religious Muslims, as well as religious Zionists, traditionalist religious (*masorti*) Mizrahi Jews, Ethiopian Jews, as well as a small contingent of secular liberals interested in diversifying the peace movement. These initiatives can be seen as a continuation of the non-liberal resistance to Ashkenazi hegemony in the social and political spheres.

Outside the peace camp: "Crazies on both sides"

The peace camp's discontents are widely considered the enemies of peace by those within the liberal Zionist left. Liberals, like Ben, from the Israel peace camp are often



bamboozled by the lackluster, timid, or even hostile response to their notion of peace as salvation by the wider populace. They ask: Why would anyone not embrace peace? In his column from August 31, 2014, Rogel Alpher, a journalist now considered the voice of the liberal left, wrote that Israelis and their children will probably be periodically forced to wage war in which civilians will be killed because of the settlers' intransigence and fanaticism, but also because of extremist Arab organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Islamic State. To quote: "My fate and that of my children will be determined by those who have found God, who speak with Him and act in His name. I think that they are mad" (Alpher 2014). Alpher peers beyond the "enlightened liberal garden," into the surrounding "jungle" (Mizrachi 2016) where the enemies of peace, those who embrace a different cosmology and are driven by demonic, supernatural powers, threaten his safety and endanger the fate of his children.

As a result, the secular liberal elites often blame these other groups for the failure of the peace process; moreover, they become what J. D. Y. Peel has referred to as "icons of moral alterity" (2016: 546). Joyce Dalsheim (2014) demonstrates how groups outside the peace camp are often used as scapegoats by the secular left regarding the failures to achieve peace as of yet. They are often depicted as the "spoilers" of the liberal vision of peace. Reciprocally, the Islamicists and the Islamic movement are often represented in the media as singularly focused on pushing the Jews into the sea and establishing an Islamic Waqf "from the Jordan River to the sea." These liberal voices situate madness and reason at opposite poles along the strict religious-liberal spectrum regarding peace.

A similar rift emerges over the question of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank. For much of the liberal left, the occupation is the main reason for the absence of peace and the demise of the two-state solution. For them, Israeli settlers who live in the West Bank are by virtue of this choice the epitome of depravity and war-mongering. By contrast, for many of our interlocutors, Islamists, and religious Jews who challenge this vision, the "green line"—the 1949 armistice border dividing Israel from a proposed Palestinian state—does not hold any legitimacy. Both Islamists and religious Jews that we worked with refused to divide the land and saw the entire area of the historical holy land and historical Palestine as indivisible. Thus, for them, the "occupied territories" are not more or less occupied than

Tel Aviv or anywhere else on the Israeli side of the green line.

Will you put that in writing?

We would like to single out and explore one point of disagreement between the vision of the mainstream, liberal Zionist peace camp and the emerging alternatives that on the surface may seem obscure or incidental. The question at stake is the importance of a contract to be signed by representatives of both sides, one that would create a state-level agreement between Jews and Palestinians. The stark difference we found over this issue points to significant cultural gaps regarding the temporal assumptions people attach to the idea of peace.

No one we have met objected to the idea of a peace agreement. But while the mainstream peace initiatives view a peace agreement as a major goal, milestone, and end point, the non-liberal religious peace activists are very skeptical regarding the significance of such an agreement to any future peace between Jews and Palestinians. The liberal Zionist peace process envisions peace arriving with a peace agreement, marked by a handshake reminiscent of the one between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat. In this vision, there is a "solution" to the conflict. There is forward and backward, progressive and regressive; forward is a movement towards a permanent solution to the conflict, backward is anything perceived as an obstacle. The embedded notions of progressive temporality are evident in the discursive practices of contemporary mainstream peace initiatives; for example, in the prominence of "timelines" in the publicity materials of peace movements. Such timelines mark, in a linear fashion, the conflict as a series of major events that either contributed to the progress towards the unrealized "peace" or sabotaged it.² The idea of the timeline suggests ups and downs within continual progress toward the ultimate end point, as yet unrealized, of "peace."

This approach to negotiations toward a peace agreement is found not only on the "think tank" level of academics and policy makers. In organizations such as Peace Now, OneVoice, or the Peres Center for Peace,

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2. See for example: <http://peacenow.org.il/en/about-us/timeline#event-timeline>; <http://one-voice.fr/en/about-one-voice/one-voice-in-the-world/timeline-and-victories-across-the-world.html>; <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/27/the-peace-process-a-short-history/>



there is an explicit focus on the policy particularities, details, and political nitty-gritty of the final agreement. Different organizations offer variations on the “two-state solution,” what constellation they advocate regarding Palestinian refugees, the settlements, Jerusalem, and other issues known to be the main sticking points ostensibly causing negotiations to break down in the past. We have experienced that even “grassroots” activities often jump from icebreakers to discussions on land divisions and water rights. It reflects the hegemonic notion, held by this community, that the “right agreement” is the key to transitioning from conflict to peace. These practices are attempts to contractually create security permanence. This approach’s underlying assumption is that only a peace agreement that regulates and moderates the relationship between Jews and Palestinians on the state level can bring peace, as is evident also in Peace Now’s recent campaign, whose slogan is “Demanding a State Solution.”

The religious non-liberal peace activists we have worked with are extremely skeptical of this position. After the group leader told them that Oslo did not need to define peace for them, they began to express their frustration at the mainstream focus on a peace agreement. “Why do they always talk about a contract?! As if Oslo worked so well. What do they think it is going to do?!” Malka exclaimed.

Why would they think that anything would change if some person that supposedly represents me signs a contract with some person that supposedly represents them?” Kinley answered/interrupted her. “I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you exactly. They want a contract so that they can separate the Jews from the Muslims and say ‘Look, this is what they [Palestinians] want too.’ This is the leftist fantasy of separation. They like to try and scare us, talking about the demographic threat. They tell us, hurry up and sign a contract because soon Jews are going to be the minority and you will be surrounded by Arabs. But, look at us [settlers], we aren’t the ones who are scared of that. They are the ones who are scared of that, that is what they are worried about. We are fine living together with Arabs, we already do. They are the ones in Tel Aviv who have never met any Arabs.

In a later interview, Aaron, a member of the group, told me “They think that an agreement will be the end of the conflict. They think two states is the end of the conflict. But it doesn’t work that way. In a marriage there is also a contract. But how much is a healthy mar-

riage related to the marriage contract? The contract only becomes relevant with divorce. It is the same with peace.” An activist from another non-liberal initiative described the relationship between the peace camp and a peace agreement an “incomprehensible obsession.” In other words, Aaron and others are suggesting that while a peace agreement could mark a significant shift, it cannot have the temporal finality that the traditional peace camp has attached to it.

Activists from the peace camp, unsurprisingly, reject this characterization. After a talk at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, in which I had described these accusations, I sat down with Edna, a liberal Zionist interlocutor from the mainstream peace camp who happened to be in attendance. “Totally unfair,” she said. “I don’t know anyone who thinks that the contract is the only thing that needs to be done. We don’t believe in magic . . . unlike them actually [unlike religious peace activists, dismissively referring to their religiosity as belief in magic]. They just don’t want to sign a contract because things are very comfortable for them the way they are now. They are ignoring the occupation.”

“But do you think that there needs to be a contract?” I asked. “Of course!” “So tell me why in your own words.” “Because it is the only way, a contract that creates two states is the only option. We are two peoples, we need two states. A contract shows that there is agreement between the two peoples that there will be peace between them. It is the only way to be sure. A contract will bring peace . . . lasting peace—peace with guarantees—this is the only way forward.” “And you don’t think these religious groups can offer a different kind of peace?” “I don’t want to say anything bad about people who have good intentions, but I will say that they want to pull us all backward into the Middle Ages. They want to make this region like Iran.” These statements, while strongly articulated, were not in the least surprising. They echoed sentiments we have heard many times from activists in the peace camp. They also resonate with the centrality of the contract to the liberal progressive vision of peace that informs the mainstream peace process.

So, in the division over a peace agreement, the alternative peace activists accuse the liberal Zionist peace activists of seeking peace based on their underlying desire for separation from the Palestinians, and the mainstream activists accuse the alternative peace activists of ignoring structural inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians. Our purpose here is not to adjudicate these accusations, though they are both very powerful (see, for



example, Dalsheim 2014), and both point to the blind spots that result from the frequently insular nature of the Jewish Israeli peace discourse in *both* the mainstream and alternative camps. Rather, following recent work in the anthropology of ethics (e.g. Lambek 2014), we want to understand the contrasting ethical imaginaries that underlie these accusations.

Peace agreements in the context of diverging temporal ideals

We believe to understand this difference with regard to the importance of a contract, these statements must be analyzed in the context of their justifications as well as the deeper political assumptions that they spring from. Edna spoke passionately about the need for a contract, but also invoked the idea that such a peace agreement was the inevitable outcome of the conflict. She also noted that for her, an agreement would mark the transition from conflict to peace and, moreover, that this peace would be “lasting.”

The explanations of mainstream peace activists for their involvement in the peace camp were extremely consistent. To give one example, Miri, a long-term peace activist in her sixties, was active in several large mainstream peace NGOs. In a conversation at an activist event in Neve Shalom, she offered this explanation:

Because I am old and I can't wait any more. We can't wait anymore. I need to make peace because I've been waiting 64 years for peace. All of these politicians think they can wait for better terms, or a better deal . . . No! There is no time, there is no more time, we need peace today! Yesterday, in fact . . . I do this for my children and for my grandchildren. Today, every time they leave the house, go to work and to school, I worry. I don't want them to worry as I have worried all these years about them. I don't want them to have to think about these things. I want them to be free [she said, opening her hands upward as if releasing a small bird].

During this interaction, what was remarkable was the sense of *déjà vu* in light of my familiarity with these sentiments. In fact, nearly every activist in the liberal Zionist peace camp we have interacted with had at some point or another repeated the two central themes of Miri's answer: (1) that I/we couldn't wait any longer for peace; and (2) that their personal motivation was to spare the next generation the worry, anxiety, and fear that they have themselves experienced.

These sentiments are so frequently heard and commonplace as to seem banal, but we believe that they actually offer significant insights as to how these peace activists imagine the peace they are fighting for. First of all, we can see from this discourse of “waiting” for the “arrival” of peace, that peace is understood as an event that marks a binary transition, from “no peace” to “peace.” The period of no peace is characterized by fear and worry, while the imagined peace is characterized by the absence of these feelings.

A recent *Foreign Policy* article, written in the wake of his death, evaluated Shimon Peres's efforts and ultimate failure to “achieve peace.” The authors write that in the 1990s “Peres looked poised to end Israel's legacy of conflict for good” (Kamin 2016). This idea of peace as an achievable and potentially permanent state, apparent in the policy community, is also evident from Peres's own ideas and visions, for example in his oft-quoted statement “There is no permanent security without permanent peace” (Peres 2014). American politicians involved in the peace process, such as former US president Jimmy Carter, shared this vision and focused their efforts on identifying and eliminating the “obstacles to permanent peace in the Middle East” (2006: 207).

Permanent security is a major theme of the liberal Zionist vision. A promotional video currently on the Peace Now website describes the motivations for their activist efforts in terms of their vision for peace: “So that there will be no more bereaved families, so that racism and fear will vanish from our streets, so that the color red will be just another color in the crayon box, and so that we will finally have a border.” The video, which features a father and a small infant child, resonates with Miri's statements that she is an activist for the sake of her children. This desire for permanence imagines a temporal horizon in which a new age is ushered in, eliminating bereavement, violence, prejudice, collective worries, danger, and vulnerability.

This vision has long been part of the liberal Zionist mythology surrounding peace, and is readily apparent in many cultural forms including literature and the arts. Consider, for example, an excerpt from the famous “Song of Peace,” which was adopted as the anthem of the Israeli Peace Now movement:

So—only sing a song for peace,
Do not whisper a prayer.
You'd better sing a song for peace
With a big shout.



Let the sun penetrate
Through the flowers,
Do not look backward
Leave those who departed.

Lift your eyes with hope,
Not through the rifle sights.
Sing a song for love,
And not for wars.

Don't say that the day will come,
Bring the day because
It's not a dream,
And in all the city's squares, cheer only peace.

This song has great symbolic power as it was the last song sung at the demonstration at which Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, who was later found with the blood-stained lyrics still in his pocket. In this vision of peace, the audience is enjoined to not look back but rather to join the march of temporal progress moving forward toward the future peace that will arrive and completely transform reality from war to peace.

By contrast, the religious non-liberal peace initiatives tend to be somewhat puzzled by the idea that a peace agreement will be a major point of transition. After Betzalel made a number of statements rather sardonically criticizing the peace camp's "fixation" on a peace agreement during the Citizen Accord Forum meetings, I sat down with him for an in-depth interview regarding his antipathy for the idea of a peace agreement and for the peace camp more generally. He told me:

Maybe I have been too sarcastic in the meetings. Probably I should be more polite, and there will be a peace agreement, and probably many agreements. But we (the religious) know every agreement itself isn't magic and it is temporary, because that is the nature of agreements . . . as time passes, leaders change, people change, we see this all the time. And also because the religious know that things can change at any moment. Don't forget that we are waiting . . . for the Messiah, and when he comes, all of these little arrangements we have made will be irrelevant. This of course does not mean we don't need to try (*l'hishtadel*) . . . to try (*l'nasot*) to make real peace with the Arabs, we must do this because we live together, and not just throwing money at them to be quiet. But this should not be thought of as an accomplishment, but just the begin-

ning of making peace. We will have to do it again and again and again.

In this statement, Betzalel rejects what he perceives as a liberal model of peace wherein signing a peace agreement represents a definitive shift into a qualitatively different state called "peace." At the same time, he rejects passivity and separates the idea of pursuing "real peace" from a notion of a peace agreement in the singular. His aside regarding "not just throwing money at them" is a reference to, and rejection of, Benjamin Netanyahu's ideal of creating an "economic peace" with Palestinians, wherein peace would be based on economic cooperation and prosperity and bypassing contentious political issues such as Palestinian statehood or citizenship, which Betzalel thinks must be addressed.

When I sat down to speak with Adina after one of these meetings, she was eager to share her insights regarding the differences she saw between the liberal Zionist and religious peace initiatives. "They are waiting for peace, but during the day they are making money. We are waiting for the Messiah, but during the day we are making peace." She repeated herself for effect. "This is the big difference. They think when peace comes suddenly they won't need to lock their houses, but this is absurd. Peace is not like the Messiah, peace is like money, sometimes you have a little, and sometimes you have a lot. It isn't—there is peace or there isn't peace." Adina's statement certainly gives voice to the mutual antagonism between the groups of peace activists. Her parallel comparison is worth breaking down. She accuses the liberal Zionist peace activists of a kind of messianism regarding peace, which in her religious Messianic outlook is a factual and moral error. Her claim that they actually invest their efforts in making money is an accusation against the elite socioeconomic status of much of the peace camp, as well as their political support for many of Israel's neoliberal capitalist reforms over the last decades. By contrast, she casts religious peace activists as having their priorities straight, the messianic mode of active waiting is reserved for God, while peace is actively pursued as an essential but ultimately prosaic and quantifiable goal.

The distinction between "waiting" for God/peace while "making" peace/money speaks to the crux of the issue that this paper seeks to explore, which are cultural models of temporality as they concern peace. "Waiting" here refers to placement in a messianic temporal mode offering the promise of permanence, completeness, and perfection, while "making" refers to a prosaic temporal



mode which is modular and quantitative, necessarily incomplete, and dynamic. Liberals from the peace camp would likely reject the characterization of their temporal understanding of peace as “messianic,” in no small part because of the religious connotation. But there is no need to characterize it as messianic in a literal sense in order to recognize the characteristics of permanence, qualitative change, and a temporal mode of anticipation from the discourse, practices, cultural production, and the testimony of those in the peace camp themselves. By contrast, the temporal characteristics of the discourse and practices of the non-liberal peace activists are far more gradual and accumulative or quantitative.

In his 2000 Frazer Lecture, J. D. Y. Peel accused anthropologists of being rather poor at temporality and failing to fully take into account the historical trajectories imparted to religions by their discourses and practices (2016). Since then, Joel Robbins has noted that time “rarely appears as an important aspect of the motives that ethnographers demonstrate or imply drive the actions of those they are studying.” Rather, anthropologists default to what he calls a “temporal middle” between the moment of ethnography and the long-term horizon. But in reflecting on the articles in the *HAU* issue dedicated to happiness, he concludes that “values . . . render human temporality complex” (2015: 230). This case demonstrates the inverse, that models of temporality have significant implications for cultural values, such as peace, an explicitly shared value with divergent visions of its manifestation. Michael Lambek similarly argues that academic disciplines, such as anthropology and history, often adopt Euro-American temporal models unreflexively. But he demonstrates that the Sakalava people of Madagascar have “a different way of collectively being in time: a being in time that includes its own understanding of being in time” (2016: 318). Due to a very high level of cultural diversity in the Israeli case, we actually see competing understandings of being in time, wherein liberal progressive and messianic temporalities clash over the horizon of peace.

The practices and activities of alternative peace initiatives are also oriented much more toward the prosaic issues of co-existence. For example, the Citizen’s Accord Forum brings together the non-liberal ultra-Orthodox Jews and religious Muslim Palestinian Israelis into professional working groups to discuss and advocate for issues that are common to their communities. There is a working group for lawyers that addresses issues the rabbinical and sharia courts have in common, and difficulties working in the context of the hegemonic secular

legal system. Similarly, there is a group of school principals that address challenges they face with the youth in their communities and the place of the religious and Arab school systems (there are three school systems—secular, religious Jewish, and Arab). There is also a group for social workers from these communities, a group for religious leaders, as well as one for members of the press from these sectors. As peace initiatives go, these groups bypass the idea of a “final agreement,” not as irrelevant, but as “above the pay grade” of ordinary citizens, as one group facilitator put it.

In addition to participating in the ongoing activities of the Citizen’s Accord Forum for a number of years, we attended an intense weeklong meeting in Dayton, Ohio that brought together leadership delegations from the ultra-Orthodox community as well as the Islamic Movement in Israel to discuss peace. The Jewish contingent included important Mizrahi rabbis from Israeli cities and community leaders, while the Islamic contingent included important sheikhs and imams from the Southern branch of the Israeli Islamic movement as well as community leaders. The intense closed-door meetings gravitated immediately towards micro-processes. The participants focused on practical, modular, mechanisms that would enable co-existence and encourage pluralism in their communities. They discussed questions of equity between the Jewish and Arab populations around issues including cemetery maintenance, infrastructure repair, and sewage, not in general, but with reference to specific towns and local situations. They discussed how each community could support the other to alleviate the sense of distress and ennui experienced by the youth in these populations, including practical plans for youth outreach exercises and coordination with social services. They discussed educational initiatives that would teach people to appreciate the nuances concerning the autonomy and integrity of the separate communities, while at the same time opposing physical separation of the communities by building habits and practices and appropriate forms of interaction between Palestinians and Jews in business and social contexts. These discussions were enthusiastic and far more concrete than any peace encounter we had seen before.

Progress and the end of history—The liberal peace/time cosmology

The ethnography presented above must be contextualized within its contemporary intellectual and political norms, specifically, in this case, the era of liberal



progressivism that created the intellectual conditions required to imagine “permanent peace.” Faith in “progress,” its inevitability and its moral worth, has been part and parcel of the ideology of modernity and modernization since the nineteenth century. In its most naïve version, the notion is nourished by the belief in humanity’s monolithic linear advancement, a teleological march of progress based on scientific reason, objectivity and political, economic, and administrative rationality (Boyne and Rattansi 1990), spearheaded by, and embodied in, Western culture.

Despite all of the critical labor, especially post-Holocaust, that has challenged it (Foucault 1990; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), “progress” has become entrenched as a common idiom in the public, media, and political discourse, an adjective applied to diverse spheres, ranging from the technology that is altering the world to the point of non-recognition, to enlightened forms of governance (the “progressive” or “reformed” democratic state) and to the penetration of what in liberal society are considered “proper” ethical and political norms into all areas of life. This later era of moral and political progressivism is perhaps most fully articulated in the sphere of political science through Francis Fukuyama’s article “The end of history,” published in 1989. Fukuyama claimed that Western liberal democracy is the ultimate and final form of human governance, being the most evolved and peaceful form of administration. This theory of the inevitability of Western liberal democracy presumes a natural evolutionary path through rational enlightenment, the separation of church and state, the adoption of individualism and global free market capitalism. For our purposes, it is significant that he introduced the idea of permanence into the modern political lexicon. He gave political credibility to the idea of permanent political stability, and in particular, permanent peace. While Kant actually preceded Fukuyama in introducing the concept of “perpetual peace,” the idea of permanence in human relations was until Fukuyama’s intervention largely a philosophical or theological idea, the eschatological state of a “peaceable kingdom,” not a legitimate or serious idea in the modern secular political sciences.

Fukuyama’s vision was widely influential, especially in the professionalized spheres of politics and policy-making and has likewise become hegemonic in global peace imagery. The idea of “liberal peace theory” (Doyle 1983: 205, 207–8) echoes Fukuyama’s view that liberal governance and the market economy are the natural con-

ditions for permanent global peace. Still other researchers have attempted more systematic explanations of the “end of history” argument, for example, those such as Steven Pinker (2011) or Azar Gat (2008) who claim that Enlightenment thought has precipitated an irreversible decline in war. In contrast to the linear progressivism of liberal thought, modern messianic and kabbalistic thought has strong dialectical elements, wherein any move towards redemption will be accompanied by transgression, discord, and sin (Stern 2015: 175–6). Our previous work demonstrates that the different political and social discourses in Israeli society have produced conflict and misunderstanding, in particular between liberal and non-liberal groups (Mizrachi 2014; Weiss 2014; 2017). Our case here further suggests that the Enlightenment model, which has tacitly and explicitly informed so much of the writing and praxis of peace-building efforts in Israel and Palestine, is essentially out of step with the non-Western, non-liberal majority involved in the conflict, despite its strong resonance with a minority of Western elites.

Theoretical and practical implications

In *Formations of the secular*, Talal Asad (2003) demonstrates that the secular is not the absence of religion as it “claims” to be but, rather, is derived from European Christian cultural forms. Similarly, we believe that the liberal Zionist peace initiatives have inherited from the Christian tradition by virtue of their intellectual genealogy. The theme of permanence, which we found to be ubiquitous in the liberal Zionist peace camp, retains traces of a Christian theology of peace. Specifically, it is the transformative nature of the awaited peace, rather than a prosaic description of the state of human interactions that, we argue, is inherited, indirectly through liberalism, from the Christian tradition. Roland Bainton describes the shift from the Hebraic understanding of peace based on Old Testament readings, to the conceptualization of peace within Christian thinking. He describes the peace of the Old Testament as “food and drink,” that is, everyday physical conditions of well-being that allow the population to survive and thrive unmolested (2008: 54). It is the absence of warfare, siege, and occupation. The well-known verses from Ecclesiastes—“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: . . . A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (3.1, 3.8)—reveal this modular and dynamic



understanding of peace, in contrast with the liberal vision of the end of history and permanent peace. We argue that Adina's description of peace being "like money" that is, modular and quantifiable, more clearly fits within the "food and drink" framework.

By contrast, Christian thinking on peace involves a shift from earthly and physical conditions and concerns to ideas of righteousness. It is not only the lack of war, but further, the absence of all contention and the total breakdown of enmity between man and his fellow man, a peaceable kingdom. In the Christian theological tradition, this peace was made possible through God, but in modern secular variants this transcendental component remains while simultaneously being returned to the earthly realm and the responsibility and control of mankind (Bainton 2008: 55). This does not mean that members of the liberal Zionist Israeli peace camp are secretly Christian or adhere to Christian theology in any conscious way but, rather, that the international, professionalized peace industry is infused with this worldview and that these activists have inherited the understanding of peace as a change in qualitative substance, a redemption and arrival of a different epoch that is one way and irreversible.

The liberal peace process can be characterized as secular in another sense, in that the redemption awaited ultimately lies within human control; "bring the day" in the words of The Song of Peace. This is in contrast with *religious* messianism, which awaits the arrival of the Messiah, an event that humans cannot fully control or predict. This distinction is essential to the distinction Adina makes between liberal Zionist peace initiatives who "wait for peace" and religious initiatives that "make peace" while "waiting for the Messiah." The liberal Zionist peace initiatives attempt to determine through a comprehensive peace agreement, the specific shape and form of the future peace. This is against the cultural sensibilities of religiously oriented populations, who gravitate toward leaving room for divine intervention on matters such as these. This can be seen in the religious concept of *hishtadlut*, invoked by Betzalel, which requires people to exercise diligent effort and work toward values such as peace and justice, but stops short of assuming human control by allowing for divine providence. For our religious interlocutors, trying to "micro-manage" human affairs to this degree is not only futile but reflects a kind of arrogance in the face of God, which is offensive and unbecoming. This tendency does not prohibit planning on an everyday level, but it renders

mute questions of "permanent peace" and "permanent security."

These insights have implications for both critical theory as well as anthropological literatures. The critique of the alternative peace initiatives has a certain resonance with the theoretical approaches that challenge "grand" or "master" narratives, and especially those that argue against narratives of inevitability in favor of contingency. For example, in *Foregone conclusions*, Michael André Bernstein (1994) wrote his observations regarding the depiction of historical events, warning against writing teleologically about the past, as though the events that unfolded were inevitable. Bernstein argues for an approach to temporality that is particular and discrete rather than universal and sweeping. He subtitled his book *Against apocalyptic history*, suggesting we must recognize the contingency of historical events. Our ethnographic case extends these warnings forward, to the future, against apocalypses, practices meant to obtain precise information as to the date and shape of the messianic future (Yoder 1994: 145). Walter Benjamin also critiques such attempts to manufacture wholeness, claiming the human monopolization of time does a particular violence. He writes, in *On the concept of history*: "We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future . . . This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter" (1969: XVIII (b)).

Religious messianism requires the acceptance of contingency because it is only the messiah who can restore wholeness to the world, which is teleological, but not within human control. In this worldview, the kind of peace discussed by liberal activists (no worries, no fear), and invoked in their statements (an end to bereavement), is a metaphysical peace, not a prosaic one, and cannot be achieved by human effort. The prosaic peace offered by alternative initiatives is inherently temporary, because in their view, peace and harmony are relative and aspirational, not actual historical conditions and certainly not permanent ones. The alternative approach allows for agreements, establishing terms of mutual responsibility and restoring justice, but only imbues them with prosaic rather than transcendental significance. It displaces control over human affairs in a way that foregrounds common political arrangements in contrast to the liberal Zionist approach that seeks a more meaningful redemption through human intervention. In other words, there is a refocus in non-liberal



initiatives from “timeline events” to improving everyday conditions, back to the “food and drink” of the Old Testament.

This case also recalls other situations of contending temporalities. In his book *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) challenges the supposed neutrality of secular time assumed by the social sciences, despite its particular historical connection to Europe. Perhaps even more similar to our case, Lisa Stevenson (2014) examines the attempts of Canadian social workers to combat a suicide epidemic among the Inuit youth population. She finds that their techniques, which feature a strong Western orientation toward the future and planning for the future, culturally alienates young Inuit who traditionally do not share this liberal and capitalist orientation, perhaps even exacerbating the problem. Here, we see the way that the orientation toward the future and also permanence, as well as expectations for dramatic transformation of the liberal peace industry, is alienating a significant part of the population involved in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. As a result, antipathy is generated toward the peace camp and the peace process, even among those who desire peace. This suggests that “peace” is a category that deserves more attention as a culturally variable concept, that it cannot be assumed to be a known quantity.

Conclusion

In this article, we seek to bring ethnographic analysis to bear on a particular cultural difference we have observed in our long-term fieldwork with mainstream and fringe peace initiatives. We observed that the “peace camp” is overwhelmingly populated by a minority of liberal secular elites, while the broader Israeli and Palestinian public avoid or reject these initiatives. By contrast, today there are a few alternative groups emerging on the margins, outside the liberal Zionist peace camp consensus, that attract a much more diverse range of participants who may better reflect the makeup of Israeli and Palestinian societies as a whole. We have identified a number of distinctions between the liberal and religious peace initiatives. One of these, and the focus of this article, is the understanding of the temporal progression and transition to peace in the region, whether this transition is a matter of degree or a metaphysical shift, and whether this transition is permanent or inherently dynamic. While liberal politicians and activists seek to “secure” or “achieve” a permanent security through a peace agreement that would mark the transition from conflict

to peace, this vision does not resonate with our non-liberal interlocutors. While the liberal Zionist peace activists find this imagery inspiring, our non-liberal interlocutors find it disconcerting. By contrast, peace in the non-liberal worldview is not an event, but a quantitative modulation of relations: less violence between Jews and Palestinians; more fair and just interactions as the groups meet in the public sphere; more respect for integrity and autonomy of the communities. They see this peace as something that is never finally achieved, but as an ongoing struggle, a relationship that requires constant maintenance. Like any other relationship, the relationship between the communities can be strong or weak, but it is inherently dynamic and vulnerable to deterioration.

Here we demonstrate that there is a significant gap between the visions of peace of different communities involved in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, rooted in their separate cosmologies. Based on our experience with peace initiatives from the mainstream and alternative approaches, we believe that the rift described contributes significantly to the failure of large portions of the population to support liberal Zionist peace initiatives. The “peace” promoted by these initiatives is perceived as intangible, with the peace imaginary that these initiatives advertise failing to captivate or inspire their target audience. This incompatibility often goes unrecognized because peace is often assumed, by liberal peace activists and scholars alike, to be a known quantity. But, in fact, the peace that is taken for granted is not neutral, but reflects cultural assumptions, values, and models of temporality, specifically liberal progressivism. Thus, we suggest that binary thinking about “pro” and “anti” peace phenomena, as reflected in the liberal accusations of “crazies on both sides,” is inaccurate to the emic understandings of the respective groups. Instead, we should be analyzing divergent visions of peace.

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Erica WEISS is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Tel Aviv University. Her current research interest is non-liberal religious peace initiatives. Her most recent book is *Conscientious objectors in Israel: Citizenship, sacrifice, trials of fealty* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

Erica Weiss
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 6997801
Israel
ericaweiss@post.tau.ac.il

Nissim MIZRACHI is a Professor of Sociology at Tel Aviv University. His current research interest is the sociology of liberalism, human rights, and ethnic inequality. His most recent book is *Getting respect: Responding to stigma and discrimination in the United States, Brazil, and Israel* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

Nissim Mizrachi
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 6997801
Israel
nissimm@post.tau.ac.il

