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Peace of Ass / Walking the Peace Talk: A non-artists' statement



“Peace of Ass”

Conceived by Jon Simons and Ariel Katz. Designed by Ariel Katz. Photo by Jess Booth. Photo editing by Claire Swallow.

Jon and Ariel’s voice: Our opening statement for our creative project about Israeli-Palestinian peace, and its lack, is not a conventional “artist’s statement” as neither of us are artists by training or occupation. Jon Simons is an academic specializing in cultural theory, currently focusing on images of peace in the Israeli peace movement (Simons 2012; Simons 2013), who under other circumstances would have contributed to the “philosophy” panels at the 2014 International Žižek Studies Conference. Ariel Katz is a psychotherapist and writer interested in Israeli/Palestinian peace (Katz 2010; Katz 2013).

We were brought together for this project by decades of friendship (which was much tested in the process) and a shared concern to make a contribution to peacemaking between “Israelis” and “Palestinians.” Wishing to add to our usual modes of intervention, we took the opportunity offered by the conference organizers to be creative and assume the mantle of “artists.”

The conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is one of the world’s most intractable conflicts, dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. Even calling it the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” is reductive of its complexity and the different terminologies used to refer to different identities at play. Roughly one fifth of Israeli citizens are called Arab Israelis by the

government but many identify themselves as Palestinian Israelis or simply Palestinians. Some of the four fifths of the Israeli population who are Jewish call themselves Arab Jews in reference to their origin in Arab countries. There are many more Arabs and Jews in the world than those embroiled in the “Israeli-Palestinian” conflict. Though there seem to be clearly two “sides” to the conflict, it is hard to draw fixed lines around them. Attempts to make peace are easily derailed and attack is met with counter-attack. We worked on our project when the nine-month gestation period for US Secretary of State John Kerry’s peace initiative for a “two state” solution was coming to an end in the spring of 2014. The breakdown in talks was followed by Israel’s war on Gaza in the summer and as we prepare this text for publication in



the fall, by violence between Jews and Palestinians around Jerusalem. There is no positive outcome on the horizon. To achieve peace we need to try something different.

As we both have quite different modes of expressing ourselves about our work and this project, in this opening statement we write in our distinct voices, returning to a shared voice as we describe particular aspects of our project. Our project had a performance element, the *Peace of Ass* “mock” fashion show of Israeli-Palestinian “peaceware,” including contact improv dance, and also featured a static exhibition displaying the garments worn and played with during the fashion show – “Try on Peace for Size” - alongside refashioned Israeli and Palestinian flags. Here is some of the thinking that informed our project.

Ariel’s voice: I’m a Jewish woman who grew up in a family with strong ties to Zionism. I had travelled to Israel three times before studying Middle Eastern Studies at Cornell University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where I focused on Arabic and Hebrew language and literature. After graduating, I worked for Interns for Peace in Acco in the 1980s, living with a

Palestinian woman, Rokaya Marzook Aburekeyek. Together we recently developed a technique for non-verbal dialogue between Israeli Arabs and Jews which has been presented at a psychotherapy conference in England (Katz 2010). We are currently writing a book together, and the process was interrupted during the Gaza war in 2012, mirroring the interrupted peace process, when violence erupted. When the project halted, I was left feeling powerless. Jon was working on a project searching for “images of peace” so I decided to create some images for him using the emotional energy of extreme disappointment and anger about the aborted peace process in Israel/Palestine and the lives that are unnecessarily damaged or ruined in the process.

A flag can carry high emotive charges of nationalism both for those that identify with it and for those that see the flag as representing the big Other. The colors and shapes of flags, through association, can also be emotively charged. My designs are a way of finding new symbols to blur the divide between us and them. My first product was a Converse sneaker made up of colors and shapes from both Israeli and Palestinian flags to encourage people to “walk the talk” of peace, and put the tongue of their shoe in the same direction as the tongue in their mouths.

The concept of peace is generally associated with tranquillity and therefore inherently lacking emotional charge. How can it possibly compete with the power of hatred and vengeance? Just as advertising generates strong feelings about products, I wanted to energize our associations with peace by somehow making it seductive and sexy, a fashion item, a commodity that people would be drawn to and “buy” into. I had an idea called “Pussies for Peace” where flags are drawn on women’s bodies from their belly buttons to their knees, with the focal point drawn on their pubic mons. This was a play on objectifying women’s bodies to sell a concept while having the underlying meaning that more feminine energy of relationship is needed for peacemaking, as well as a pun with the Hebrew words for womb and mercy which have the same root. This concept is used in the dance piece.

Jon gave me the idea to paint flags on bottoms and to create a fashion show for the Žižek conference with him, and that was the impetus for “Peace of Ass”. Through our spontaneous play together with these ideas, the collection grew. From a state of despair, together we managed to find transgressive enjoyment in the irreverence of deconstructing and reconstructing flags. The work is a collaboration between psychotherapist/creator and cultural theorist who come from different disciplines but share a concern for justice in Israel/Palestine.

My close friend, Rokaya Marzook Aburekeyek, a Muslim Palestinian citizen of Israel, is my muse for this collection. For her, I'm driven to conjure an Israel/Palestine at peace. Rokaya



insisted that the first fashions that needed to be created weren't the street shoes I'd designed, but instead slippers to be worn at home, so that peace becomes a family value in every household. We need to "internalize" peace before bringing it about in the outside world. This led to the robe and house shoes being part of the collection. The featured letter shin has the kabbalistic and dualistic meaning of the unchanging, potential for change and actual change.

I draw on several psychotherapeutic approaches that utilize creative visualization to promote actual change. Phobias can be cured through exposure therapy. I offer images of flags together to expose people to the Other and to picture the possibility of sharing a limited area, such as a shoe or a flag. Solution-focused therapy asks the "miracle question": If you woke up tomorrow and your problem was solved, what would that look like? The final section of the dance is one such vision. The women walk side by side, ripping up borders, and are so divested of nationalistic identities that they are able to put both flags on their ass.

Symbols of affiliation have the power to unite people while simultaneously separating them from the Other. Flags and their colors reach beyond our intellect to primal instincts of tribalism and survival, of pride and power, of repulsion and fear. Perspectives have become artificially polarized and fixed through traumatic historical events and propaganda. All the elements of this collection are an attempt to disrupt the alienating energy of national symbols by creating intertwined symbols, envisioning connectedness and inviting all to "try peace on for size." Just as fashion evolves to express current social contexts, national identities also evolve and change, their importance waxing and waning through history. This project is an attempt to loosen their grip.

Jon's voice: Growing up in Britain, I was very involved in a Zionist youth organization, and at the age of twenty three I immigrated to Israel, where I exercised my right as a Jew to become an Israeli citizen. Nearly three years after I arrived in Israel, the first *intifada* broke out, and I started going to many protests against the Israeli occupation, and then became very active in a dialogue group between Israelis living in West Jerusalem and Palestinians living in the West Bank town of Beit Sahour. After moving back to Britain and then to the United States, in recent years I've combined my long-standing passion for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine with my academic research.

As Ariel says above, this project is based in our shared frustration about the lack of peace and our desire to work creatively together towards peace. As the project was proposed for a conference about Žižek, I was prompted to think about Žižek's approach to nationalism and national identification. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often understood to be a clash of two national movements. Yet, there is nothing natural about nationalism. Some scholars, the

“ethno-symbolists,” consider nationalism to be “primordial.” They trace it back to the ethnicity of ancient Hebrews and Greeks and focus on the role of symbols, myths, values and traditions in modern national identities too (Smith 1998). Most scholars, however, take nations to be thoroughly modern, for example, as imagined (but not imaginary) communities. People who don’t know each other feel they share life in common as a public connected by different modes of media, from print onwards (Anderson 1991).

Along a different theoretical track, using the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek characterizes nationalism as an ideological fantasy that shapes not only a community’s identity but also its desires. The Nation is a sublime object elevated by individuals to stand in for what they have lost, what they lack – their *jouissance*, or transgressive enjoyment. As he says, “Enjoy your Nation as Yourself!” (Žižek 2003, p. 200). People don’t *know* what the Nation is or why it is the basis of political authority, but they *believe* that it knows, and so they accept its authority above the fundamental, social order or law, which inheres in the symbolic, linguistic register. Thus, nationalism “cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification,” as the national bond lies in “a shared relationship toward ... Enjoyment.” (Žižek 2003, p. 201). For the sake of the Nation, the big Other, people give up their *jouissance* under the law of national allegiance, but at the same time, inconsistently, they believe that through the Nation they have access to their lost *jouissance*. In a fantasy of lost origins Others steal “our” enjoyment, in this case nations who take their pleasure – or enjoyment – differently (Žižek 2003, p. 203). Hatred of the other nation is a way in which the national political community deals with its lack of enjoyment and sustains its fantasmatic structure.

A Žižekian understanding of the intractability of national identification echoes well with the intense investments of Israelis and Palestinians in their national identities, and explains their attachment to national symbols such as flags. But how are the identifications and psychic investments in national identities that prevent peace between Israelis and Palestinians to be overcome if they are as deeply built into individual and national psyches as Žižek argues? It follows that a political change can only come about as a revolutionary political intervention, which Žižek calls an “Act” that is also a sort of psychoanalytical intervention that “crosses the fantasy” (to use one of Lacan’s terms) that sustains nationalist identity. Such “an Act ‘touches the Real’ ... of what a sociopolitical regime has politically repressed or which it cannot publicly avow without risking fundamental political damage” (Sharpe 2010, p. 255). What a nationalist regime disavows fundamentally is that there is no Nation, only a lack that the Nation tries to fill. Perhaps he isn’t right, but if we follow Žižek, then peace could only come if Israelis – and Palestinians – renounce their nationalist identifications. Certainly, the radical anti-occupation activists don’t believe real change will come without renouncing Zionism, chanting rhythmically in Hebrew at demonstrations: “We won’t kill or be killed for the sake of Zionism.” Perhaps they have traversed the nationalist fantasy into an “alternative administration of enjoyment” (Stavrakakis 2004, p. 31) in which the fundamental lack of enjoyment is accepted as unavoidable, as Real in Lacan’s terms. Only if the lack is not blamed on others or believed to be redeemable by the big Other can there be peace, can people be reconciled to themselves as subjects of lack.

It’s clear that there is no easy or quick way to induce Israeli Jews and Palestinians to stop blaming each other for stealing their enjoyment and instead activate alternative enjoyment

that connects individuals and communities to each other. It is not as if there has been a lack of inventive Israeli/Palestinian peace (or anti-occupation and human rights) activism, though clearly there is still a lack of peace. Žižek offers one explanation of why peace is so hard to achieve, by emphasizing the power of nationalism as a fantasy. On his account, neither trying to persuade Jews and Palestinians that they share common interests, nor bringing them together in dialogue to demonstrate that they really aren't so different from each other, can get us through the fantasy. From the same Žižekian perspective, to say: "Hey look, my national identity is just a covering, underneath we're all the same, so let's kiss and make up!" would be as much mired in a liberal fantasy as nationalism is its own structure of enjoyment. As Žižek might put Mohammed Abu-Nimer's (1999) critique of some conventional contact approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the dialogue of sharing *hummus* is so problematic because once it's over, each side believes that the other stole their *hummus*. There is nothing to be gained by pretending that nationalism is not as powerful a fantasy as it is.

Yet there is also nothing to be gained by believing that nationalism is a more powerful fantasy than it is, immune to challenge and change. A Žižekian framework is less suited to understanding all the smaller acts of peace activism in Israel/Palestine which may not have brought peace yet, but which continue even at the current time in which the Israeli parliament is passing increasingly nationalist, anti-democratic laws. For example, the bi-national Israeli-Palestinian group *Combatants for Peace* (2015) talks, protests non-violently, and works in solidarity without abandoning their wish for an Israeli and Palestinian nation state. Another joint Israeli-Palestinian group, *The Bereaved Families Forum* (2015), work publicly against violence, hatred and vengeance, in the belief that reconciliation between nations is a prerequisite for conventional, negotiated peace. Other activist groups criticize them for not being radical enough, or as a Žižekian analysis might conclude, for remaining too invested in the national fantasies that sustain Israeli and Palestinian identification as two sides of a conflict (for example, by taking an Israeli flag to a joint demonstration in the West Bank). Perhaps there is something to such criticisms, but I would argue that what matters more is that these Israeli-Palestinian activists work together in similar ways to others who privilege working across national lines above national identification. A good example of that is *Ta'ayush*, (2015) a grass-roots partnership working non-violently to stand with Palestinians living under the menace of Israeli settlers and military. These are the activists whose work I admire and research, whose acts perform and prefigure the peace that is yet to come, who engage in concrete acts of political imagination, and whose acts might one day add up to the Žižekian Act.

Our project is, in my view, neither a Žižekian Act nor one of the many small acts of grass-roots activism, at least not as its performance in Cincinnati. From a Žižekian perspective, our fashion project can't loosen Jewish and Palestinian national identities or symbols: it doesn't itself fashion a new structure of enjoyment. However, our project does gesture towards a Žižekian Act by indicating through its laughter that another structure of enjoyment is needed. For me, the key to our project is the "peace of ass" joke. In part, it echoes Žižek's (2004) infamous scatological metaphor in which he considers different national toilet designs not in relation to the excrement itself as the horrifyingly-sublime, but the hole into which the excrement goes. The hole is the Real, "the gap which serves as the passage to a different ontological order," beyond our symbolic, social order (Žižek 1990). The "peace of ass" joke refers to an asshole

into which peace has disappeared, and become unrepresentable in the language and practice of at least some anti-occupation and human rights activists in Israel/Palestine. Peace for them is a discredited term, a piece of shit, an ideological fantasy repeatedly touted by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, an unending process the achievement – or enjoyment – of which is always denied by the enemy Other, as in the slogan “there is no partner for peace” (Ophir and Azoulay 1998). Painting the Israeli and Palestinian flags in halves on butts might imply such disillusion – “peace up your ass!” It may be an irreverent poke at the flags as national symbols, and hence at nationalism in general, and thus also at a “two-state” solution to the conflict. But the image is open to all sorts of interpretations, including that each nation is only complete when it is up close and personal with the other. Of course, it can mean all those things together.

To some extent then, our project embraces a Žižekian tactic (but not only Žižekian) for undercutting current nationalist psychic investments by approaching the transgressive enjoyment, which is normally prohibited or marginalized. The everyday enjoyment of playing with fashion is a way to show what people have relinquished by adhering to the nationalist, symbolic order. This tactic entails practices that would involve sex, death, violence, abjection, but also humor, physical contact, and disruption. Our project takes some steps in that direction, walking the peace talk and improvising contact between bodies that normally don't touch, except in confrontation. Our project imagines another structure of enjoyment while recognizing that imagination is a necessary but not sufficient step. Our project plays with and mixes national identities, staging enjoyment in an ordinary rather than transgressive sense to point towards a way out of nationalist structures of enjoyment. Whatever else that might mean, it must surely involve bodies in touch with each other, butts pressed to butts, boundaries between and around bodies being pulled away, bodies dancing together, not seeking enjoyment through the big Other as the Nation, but enjoying each other as bodies.

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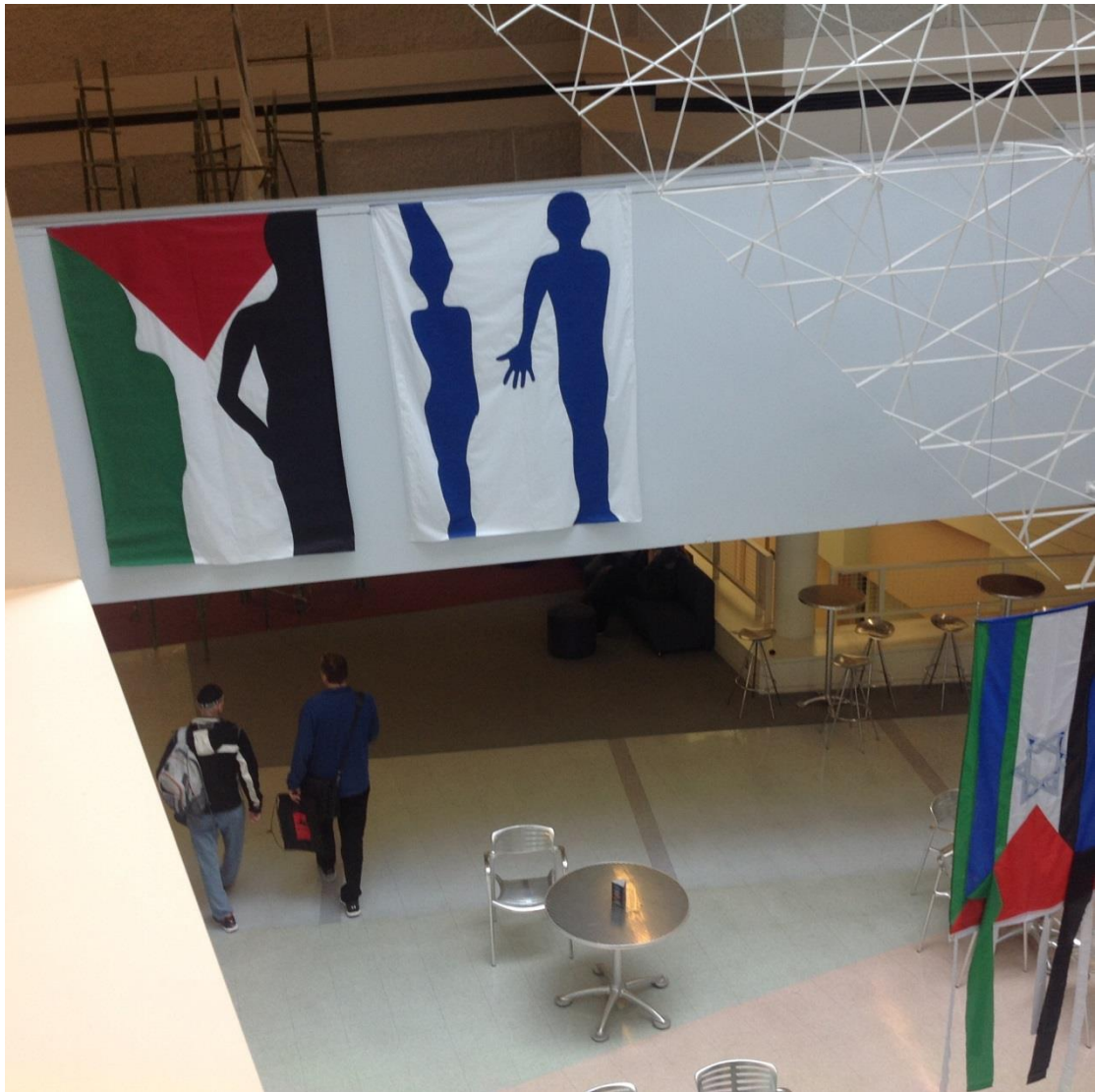
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The following sections in our combined voice cover the main symbolic themes of the fashion exhibition and show:

- **Playing with flags**
- **Walking the peace talks**
- **Shouldering peace, heading for peace**
- **Getting comfortable with peace**
- **Peace superhero**
- **“Peace of Ass” contact improvisation dance**

Playing With Flags

Israelis and Palestinians often find that their bodies and lives are imprinted with their separate national existence and destinies – flags are imposed on people. These flags reverse that relation by replacing the stripes of flags with silhouettes of a man and a woman.



The blue and white Israeli flag shows a man and a woman. The man's open hand replaces the Magen David, or Star of David. In the Palestinian flag the colored stripes are replaced by a man and a woman.

The "people on flags" contest the monopoly of the national flags on identities and the nationalist politics that trump respect for human life. The representation of both men and women in each flag indicates that the conflict between "two sides" isn't only between Israelis and

Palestinians, Arabs and Jews, but that gender injustice and the oppression of women is also part and parcel of the conflict.

Ariel: In order to make a joint flag, I took two existing flags, one I had purchased from Hebron wearing a jalibiya and hijab and one from Toys”R”Us in Be'er Sheva, and sewed them together before I cut them so that there were never any separate pieces. I stitched along each border between two colors using green thread. Then Jon and I cut alongside each suture to create a single flag leaving the loose pieces hanging so that no pieces were discarded. When I cut the white fabric to reveal the red triangle I didn't follow the suture lines and I cut down the center, reminiscent of open-heart surgery. It was at first painful to raise the scissors to the flags and cut something that feels sacred to a group of people. As I got going and started to see the colors come through, I thought the flag looked better together than the separate flags. The finished product embodied both the pain and loss of not getting everything you want and having to compromise and accommodate the other; and the joy of finding an integration that only blurred the colors at the borders while maintaining the integrity of the original colors.



The fourth flag I made by sewing an open ended zipper between the two flags so that they could be one or separate and remain fully intact. The zipped flags made the cape for the Peace Hero.

Walking the peace talk

The Converse All Star shoes bear all the colors of the Palestinian and Israeli flags visible from every angle. The white side with the star represents the Israeli flag, yet the eyelets are green, laces red and sole black as a nod to the yin yang symbol that incorporates one's opposite into the center of oneself, that the Self exists only in relation to the Other.



The blue tongue, stitching and sole stripe that encircles the shoe to the Palestinian side is the blue stripe from the Israeli flag. The five pointed star of Converse's corporate logo is changed into the six pointed Star of David. The shoes suggest that everyone needs to do more than talk the talk (of peace), and instead get up and walk the peace talk.

The "We are One" sneakers are used by the dancers as a way of recognizing the layers of identities and that both Jews and Palestinians feel engulfed by the other.



The shoes are designed by Ariel Katz, produced by Converse.



Shouldering peace, heading for peace

The **keffalit** is a creative construction of a multipurpose garment that can be worn by both Jews and Palestinians to express their identities, as both different and connected.

Traditionally, at each corner of the **keffiyah** is a tassel. The keffiyah is often plain white, but Yasser Arafat, PLO leader and then first president of the Palestinian Authority, made the black and white patterned keffiyah with tassels on each corner into a symbol of the Palestinian people. The keffiyah in our exhibition was made in the only remaining keffiyah factory in Palestine and sports the colors of the Palestinian flag.

The **tallit** is a prayer shawl worn by Jewish men (and now some Jewish women). The tallit traditionally has black or blue stripes but can be multicolored or only white. The Israeli flag incorporates the classic

tallit's blue stripes on white background. What makes the rectangular piece of fabric a tallit are the *tzitzit* or fringes, knotted strings that Orthodox Jewish men wear to remind them of God's 613 commandments. *Tzitzit* are generally all white, though traditionally they included a blue string.

In the keffalit the tassels of the keffiyah are replaced by the Jewish *tzitzit*. The keffalit includes the colors identified with both Jews and Palestinians, emphasizing the similarity of the keffiyah and tallit, and suggesting that the cultural meaning of the material is the meaning placed on it by each group.



Jon Simons



Ariel Katz

The keffalit is conceived, designed and produced by Ariel Katz.

The ***hijab*** is the traditional headcovering of religious Muslim women, covering their neck as well as their hair. The ***matpechet*** or ***tichel*** is the scarf worn by Orthodox Jewish women, covering their hair but not their necks.

During the performance of the fashion show, the dancers play with four similar pieces of cloth, fashioning them to be the head covering of Palestinian and Jew, both male and female.

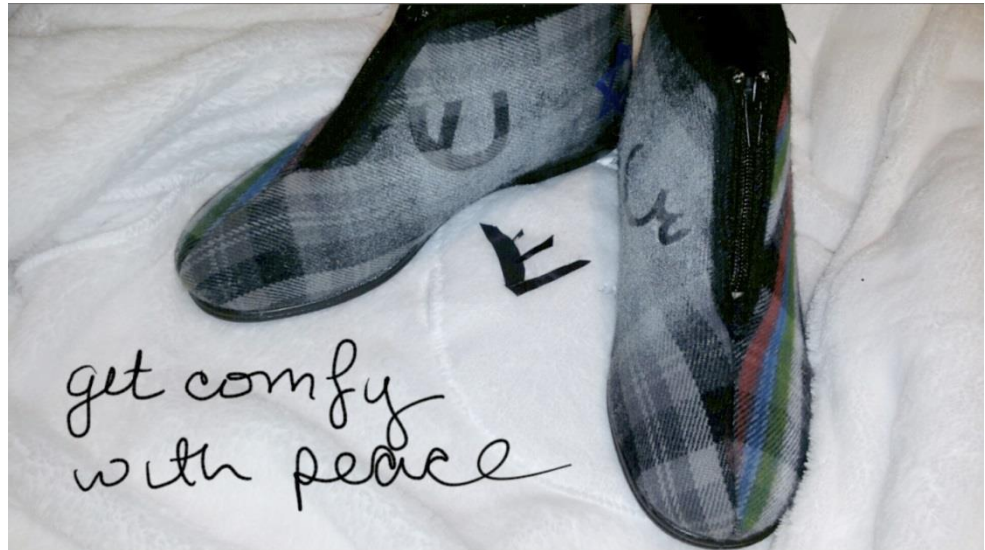
Those invested in separate national, ethnic, and religious identities may feel uncomfortable with the blurring of lines in this exhibition and may resist the idea that their separate cultural identities are not so separate, and that peace between them is both possible and desirable.



Getting comfortable with peace

The concept for “Getting Comfortable with Peace” came from psychotherapist Rokaya Marzouk Aburekayek, a woman who is a Muslim, Palestinian citizen of Israel. Here is her explanation of the origin of real peace:

Peace starts at home. It starts with the example we set for our children, in the education we give them at home ... actually, it starts even earlier than childhood. Peace must be the in the milk that passes from the mother's breast to her newborn child ... Perhaps peace



starts even earlier. It begins in the mind of the pregnant mother-to-be or even as she contemplates pregnancy and dreams of peace. I believe it's the mother that will be instrumental on the road to peace.

Our father Abraham was a violent man. He cut off his own foreskin and that of his sons. The Bible tells us that God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac, father of the Jewish people, and the Koran tells us he was commanded to sacrifice his son Ishmael, the father of Muslims. When God saw that Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his sons, he told him to sacrifice a ram in Isaac's place and a sheep in Ishmael's place. It's no wonder Abraham's children grow to be violent. But they need to learn to find an alternative target for their natural aggression, so that the brothers' children can live in peace together.

During the dance, a stuffed lamb was tossed to the audience in reference to the biblical sacrifice mentioned in Rokaya's statement. The audience spontaneously caught the lamb, punched it and hung it over the balcony. This 'acting out' humorously punctuated Rokaya's argument that in order for peace we need an acceptable outlet for our natural aggression.

The idea of peace with “enemies” can make people feel vulnerable and insecure. Here the peace robe is of the softest, coziest fleece, generously cut to make even

the most apprehensive hawk comfortable. The slippers bear the common plaid pattern of a design that is very popular in Israel on which we drew stripes in the colors of the Israeli and Palestinian flags. Israeli and Palestinian identities are encapsulated in a single letter on the sides of the slippers that face each other. The letter (“shin/sin”) is the first letter in the word for peace -“shalom” in Hebrew and “salaam” in Arabic. The two sides reflect back each other’s similarities and differences as one walks along.

The white bathrobe has a monogram, the Aramaic letter for “shin” which has four prongs instead of three. Aramaic is the root language for both Arabic and Hebrew. The forth prong is made up of an olive among olive leaves, referencing the olive branch symbol of peace.

The design of the slippers includes a tension between a notion of peace as the blending of national identities and peace between separate identities. The slippers encourage people to take their sofa politics and longing for peace out of their home and onto the streets.



The peace slippers were designed and produced by Ariel Katz. The monogram for the bathrobe is designed and produced by Ariel Katz.

Peace superhero



Our peace superhero is not the first to want to intervene to bring Jews and Palestinians together in peace. But what would a peace superhero do? Each side feels like the victim of the other. How can a peace superhero bring peace without bullying one or both sides into peace, thereby reiterating the dynamic of oppression? Our peace hero doesn't feel

self-righteous or take sides. She brings the sides closer together through humour, creativity, understanding, and nurturing. The fantasy comic figures Superman and Batman were invented by Jews during the Great Depression. The peace hero was created by Ariel poking fun at her own fantasy of making peace in the Middle East. Following the conference, Ariel put on the costume and took to the streets of Brighton, England to silently yet playfully intervene in a demonstration and counter-demonstration by supporters and opponents of the Palestinian BDS movement. This act brought the two sides together to wonder, "Whose side is she on?"



The peace superhero's costume includes leggings in black and green and a red skirt covering her legs as is required by Jewish and Muslim tradition. Her shirt and suspenders are the colors of the Israeli flag and she wears a Bedouin veil to hide her identity, as a reminder of the 'unrecognised' Bedouin population in both Israel and Palestine. Her reversible

cape is made out of the Israeli and Palestinian flags zipped together. In her flag-inspired multi-colored Converse shoes, she jumps into her mission of peace.

When we pinned the superhero costume up for the exhibition it bore a striking resemblance to Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* which Walter Benjamin calls "the angel of history" in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," where he writes:

His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet ... a storm is blowing from Paradise ... This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.



Benjamin's rejection of a linear, progressive theory of history reminds us that there is no way towards redemption and peace that does not keep in sight the catastrophes, violence and destruction that have already happened. He also calls our attention to a Talmudic principle referred to often by Rabbi Arik Ascherman of *Rabbis for Human Rights*. We can never know what little act we take that seems meaningless and pointless at the time might tip the scales in the right direction. We never know, as Benjamin adds in the same piece as above, which "second of time ... [could be] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter." We never know when peace will come, but we should have the courage and commitment to act always as if it will come.

The peace superhero costume is designed and assembled by Ariel Katz, tights sewn by Ruth Schechner.



"Peace of Ass" contact improvisation dance



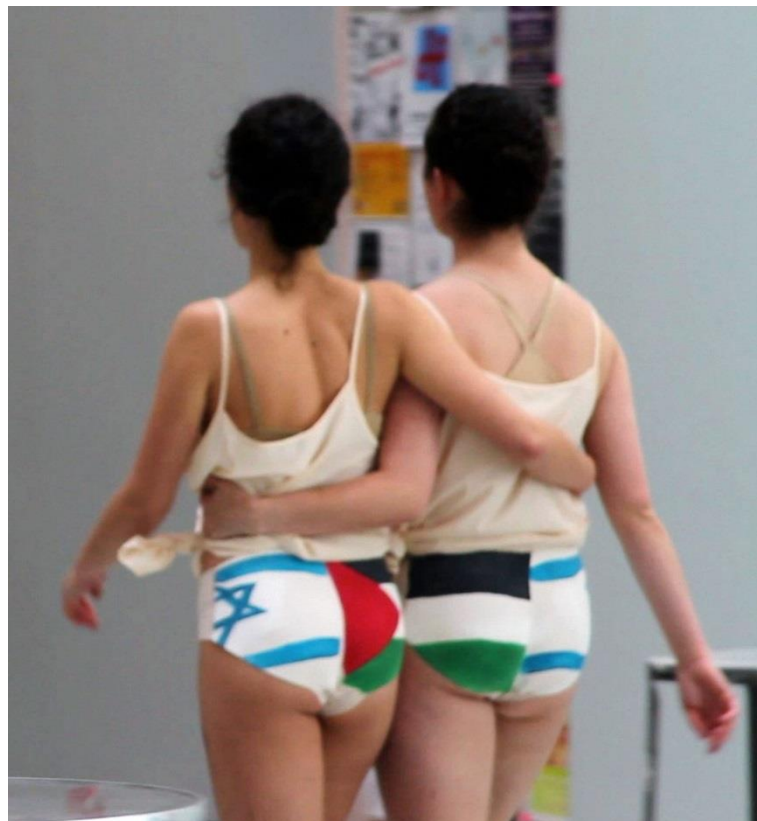
Two dancers in blank body suits are painted with colors and shapes from the Palestinian and Israeli flags. National affiliation is a construction put on us by others, primarily the previous generation, our education system and the media, and later by those who see themselves as different from us. Having a national identity is much akin to supporting a football team, blinded by loyalty regardless of how the players behave or how many games have been lost. As soon as we wear the colors of a particular team, all other teams are disdained. The colors unite us and encourage us to bring down the others psychologically and sometimes violently.



Through meeting on the field, so to speak, we come close enough to touch the other. From this aggressive contact we feel the flesh and see the blood of the other. Sometimes there is a turning point where we realize that underneath the uniform is not the monster of our fantasy. The clothes are stripped off to reveal first faces

and then the skin we are able to share with the other and accept parts of them. The dancers trade only their right shoe so they can walk in the other's shoes without compromising their own identities. Written on the heel stripe is "We are One," a slogan used to unite all Jews inside and outside of Israel/Palestine. Here the phrase has been co-opted to include all Palestinians around the globe in the "we".

Underneath the painted morph suits that represent conflicting national interests, the dancers have half of a Palestinian flag painted on one cheek of their buttocks and half an Israeli flag painted on the other. The only way to create a whole flag is to walk together side by side. As the dancers form flags with their abutting buttocks, they walk together to remove the borders of the dance space. The buttocks are an area of the body that is considered "offensive." The butt is also an intimate and protected area – people aren't allowed to touch it. Flags and butts can both be offensive and holy. Painting flags on the buttocks is a comment about how even the sight of either flag in Israel/Palestine can be offensive to the "other side".



Yet the flag is only a colored piece of cloth, whereas the buttocks are our flesh. We shift the shock value of the flags to where they are placed to disrupt any serious nationalistic meaning. This playful dance invites the viewer to imagine working closely together with the other, respecting them as equals, so that there is no need to rely on walls and barbed wire to create a sense of security.

It could be that this way of interpreting the dance is not only idealistic, but ideological. As Jon writes above, regarding national identities as skin deep accoutrements that can be cast off by undoing nationalist acculturation cannot, from a Žižekian perspective, touch the nationalist fantasy. But Žižek might be wrong, and the playful dance might be the small act that tips the scales towards peace.