IDENTITIES IN CONFLICT: MASTERS AND SLAVES[1]

Benyamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, recently expressed his view that Palestinians first recognize Israel as a Jewish State before a two-state solution could be considered. Its recognition, as such, i.e., as Israel, by Palestinians is apparently not enough. Israel's founders, let it be recalled, declared it, on May 14th 1948 as A JEWISH STATE IN ERETZ-ISRAEL, TO BE KNOWN AS THE STATE OF ISRAEL. God's covenant with Abraham in 2000 B.C. was that He would make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:2). Apparently Jacob, Abraham's grandson through Isaac, came to be known as Israel -etymologically rooted in the two words, *isra* and *el*- on account of his having successfully withstood a spiritual challenge posed by God, or, of having stood up to Him, at Jabbok (Genesis 32:28). It was henceforth that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob came to be known as the Children of Israel. Since God apparently promised Abraham He will bestow what had been known *inter alia* as the Land of Canaan unto Abraham and some of his descendants (the descendants of Abraham's other son, Ishmael, having been deemed unworthy of that inheritance, in spite of the name's etymology)[2], that land henceforth came to be known biblically as the Land of Israel, that is, as the land, tribally speaking, of the "Jacobians".

Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 called Israel, that is, the land, or Eretz Israel, "the birthplace" of the *Jewish* nation, or people, clearly implying that it was only when the Children of Israel were already in the said Land that the name came to apply to them. But where did this term (*Yehudim)* come from, and on what basis was it acquired? Apparently, tracing their roots to the children of Israel, and having settled in the Land that had been the Land of Canaan (and, across time, of other tribes as well, including the Philistines), members of one particular tribe called itself or was called the tribe of Judah, either on account of the geographic location in the Land of Israel where they ended up settling (*Yehuda*?), or -as the old Arabic (Semitic) root seems to suggest[3]- on account of having split off from the rest of the larger migrating group and having turned in a southern direction towards a lowlier terrain. There they established their own kingdom, naming it the kingdom of Judah. Another settler tribe established the kingdom of Israel further north. Henceforth Judah, and, in Greek, Latin, Old French and then Middle English in the West since the Middle Ages, Jew and Jewish (and their various cognates), become terms which have currency, or meaning. But while by now having religious and cultural associations, the term's etymology still retained its geographic origins, indicated territorially even today in the geographic designation of "Judea".

Now, given this brief history through time and etymology, and taken at face value, Netanyahu's demand that Israel be recognized specifically as a Jewish State can therefore be welcomed by the Palestinians or the United Nations simply to mean that he really wishes Israel of today to be recognized as being confined to the geographic boundary of the Kingdom of Judah!!! That, after all, is as etymologically and historically close to being Jewish or to Jewish-ness as one can get Israel to be defined.

But that is not, clearly, what Netanyahu is after. He wishes what is known (at least to himself) as Israel today to be or to become as literally (i.e., genetically) Israel, or as purely Jacobian in other words, as it is possible, that is, as free of *Abraham's other seed* as that is possible. "Jewish" for him means, as it does for Israel's founders, a “people” *defined negatively* in the sense explained as much as it means a religion. Therefore, he wishes the descendants of the other seed simply to confirm their binding acceptance of God's supposed gift to the supposed descendants of their ancient cousins. For the over million non-Jacobians who today have Israeli citizenship, what is required therefore is that they *en masse* declare that they consider themselves to be "guests" of sorts in that Land. For the nearly four million people who live in the so-called West Bank and Gaza parts of Eretz Israel, their chances of ever becoming free and exercising self-determination will also henceforth hinge upon their recognition of that definition of Israel. As for the rest, that is, for Palestinians and their descendants who were made refugees, they would have to forfeit their claims altogether and forever to a land they once mistakenly believed was rightfully theirs.

It is possible, of course, that Netanyahu, as an ex-salesman, and MIT graduate, is simply acting cleverly, as he believes, in order to get the best deal. Perhaps he will climb down from this demand once he believes he has brought Palestinian expectations, and demands, down to a minimum. But others in his government, such as his Jacobian Moldova Foreign Minister Lieberman, seem to be more serious. This man's party (Israel Is Our Home), which won a hefty number of seats in Israel's last elections, really takes seriously, and tries to sell, this notion of so redefining the Land geographically as to exclude as many non-Jacobians from it as possible.

Let me underline once again what this exclusivist notion is all about: starting from a specific family line, and a tribal migration, a settlement polity is created within which a religion evolves, henceforth identifying members of that polity. Once having assumed territorial form then everyone not belonging to that polity, whether in tribal or religious terms, and who may happen to find themselves living in it, are simply to be discounted as full members. Indeed, they themselves have to renounce that membership on pain of contravening the law of the land. Those who have been dislodged from it against their will in the process of the polity's formation have to drop any claims to it, or in it.

So much, then, for the genealogy of an exclusivist politics of identity: it is clearly a politics of confrontation and conflict. Let me now turn, in contrast, to a universalist perspective.

In his recent book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen brings together and further develops some ideas he has been espousing in his earlier books, lectures and talks on the multi-layered nature of identity. On the one hand, as he considers the general identities of different cultures, he shows through example how threads of one culture are deeply weaved into another, often unbeknown to the people themselves who identify with those cultures. On the other hand, as he considers the specific identities of different persons, he reminds us how richly varied these are, in each instance reflecting the different associations or roles human beings have. Globally, he concludes, talk about a clash of, say, Oriental and Occidental civilizations is misconstrued, since what we essentially have is one civilization, a shared human civilization, not two, or more. Individually, on the other hand, different associations or roles human beings have, and which constitute their respective identities, can make for the enrichment of the societies where these individuals live, rather than be viewed as an inevitable source of schism in those societies.

Sen’s observations seem eminently sensible. We have come to share so much between us that this all should make for better co-existence rather than for discord or war. The introduction of Budhism into Shintoist Japan, for example, simply had the effect of enriching the lives of the individual Japanese, who now came to have two indigenous complementary manners of religious expressions rather than just one. Countless other examples of cultural continuums, some

mentioned by Sen, and others not, can be cited. Stories in the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* such as that of the flood, or that of the seduction of the Adam-like Enkidu, resound in the Old Testament. Turkey's heritage is a resplendent synergy of Hittite, Greek, Byzantine and Ottoman cultures. The genius of the Arab civilization would not have arisen had it not been for the extant works and ideas of earlier Greek, Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian, or further a-field subcontinent authors and innovators. The Jews themselves have as much a share in it as anyone else. William Harvey's essay on the pulmonary circulation of the blood could well have been influenced by the 13th century Ibn Nafis of Syria, while Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* could well have been an extension of debates by Arab astronomers such as al-Tusi or al-Qushji. Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal, reflecting the universalist philosophy of the founders of the Mogul dynasty, to whom Sen refers on more than on one occasion, boasts patterns of the crescent alongside those of the cross, David's star and the Hindu lotus. The examples of a civilizational continuum, in other words, or of a rich history of built-up layers of human achievements, are endless. Ideas, as the saying goes, and as Sen reminds us, have been borderless long before the advent of the internet, or of globalization, and no single people, or cultural source, can claim exclusive ownership of what is most definitely a common world heritage.

Yet, in spite of these salient threads that run through the world's cultural mosaic, not only are we witnesses to constant wars and military conflicts, either kindled or reinforced by supposedly conflicting identities of all sorts and descriptions: these seem to have been alarmingly on the rise, with many more people having been killed by them during the last century than at any time before. It is, incredibly, in the midst of the so-called "Judeo-Christian West" that anti-Jewish sentiment at one time began to run high, eventually leading to the Holocaust. Some of us might also vividly remember the madly murderous flare-out between the Hutus and the Tutsis, leading to the internecine massacre of more than half a million people in the small ex-Belgian African colony of Burundi. One journalist at the time cynically reported the only difference between the fighting groups was the height of the average man. Memories of the Serbo-Croatian war, as former Yugoslavia was dismantled, still haunt us. Religious riots still flare out in Akbar's India, home of the second largest population of world Muslims, while the dust from Darfur's ethnic excesses has not yet settled. In Iraq, Sunnis and Shiites blow up each others' worshipper-packed mosques. Closer to home, Israel's sheer disdain for human values during its most recent military incursion into Gaza follows upon the heels of

yet another battle between Lebanon's Hizbullah and the Israeli Army, which in turn flared out following a five-year old violent confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians, where civilians have been known to be crushed to death under falling edifices blown up by rockets or suicide-bombs.

And even were we to take Ghandi's insight –as I do- at its face value that wars and genocides, as affronts to humanity, are exceptional interruptions in the flow of human affairs rather than constituting a historical pattern,[4] we are still faced with having to give an account to ourselves of that sweeping moral indifference we seem to have to the less endowed among us, whether on individual or national scales, manifested in every walk of life, arising simply from the sense that identities, when not in conflictual relation, are at best islands unto themselves, disconnected from one another and floating, so to speak, in free space, one sphere hardly having anything to do with another.

What, then, given Sen's perspective on civilization's continuum, are we to make of all this apparent scatter and divisibility of the human form, where the preponderance is that of cocoon-trapped, narcissistic and exclusivist identities, clashing with each other, let alone not manifesting sympathy, understanding or solidarity?

Sen's observations on the commonalities to be unearthed in the multi-layered nature of more global or cultural identities, and in the multi-layered nature of personal identities, are not just meant to show us that these identities are not sealed enclosures: they are also meant to show us that world ideologies and so-called civilizations and cultures are *not* irreversibly programmed or in-built to clash with one another –hence the second part of the book's title, "*The Illusion of Destiny*". Quite the contrary, he tells us, given the multi-layered nature of identities, and the *rational* capability of human agency[5], there are in theory at least as many reasons to look for and expect to find commonalities from which to build harmony as there are to forecast violent discord and doom. And if common features in different ideologies weren't enough to convince us that is possible, we'd still be left with the simple fact that it is not, in the final analysis, Shiism which battles Sunnism, for example, or Westernism which battles Khomeinism, but a human being who is Iraqi, an Arab, a Moslem, but a Shiite, who battles another human being who is also Iraqi, Arab and Moslem,

but a Sunni; or one person seeking to live by so-called “higher values” who battles another- Sen's conclusion being that, unlike ideologies, men at least can change, or be made to change.

But why –even assuming they are rational- should men wish to change? One might ask. And then: How would they do it?

Before even beginning to answer these questions, we find ourselves confronted by the haunting suspicion that the entire framework of reference Sen places before us may not be of relevance to understanding the causes of conflict in the first place. He just seems to assume that, as Jonathan Glover points out to us, once we unearth and recognize all these underlying commonalities between us, we would just discover that we do not really need to be at each others' throats, so to speak. Writing against the background of Huntington's "clash of civilizations", Sen is concerned to show us there cannot be an inevitable, inherent clash between antagonist civilizations by showing us there are no such creatures or entities in the first place. But Huntington's thesis, as we know, is just one among many trying to explain why wars happen, and these have been attributed to causes other than mere dissimilarity or even opposition. Freud's cynical response to Einstein's query concerning the human propensity to war, where he sadly concludes that our selfish genetic predisposition to engage in conflict is inherent and very hard to erase, posits identities as independent, self-seeking enclosures whose engagements with the outside world are more determined by basic wants than by commonalities or differences with other inhabitants of the world. Furthermore, in this connection, and ostensibly to further rattle Sen's thesis, conflicts in any case, it might be said, not only seem to persist where commonalities in heritage and culture exist, but arguably they even come to life and flourish exactly in those circumstances. If Abraham had not been a common ancestor the obsessive confrontation between Jew and Palestinian around his tomb in Hebron surely would not exist. It is the shared reverence of the same territory, rather than to different territories, furthermore, that makes Israelis and Palestinians fight. Indeed, it is exactly where paths cross, or thought to cross, that the parties treading them begin to take account of each other, in anticipation of a possible collision. The logic driving each party in such circumstances, as Freud tells us, is their selfish interest, couched in any number of different ways, be it the language of force, rights, or covenants.

So, one is driven to asking oneself, Is there no way out at all of this Freudian conundrum? It would seem that the only exception to this supreme logic –and, strictly speaking, it is really an extension of the same logic rather than an exception to it- is if the two sides can somehow identify a *common* selfish interest, thus requiring or compelling them to seek ways to cooperate. Various scenarios (games) here avail themselves, culminating in one where the very survival of one of two conflicting parties comes to be seen as being entirely dependent on the survival of the other; and where, consequent upon mere survival, the advancement and enrichment of one comes to be seen as being a function of that of the other. In such a context, and given the preeminence of selfishness as an end and rationality as a means, inclusivist selfish ends can still be served by rational means. But speaking more generally, and as Ghandi observed in India's context, unless opposing claims are measured against a shared standard, such as an account of shared human values, implying the recognition of a shared identity, and a shared universal end, competing claims would simply have equal weights, no one claim having preeminence over another, and the conflict between them only being resolvable by force. It is not readily clear whether Ghandi's formula for reaching a universalist vision is predicated on some higher cerebral function or an altogether different human facility such as sympathy or altruism. But whichever it is, and whether, indeed, Ghandi's vision is too idealistic in the first place, the question still arises whether, even if two or more parties saw it was rational for them to reach agreement in the pursuit of selfish ends, it is possible for them to feel or be free to crawl out of their entrenched cocoons, seeking those shared points of affinity with others. Or, are we all –even in spite of rationality and contrary to its dictates- somehow condemned by our birthrights or genetic trees to being slaves to our heavily encumbered, uni-dimensional, narcissist, and therefore inevitably irredentist identities?

I believe that we are fortunately not so condemned, and that the answer to our question is simple and self-evident: our identities as human beings happen genetically to be so constituted through our imaginative faculty as to make us constantly wish that we could crawl out from our cocoons, seeking anchors outside of our cradles. It is our imagination that is our savior!!

Thus, while each of us is admittedly born into actual time/space spots, and our identities and prejudices are thus shaped by the cultural and geographic landscape defining that spot, nonetheless we seem to be inherently capable of imagining ourselves as being somehow different, for example as being born into altogether different time/space pockets, or into "contrary-to-the-fact" situations. Strictly speaking, our imaginative faculty, inherent as it seems to be to our nature –for we can imagine ourselves as being somehow different- seems to be at odds with our logical faculty –for it is not quite clear how our imaginative exercise works- indeed, whether this exercise is not simply a mere, useless fantasy. An imaginative exploit of transposing ourselves into a counterfactual situation in any case seems to challenge the fundamental assumptions underlying our definition of who we are. Could there be a fundamental "I", an autonomous or unencumbered self, an "I" whose identity is at once defined by the here and now, but which we can also posit as being "there", in some other locale, and/or as being "then", in some other time-slot? On the one hand, we are tied by our logical faculty to specific contextual identities. We cannot, as our actual selves, but be who we actually are. On the other hand, also being ourselves, or who we actually are, we are endowed with an imaginative faculty which helps us free ourselves from this specific contextual identity, and which enables us to hypothesize counterfactual contexts, most often in such a way, for example in some future time, that then enables us to actually become that person. In an important sense, therefore, we are thus made capable of shaping our identities and designing better futures for ourselves precisely through being endowed with such a faculty.

I am not suggesting that such an underlying I exists in a Cartesian manner, or can exist, independently. But that it underlies our concept of ourselves, or of others, as a logically prior notion is, I would suggest, a basic assumption in our discourse, in our understanding of who we are, or it is, as Oxford's Peter Strawson would have called it, a "primitive concept". A counterfactual transposition –using this underlying I as a hypothetical I- is almost like a magical tool: on the one hand it helps us understand not only who we happen to be, but also who we could be. By imagining what we could do, we can strive to improve ourselves through time, or space. On the other hand, counterfactual transpositions help us understand others, for the faculty to imagine ourselves as being somehow different, how we could be, naturally extends to being a faculty for imagining someone else. It is a faculty, in other words, that reveals to us our sameness with others. The primary notion of an unencumbered self is at once a

primary notion of a generic self, instantiated indifferently among beings of the same species, or in particular for the purposes of our discourse, of the human species: it is instantiated in me as a human being, but also, and in the same sense, in my political enemy.

Here, then, we are confronted with a dichotomy between a “substitutable I” and an “entrenched I”, an “I” which is definable ultimately in human terms, and an “I” which is restrictively definable categorically in specific context-related terms. A substitutable I is one in whose terms a discourse about human or universal values, about morality, or human dignity, fits well. An entrenched I, on the other hand, is an I whose parameters are defined by more strictly-defined religious, cultural, or national belief-codes; by place and time, by cement walls, by impermeable or semi-impermeable political or cultural borders. Entrenched identities, and political and social structures which are founded upon them, may be contingently necessary, but they are not naturally primary, because within an entrenched I, however contextually defined, there is a primary substitutable I, a free I, one which relates to itself and to others primarily as a human being, rather than as a man or woman, a Hindu or Budhist, a Christian or Jew. To the extent an entrenched I is given primacy, one is certain to find moral incongruity, a prejudice, a discrimination, a disenfranchisement, a cultural or national aloofness, even within the context of so-called democratic political systems. Such a human end as Kant’s dignity, having as he views it a worthiness beyond exchangeable value, or being an item which cannot be exchanged with something else of the same value, for nothing else has such value, relates to a substitutable I, while my “rights” or privileges as a specific family member, a resident, a traveler, a citizen, a Jew, a woman, relate specifically to me as an individual in context, an entrenched I operating within a maze of other entrenched entities, with whom, or against whom, my only guarantee of an ultimate right is what is derived from those entities’ underlying human identity, rather than from what, as entrenched selves, they prescribe for me as an ordered network of normative rules. Entrenched Is primarily relate to each other as other; Substitutable Is relate to each other as belonging to the same club.

The notion of a substitutable I is useful in the determination of what my rights are as a human being, rather than as an individual-in-context. John Rawl’s veil of ignorance, it may be said, exemplifies this substitutability. For he asks us to imagine what, from behind a veil of ignorance of who we are or might be, we

believe to be are primary conditions or rights we believe we ought to possess as human beings. Abstracting thus from our own individual contexts, we can all come to agree on what we believe are items of primary value to us as human beings, rather than as specific individuals-in-context. In this way, we come to relate to a specific injustice, to a moral outrage, not only and primarily as this happens to afflict us in our own contingent contexts, as being black or as belonging to a disenfranchised minority or whatever, but as this comes to violate our moral sense as human beings. It is on the basis of this fundamental moral sense, and on these primary moral values, that we can come to construct or judge political or religious superstructures, whether these are religions or states or systems of belief, for these can only be defined or evaluated against this primary set of values, and their source of legitimacy comes to be viewed as being nothing other than the degree to which they succeed in addressing these values.

There is good reason, then, for why one should seek to crawl out of one's entrenched identity. But now Amartya Sen's frame of reference begins to make sense, for it shows us a way to do it: because, while an unencumbered, substitutable self, allowing me to identify with others across borders of all kinds, is an ideal human objective by any account, entrenched identities are exactly those which, constituted of cultural and conceptual layers many of which having shared origins, are both where one finds oneself to begin with, and which provide one with proximate bridges to cross if one so chooses. According to Sen's logic, how one decides to deal with these layers -as bridges or walls- reflects exactly the degree to which one is a master or slave of one’s identity – a degree which can be taken to be at once a measure of one’s freedom, as well as a function of the propensity to engage in conflict and to use violence in the pursuit of selfish ends.

To take an example, let us assume that what we begin with in the Iraqi Shiite case is a wide range of identity-layers, or layers which together make up or constitute an entrenched identity. Shiism itself, for example, as one of several such constituent layers of one’s identity, can either be so over-blown out of all proportions that it becomes preponderant over all the other layers, or it can be kept in check, being allowed to assume a vibrant if not suppressive role.

Remaining in check, and synchronized with the other layers in terms of both size and function, it has the capacity to enrich rather than exasperate human relations. It can do this either by allowing other layers in one instance to play a more active role, or by being made in another instance to contribute to rather than to detract from the affinity already in existence in the form of a shared layer, such as being Iraqi or Arab, etc. Allowing one such layer to become preponderant –making it become, in one instance, even larger than life itself, that is, than the instinctive and primary identification of ourselves as living human beings- can easily vest it with a power which can turn men into instruments of death, or of its voraciousness. If we think of the multiplicity of layers as constituting a field-range of identification-capability, not only expressing what we can do but also who or what we can be, reflecting the individual's options as a conscious agent to choose at will and according to circumstance which layer, or group of layers, to give prominence on which occasion, and in effect to choose what identity to have, then to the extent that one can make those choices one can be said to be master of one's identity. And to the extent that one particular layer comes to dominate and in an exclusivist manner therefore to limit one's choices, then one's capability range, or freedom, is diminished, thereby reflecting the transformation of the agent from being master to being a slave of their identity. Needless to say, this enslavement of individuals can be reflected by how they act, but also by how they perceive- both themselves as well as others. Palestinians and Israelis who feel themselves compelled to fight each other are also slaves in this respect of their respective identities; but those who also refuse to see each other but in a negative light are equally enslaved, perceptually.

But how does this discourse tally with how we talk about identity philosophically? What does it mean to say we can either be slaves or masters of our identities? Or to say that our identity consists of a cluster of layers, in some cases controlled by our will, but in others controlling that will? Is identity, then, a predicate, or a cluster of attributes ascribable to a subject? What is the subject, then? How would we define or understand *its* identity? And if we can't make sense of what the subject, stripped of its layers, is, then how could we make sense of saying "it" can control or be controlled by those layers which we have come to see as attributes pure and simple?

These are, of course, pretty tricky questions that have been, in one form or another, a source of unfailing amusement to philosophers for quite a long time.

Is there an ultimate *I*, a *cogito*- what we earlier called a substitutable or primary I- that is other than what I happen to find myself to be, other than what I do, and other than what *you* can come to know? One of the oldest extant thought-experiments interrogating this feature of the self may been Avicenna's so-called floating, or flying man, imagined to be stripped of all possible senses, and yet being self-conscious. But let me, without asking you to commit to one answer or another to this complex question, add perhaps to its complexity by taking some further steps, or strides, along the line we have been discussing: whether we are talking about personal, collective or ideological identities, what may be understood from what Sen is saying, significantly, and as I already pointed out, is that such identities are not only multi-layered, but being so they are also amenable to the human agent's control, as a function of the agent's freedom or capability. This immediately raises, or throws light on, a number of important points, which I will first mention, then explain. First, besides the initial principle that identities are not hermetically-sealed entities, independent from one another, they are not, also, necessarily or entirely prefixed, nor are they immutable. Thus, we do not only "come by" our identities, but can also make them. A second, and telling corollary point that can be made here –one which signifies an immense source of power- is that, given this conception of identities, not only are we capable of shaping our own identities, but that there is no reason to suppose we are not also capable of shaping the identities of others: in this sense we can claim that we do not only happen to *find* enemies or friends in the world; we can also *make* them. A third point, which can perhaps be thought to add to the fuzziness of this discourse is this: identities, in the sense we are talking about, are not discrete but continuous. Stated differently, identities admit of degree, or they are subject to "less or more" rather than to "either/or" judgments. We could claim that on an identity scale, for example, one can be said to be more, or less in charge of one's identity; or that one can be more, or less, enslaved by that identity- in the sense, that is, and stated differently, that one's passion-for-wealth layer for example, or one's self-adulation layer, or the layer that makes for one's passion to make other people live by one's own values, can be more, or less pronounced.

Let me, by way of an explanation, take the example of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: An Israeli can submit herself to the view that she is Israeli *in so far as she can settle in Palestinian Hebron*. If asked, and she were a philosophy student, she might claim that "being a settler" therefore counts for her as a rigid designator –or as a description which is true of her in every possible world- that, for her, it is inconceivable or self-contradictory to be an Israeli and to be

denied (or to deny herself) that act of settlement. To be able to settle in the vicinity of the Tomb of the Patriarch is what being an Israeli means, or is all about. An Israeli's identity for her is thus pre-defined, and it is pre-defined in such a way as to ensure conflict. It is what one inherits, "comes into", or "wears" as a ready-made and pre-fabricated dress. She refuses to see, or is simply blind to, other options. But another Israeli, cognizant of other world factors, or other values, or other ways of being and doing, may choose to forge for herself an identity as an Israeli without the act of settlement being constitutive of that identity, or after having shed that layer. The first Israeli is a slave to her identity, in that she *submits* herself to that self-definition, whereas the second is master of that identity, in that she consciously re-composes the relative weight-distribution of her various layers, or even constitutes new ones. Furthermore –and this is a foretaste of the second significant point- as an extension of how an Israeli defines herself, others' identities can be impacted. The two Israelis can equally contribute, consciously or otherwise, to the formulation of the identity of their Palestinian neighbors: the first Israeli can make anti-Israelism a constituent part of the neighbor's Palestinian identity. The second Israeli can contribute to making co-existence with Israel a constituent part of the neighbor's national identity. How one defines oneself (or whether and how one decides to metamorphose, or to shape or define one's identity) can therefore impact how others come to relate to one, and can impact the kind of life one might have as a result. On the positive side this can be, amazingly, and in Ghandi-like fashion, a far more effective source of political power than nuclear capability. I shall have more to say about this forthwith. Finally, however, and regarding my third point, it is probably self-explanatory how the degree to which one masters one's identity, as Isiaah Berlin observed, and Sen noted, reflects itself on how much "one's own person" one is. Here, identity comes to merge as a notion with something like "strength of character": at some level, all individuals share a prototype identity –perhaps an identity *in potentia*- but surely, some individuals manage to become more of their own persons than others. Personal identity can easily come to be seen in this case as being differentially nurtured or constituted rather than as being evenly distributed. In this sense, we might say one person is distinguishable as a person from the next precisely insofar as they seem to be masters of their identities, and in how they manage to shape those identities.

As I said earlier, being able to master sufficiently one's identity, and to shape it, can be a powerful tool in helping shape the identities of others. Recalling Ghandi in this context, it is easy to see how much power individuals possess,

which is not that of physical force or violence, which if one learns to use consciously and purposely can *positively* transform peoples' lives. We are not entirely oblivious to the existence and effect of the converse of this power, as and when Israel's use of physical force, for example, simply has the effect of hardening Palestinian positions, or vice versa. Abstinence from the use of physical force can at the very least, therefore, not produce the hardened result. But abstinence from the use of force under great duress requires gigantic effort, the exercise of which in effect consciously succeeds in the shaping of one's own identity. This in turn projects itself on the other party's behavior, and, ultimately and in effect, on its identity. Furthermore, and by extension, the employment of attraction rather than confrontational tactics can also sometimes be put to positive use, proving to be far more fruitful as a means to change or bend the will of the other side to one's advantage. In this overall context of the use of physical force it is well to dwell on Israel's case as an example. Not only has its start-out military advantage vis-à-vis the Palestinians proven itself to be inconclusive in determining a desired political outcome: even successively increased levels of military capacity in its ongoing confrontation with Palestinians has proven to be just as useless. Israel's recently-built demographic wall is paradoxically a statement of recognition of the failure of its mighty military capability, the latest in a series of proofs of the failure of the military option. Right from its inception, with each military success it thought it had achieved Israel has had to discover the futility of that success. Palestinians, to quote one relevant example, have simply not faded out, but have on the contrary been increasing in numbers and strength. To achieve its required security Israel needed right from the beginning, as it needs now, to win Palestinian sympathy and understanding, not to demonize the other as an organically-intrinsic enemy which needs to be dispossessed or imprisoned within cement walls. Palestinians, on the other hand, who proved their wills are unbreakable whatever the force used against them, should also recognize that they also cannot break the will of the other side, and can more easily achieve their objectives by winning Israeli sympathy and understanding. Demonizing the Israelis as an intrinsic enemy cannot but be a self-fulfilling exercise.

But, it must be said, in concluding these observations on the futility of the military doctrine, that it is a sad statement on human intelligence that we only seem to be able to learn the lesson that violence is inherently useless through its very use!

To return to Sen, and to the background philosophical discussions on *a priori* and constitutive identities: while I have not addressed and I have not asked you to commit to an answer to the underlying puzzle of how one is supposed to constitute one's identity, I hope it is at least initially clear that that puzzle –in the context of our own discourse- should not immediately impose itself if the contention –as a first step- is simply that one can -to all intents and purposes, as it is sometimes said- impact the constitution of *another* party's identity. There at least, I hope it is initially clear, one is spared having to figure out how to close the gap between self and attribute, or whether, indeed, such a gap exists, or whether its existence is at all relevant. In practical terms, it is sufficient unto itself if the designation "the Israeli settler" ceases to be true of anyone, but did at one time pick out exactly *that person* I now designate as "my friendly neighbor". Meantime, this settler has to have metamorphosed into a person who now comes to view herself- or to define herself- as a non-settler Israeli. But how could she metamorphose, it may be asked, and remain the same person, therefore in one sense at least having the same identity, but in another sense having changed that identity? The only fitting answer, I believe, lies precisely in the theory of layers: that the pronouncement of one layer of her identity, the settlement-layer, comes to be downsized in relation to other layers that come to assume more weight or importance in the general constitution of her identity. I need not, in other words, nor indeed can I, given my contention I could change her, in addressing her in order to bring about such a change, postulate an immutable self other than and behind those layers anyway. But neither could I in this case address *her* to bring about that change, it might be claimed. Well, that witty claim is debunked by the fact that, in my general practice, I simply do!

But by extrapolation, and as a second step in the process of figuring out how this puzzling metamorphosing process can apply to myself as opposed to others, I need not, by analogy, or going by how I view others, be logically intimidated by supposing that I myself am nothing other than the sum or set of my own layers, some of which I can create as I go along, and all or most of which I can regulate. Let me put this in another way: if I have no logical or practical qualms about understanding and dealing with her personhood in terms of a layers-multitude, it should be an easy exercise to apply that understanding to my own personhood as well. Indeed, this is not such an outlandish suggestion, as it is arguably only possible in the first place to form an idea of my own identity having first, and through others or a societal context, formed the concept of personhood or of identity. The late Oxford philosopher Peter

Strawson, in a remarkably lucid and early work of his on personal identity, contends that that concept is primitive, and that I can only form a notion of myself as a person if I have already worked out, from interacting with others, what being a person means. Therefore, to extrapolate the constitution of my own identity from that of others is not only possible: it is arguably necessary. There remains, of course, the natural partiality I have for myself, which I am inclined normally to explain, not by the existence of an over-blown partiality-layer, but by an actual, immutable, I, standing behind or above those layers, surveying them as I might survey a property or a landscape. But there is no reason to suppose that my introspective Cartesian ruminations must imply a total break between, say, the "layers-set" we describe as a thinking subject, and the range of thinking (as well as feelings, and emotions and sentiments, etc.) which we include as operations in that set. One can imagine a working model, in other words, where postulating such a generic distinction is not necessary. And so, if we agree that I can literally and not only metaphorically change myself, just as I can literally and not only metaphorically change others, it is then surely the degree to which I can create or regulate the comparative composition of my constituent layers that my freedom or capability can be measured. Using that metamorphosing power positively, in my own case as a Palestinian for example, one rational way for me to act in order to achieve my political objectives is to so formulate my identity or metamorphose as to cause the required metamorphosis in my neighbor, that is, to transform her from being a settler to being a friendly neighbor. The only proviso here, of course, would be to ensure that by becoming my own master, I do not succumb to being somebody else's slave!

If you think about it, the upshot of my observations is quite paradoxical: even under occupation, and therefore ostensibly deprived of my freedom, and certainly deprived of objective freedoms, I can in fact, measured by myself, be free. But this is not a Stoic freedom, sufficient unto itself. On the contrary, it is a source of objective power. Indeed, by that freedom, I happen to possess the incredible power of being able to cause a metamorphosis in others, and therefore to impact the objective conditions of my living. There is an even more paradoxical conclusion arising from this contention of freedom: for, as we turn to the seemingly locked entanglement of occupier and occupied, otherwise viewed as a relationship where the stronger of two parties (the masters) has the weaker party (the slaves) floored, it is a strange observation of human nature that, of the two sides, it is the apparent "underdog" which possesses more power (in the sense discussed). A party already in control by force of another

party will find itself, strategically speaking, at the risk of losing its upper-hand advantage if it were to initiate a process of metamorphosis in itself- for example, by unilaterally beginning to lift off its militaristic instruments of control. In terms of our earlier discourse, it is in a sense enslaved by that strategic advantage, or by that layer. The floored party, on the other hand, has no strategic advantage to lose. It therefore has a wider range of choice. It could resort to the use of force, or it could employ another tactic, such as non-violent resistance, but also those tactics which, by an appropriate self-metamorphosis, could in fact initiate a process of change in the expansionist or militaristic identity of the occupier. The occupied, in other words, has in terms of capability, or choice over options, more power than the occupier!

But to what end? You will now find a lot of Palestinians asking themselves. As you survey the devastated Palestinian landscape, various ideas might come to your mind. National sovereignty, or a formal expression of national identity, may well be a forerunner. A major economic reconstruction program may also present itself as an urgent need. Emergency financial aid from international agencies such as the World Bank may be thought to be essential. However, as one looks more deeply into the Palestinian condition, and wonders about what it is essentially that requires addressing, one cannot help but realize that, underneath it all, what cries for attention is human dignity, and equal worth- those basic values informing Martha Nussbaum's capability approach. Because, if I think about it, what motivates me most in my Palestinian identity-layer is only my sense that it is through pronouncing that layer I could finally reach a situation, or create the external conditions, where my capabilities can be protected and enhanced. I view my national identity, in other words, as a means, not as an end. That is why I am not catholically wedded, so to speak, to the idea of a Palestinian State, the natural formal abode of Palestinian national identity. And that is why, even as I ponder a State, I ponder it in the context of whether it will provide me with the values I uphold. A politics or an economic program which ignores the ultimate values of the individual *qua* individual is, I believe, bound to be misconstrued. That is why, even as a Palestinian, I am more concerned with the values of being free, and being treated as of equal worth with others, even in the context of one State including Israelis and Palestinians, than I am with the symbols of national sovereignty. It is not one State, or two that matters: it is the human dignity of a Palestinian's life.

But, to return to the beginning, so it should also be the case with Netanyahu: it is the human dignity of the life of a Jew that should matter, rather than defining the State as Jewish. And one people's dignity ought not to be constructed or be allowed to survive at the cost of the disenfranchisement of the dignity of another people.

Finally and far more generally, let me conclude by saying that I hope it has also become clear that, just as it is the dignity of an individual Jew that should matter more than seeking to define a State as Jewish, what matters even more is the sanctification of universal human values over and above the sanctification of whatever are thought to be Jewish values, in the following sense: if being Jewish or Muslim eventually translates as in the least undermining human values, then so much the worse, I believe, for the values associated with those religions. A human community living by human values, including respect for difference, is far worthier than a religious community which encourages discrimination, and constructs a legal system which will condone it in its usurpation of human rights. In this sense, whatever one's natural cocoon or original position is, then, in line with Sen's recommendation, the more one manages to master one's identity, the more affinity one is bound to find with the other outside of one's contextual entrenchment, and the less exclusivist, or self-adulating and narcissistic one is a victim of being.

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[1] This paper is a further development of two older presentations which were delivered respectively at theHCDA annual meeting, Netherlands, 2006; and at a workshop on territoriality organized by the Prince Hassan Foundation, Amman, 2004.

[2] The first component of *Ishma-el* indicating compliance, or obedience.

[3] From the Qur'an, the verb *haada*, and the description *al-latheena haadu*, referring to the Jews (*al-Yahuud*), seem to indicate this directional root, meaning, to come down, or to come forth.

[4] All references here to Ghandi are to his *Hind Swaraj*.

[5] Jonathan Glover kindly passed on to me his commentary “Identity, Violence and the Power of Illusion”, written as part of Amartya Sen’s Festschrift, in which he takes to task both Sen’s so-called “Enlightenment” disposition to place so much emphasis in explaining men’s acts on rational motives- Glover lays out his overall alternative view in his *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2000), in which he tries to give more weight to such factors as sympathy and understanding; and where he also adds, to Sen’s account of a simplistic view of identity and a misplaced sense of inevitability, two other motivations for the disposition to violence, that of remembered harm, especially humiliation, as well as the tendency to project guilt collectively.