

State educational policy and curriculum: The case of Palestinian Arabs in Israel

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The state educational system in Israel reflects the declared character of the state as a 'Jewish state', and, consequently, the deep inter-group divisions in society, including a large Palestinian Arab minority. This study demonstrates how Israeli educational policy and curriculum are designed to support the Jewish nation-building project. As such, they silence the Palestinian Arab narrative while reshaping regional history for both Jewish and Arab students to fit the Zionist narrative. Furthermore, Israeli educational policy has played an essential role in consigning Palestinian Arabs to the social, economic and political margins of Israeli society.

Educational policy, curriculum, Palestinian Arabs, Israel, minorities

Israeli society is very heterogeneous due to the existence of a wide variety of immigrant Jewish populations and an indigenous Palestinian Arab population; yet, at the same time, is officially defined as 'the State of the Jewish people.' The centrality of the notion of 'Jewishness' to Israel's national identity has been translated, in practical terms, into the subordination of the indigenous Palestinian Arab minority, which comprises 19 per cent of the total population, to the Jewish majority (Abu-Saad, 2004a, Fares 2004; Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1993).

This article examines the role of Israeli state educational policy and curriculum in this process. While the state educational system is administratively subdivided into a Jewish system (which is further divided into a number of subsystems, for example secular schools, religious schools), and an Arab system, this reflects not only the cultural and language diversity, but also the deep inter-group divisions in society. Numerous studies have documented the differential allocation of resources to these systems, and the poorer educational outcomes in the Arab system, as measured by drop out and matriculation rates, and proportion of age cohorts accessing higher educational opportunities (Abu-Saad, 2004a; Golan-Agnon, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2001). Furthermore, the article focuses upon the question of how Israeli educational policy positions Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel within the national framework, and what implications these educational policy choices have for the broader society.

THE CONTESTED HISTORY OF 'BELONGING'

In the late 1800s, the Zionist nationalist movement was developed by a group of Jewish intelligentsia in Europe, the goal of which was to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. Zionism was based on the premise that Palestine was a territory that belonged exclusively to the Jewish people due to their presence on the land during biblical times. The Zionist movement portrayed Palestine as a 'land without a people, for a people without a land' (Masalha, 1997), and the Zionist immigrants to Palestine as pioneers coming to conquer an inhospitable environment, and make the barren desert bloom. The notion of an empty territory was used to justify Zionist colonisation, with its dehumanising orientation toward the native population, leading to their delegitimation as a people, belonging to that particular place (Masalha, 1997). From its

inception, the Zionist movement sought out and gained the support of the era's major European colonial powers, and most notably Great Britain. In 1947, the United Nations Organisation (UN) voted to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish over 56 per cent of the territory (in which Jews comprised 51 per cent of the population and owned 10 per cent of the land), and one Arab, over 42 per cent of the territory; despite the fact that Palestinian Arabs represented over 67 per cent of the total population of Palestine at that time (Hadawi, 1991; Lustick, 1980). The indigenous Palestinian Arabs rejected the partition plan, and as soon as the British withdrew, turning the unresolved conflict over to the UN in 1948, the Zionist leadership declared Israel's independence as a 'Jewish' and 'democratic' state. The Arab states declared war on the Jewish state, but the Israeli forces defeated the Arabs, and by the time of the ceasefire, had taken control of 77 per cent of the land of Palestine.

AIMS AND GOALS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ISRAEL

Many nations that consider themselves liberal democracies, and have indigenous and minority populations under their jurisdictions, are advertently or inadvertently monocultural in the formulation and provision of educational services, and an analysis of Israeli educational policy indicates that this has generally been the approach in Israeli public education. Private Zionist/Jewish schooling was well-developed in Palestine prior to the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948, and after its establishment, it seemingly continued to envision and to develop its educational system as if it were still only educating Jews. Israel's *1953 Law of State Education* specified the following aims for the education system:

to base education on the values of Jewish culture and the achievements of science, on love of the homeland and loyalty to the state and the Jewish people, on practice in agricultural work and handicraft, on pioneer training and on striving for a society built on freedom, equality, tolerance, mutual assistance, and love of mankind. (Mar'i, 1978, p. 50)

Over 50 years have passed since the enactment of this law, but the aims it specified remain central to current Israeli public educational policy. Though the law was amended in 2000, it maintains educational objectives for public schools that emphasise Jewish values, history and culture, while ignoring Palestinian values, history and culture (Adalah, 2003). These narrowly-defined educational aims that speak to the identity of three-fourths of the state's students while overlooking the other fourth, have continually been reaffirmed in the official discourse about education in Israel. In June 2001, Minister of Education, Limor Livnat, stated that she would like to see that "there is not a single child in Israel who doesn't learn the basics of Jewish and Zionist knowledge and values" (Fisher-Ilan, 2001, p. 4B). The Ministry of Education operationalised these goals through programs such as the "100 Basic Concepts" curriculum unit that was introduced to the middle schools in the 2004/05 school year (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004). While separate lists of the 100 key concepts were developed for the Jewish and Arab education systems, they largely reaffirmed the subordinate and superfluous status of Palestinian Arabs in Israel. One third of the concepts were devoted to heritage, and the list for the Jewish school system was entitled, "Concepts in Jewish Heritage", while the list for the Arab school system was entitled, "Concepts in Arab Heritage for the Arabic Sector", a qualification suggesting that they were of no importance or relevance for any other sector of Israeli society.

The 34-item Jewish list was comprised of broad concepts about ancient Jewish history and religion, and national holidays (for example, Purim, Independence Day, Hanukah, Jerusalem Day, which despite being called 'national' are not holidays for all citizens of the country). It also included broader social concepts, such as respect for parents and teachers, as a part of Jewish heritage. The 34-item Arab list contained concepts from both the Muslim and Christian religions, thus providing a more superficial treatment of each; and other general concepts chosen as

characterising the Arabic culture from a perspective of romanticising the orient (for example, Arab markets, hospitality, generosity, the tent). At the same time, it excluded the broader social concepts included in the Jewish heritage list (for example, respect for parents and teachers), as though such values were unique to Jewish culture and not present in Arab culture.

The second list in the 100 Basic Concepts program for the Jewish schools was entitled, "Zionist Concepts." It included 33 items dealing with the Zionist movement, 15 prominent, modern Zionist or Israeli leaders (including 3 women), the "wars of Israel", pre-and post-state waves of immigration, and institutions that have become inseparable and indistinguishable from Zionism, such as the Holocaust Museum and the Israeli military. The parallel 33-item list for the Arab schools was entitled, "Zionist Concepts for the Arab Sector" and included the same concepts as the Jewish list, with a few exceptions. The Arab list included the names of three Arab citizens of Israel (one political figure from the mainstream Zionist Labor Party, one novelist and the only Arab ever to receive the Israel Prize, and one Christian religious figure, all of whom were men). It also included a center for Arab-Jewish Culture, Society, Youth and Sports (House of the Vine) that organises non-political social meetings between Arabs and Jews aimed at creating recognition and understanding, and educating for co-existence, good neighbouring and tolerance through cultural, artistic and community activities. Neither the three Arab names, nor the House of the Vine Center nurturing Arab-Jewish coexistence, appeared on the Jewish list of Zionist concepts, which instead included additional items about the pre-state Zionist settlers and their victories over the indigenous population, the unauthorised pre-state immigration of Jews to Palestine, and the absorption of the first massive post-state wave of Jewish immigration. Not surprisingly, there was not a single mention for either Jewish or Arab students of the history of the Palestinian people, the consequences they suffered (dispersion and dispossession) as a result of the fulfilment of Zionist aspirations through the establishment of Israel or the Palestinian national movement. In stark contrast, Palestinian Arab students were required, along with Jewish students, to **memorise** a substantial list of Zionist historical facts and figures.

The final section of the 100 Basic Concepts for both school systems was entitled, "Concepts in Israeli Democracy". It contained the same broad humanitarian items (for example, human rights, the Geneva Convention, Rights of the Child, pluralism, humanism) for both groups, in addition to less inclusive items such as that defining Israel as the "Jewish and Democratic State," the *Law of Return* (which applies to Jewish immigration and return rights only), the flag and the national anthem (which are both symbols of Jewish religious origin).

Thus, while the *1953 Law of State Education* might seem to represent an out-dated policy approach that would have changed over time to recognise and accommodate the presence of a large Palestinian Arab minority in the student body; in fact, a program such as the "100 Basic Concepts" demonstrates how the educational aims and goals that were established in the *1953 Law of State Education* have continually been renewed and reaffirmed, keeping Palestinian Arabs from being fully present in their own education, and basically absent from Jewish education.

The Arab educational system in Israel has been, and continues to be, governed by a set of political criteria which Palestinian Arabs have no say in formulating (Al-Haj, 1995; Mar'I, 1978; Swirski, 1999). While the *1953 Law of State Education* strongly emphasised the development of Jewish identity and values, no parallel aims were ever set forth for the education of Arabs in Israel, though in the 1970s and 1980s some attempts were made by committees directed by Jewish educators (Al-Haj, 1995). Nor was the Palestinian minority ever given autonomous control over their education system or allowed to determine its aims, goals and curricula. Though the Arab school system has a separate curriculum, it is designed and supervised by the Ministry of Education, where virtually no Arab educators or administrators have decision-making powers. Despite the fact that Arabic is the medium of instruction in the schools, the Arab school system

does not represent multicultural recognition and accommodation, nor is it, in the words of Freeland (1996, p. 182), an example of "indigenous control over education and true interculturality." A high-level Jewish administrator in the education system described the reality as follows: "...the Arab head of the Arab education system has no authority or budget, he never even says anything at the meetings. Between us, we call him 'the plant.' His deputy, a Jewish man appointed by the security service, actually runs the department" (Golan-Agnon 2005, p. 207).

This contrasts sharply with the state's Jewish religious school system, which is physically and administratively separate from the state's secular Jewish school system, and maintains completely autonomous control over its educational policy, aims and goals (Adalah, 2003; Mar'i, 1978; Swirski, 1999).

CURRICULUM IN THE JEWISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Consistent with national educational goals, the curriculum in Jewish schools places a strong emphasis on the development of national identity, active belonging to the Jewish people, and furthering of Zionist aspirations. At the same time, there is little or no recognition of Arab history and Palestinian Arab history in particular. Where the curriculum includes reference to Arabs, it generally tends to take an Orientalist approach, portraying them and their culture in a negative light. Said analysed the way in which Eastern cultures are viewed, described and represented by Western academic scholarship, politics, and literature in his book *Orientalism* (1978) and numerous subsequent works. Said's main conclusions were aimed at how the Western (specifically the British, French, and more recently American and Israeli) economic, political and academic powers have developed a dichotomised discourse in which an inherently superior West was juxtaposed with an Eastern 'Other' according to terms and definitions determined by the West itself. Orientalism has created an image of the Orient as separate, backward, silently different, irrational and passive. It is characterised by despotism and resistance to progress; and since the Orient's value is judged in terms of, and in comparison to the West, it is always the 'Other', the conquerable and the inferior.

School textbooks are widely recognised as important agents of socialisation that transmit and disseminate societal knowledge, including representations of one's own and other groups (Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005). According to Luke (1988), school textbooks "act as the interface between the officially state-adopted and sanctioned knowledge of the culture, and the learner. Like all texts, school textbooks remain potentially agents of mass enlightenment and/or social control" (p.69). As Down (1988) stated, textbooks dominate what students learn at school, and determine the curriculum, as well as the facts learned, in most subjects. In addition, the public tends to regard textbooks as essential, authoritative, and accurate knowledge, while in most school systems, teachers rely on them to organise lessons and structure subject matters. This is particularly true in Israel, since teachers are obliged to base their instruction upon Ministry of Education-approved textbooks. According to Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005):

Due to the centralised structure of the educational system in Israel, the Ministry of Education sets the guidelines for curricula development and has the authority to approve the school textbooks. Thus, the ministry outlines the didactic, scholastic and social objectives to be achieved (Eden, 1971), and the textbooks' contents reflect the knowledge that the dominant group of society is trying to impart to its members. (p. 159)

Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) summarised the major studies done on textbooks in Jewish schools and the history of their reforms. Firer's (1985) study examined history textbooks between 1900 and 1984, and their role in promoting Zionist socialisation. Firer found that all of the history books in the pre-state period (1900-1948) stressed the exclusive rights of the Jewish people to

ownership of Palestine. Arabs, in turn, were portrayed as a backward, primitive people with no similar ownership rights in the 'neglected' land that was awaiting 'Jewish redemption'. As violent conflict began to erupt due to the opposing nationalisms of the indigenous Palestinian Arabs and the Zionist settlers, Jewish history textbooks also began to refer to Arabs undifferentiatedly as easily agitated robbers and vandals. Bar-Gal's (1993) study of geography textbooks in the same period produced similar findings. The earliest geography textbooks, produced by Zionist authors who lived in Europe and endorsed the view of 'a land without a people for a people without a land', tended to completely ignore the presence of the indigenous Arab population in Palestine. Later, the textbooks by authors living in Palestine were characterised by attitudes of ethnocentrism and superiority toward Arab society, similar to the common European attitudes toward the Orient at that time. As violent conflict with Palestinian Arabs erupted, they began to be represented as 'the enemy', and according to Bar-Gal (1993), were described as a:

...negative homogeneous mob that threatens, assaults, destroys, eradicates, burns and shoots, being agitated by haters of Israel, who strive to annihilate the most precious symbols of Zionism: vineyards, orange groves, orchards and forests. Again, the Arabs were viewed as ungrateful. According this view Zionism brought progress to the area and helped to overcome the desolation, and thus helped to advance also the Arabs. But instead of thanking the Jews for building the country for the benefit of all its citizens, they respond with destruction and ruin (p.181).

From the establishment of the state of Israel through the early 1970s, school textbooks continued to present Arabs negatively, according to the same ideological-educational perspective adopted during the pre-state period (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005; Firer, 1985; Podeh, 2002). According to Firer (1985), the first textbooks published by the newly-founded state were influenced by the trauma of the Holocaust in Europe, and used the same emotive concepts from that experience to describe the Jewish-Arab conflict. As Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) described, these textbooks completely removed the Jewish-Arab conflict from its actual context:

Most of these books did not even mention the existence of a Palestinian nation, never mind its aspirations or the driving forces behind Palestinian nationalism. Thus, the Arabs' violence and resistance to Zionism, presented without explanation, looked absolutely arbitrary and malicious. It interfered with the noble and peaceful attempts of the Jews (described as victims) to return to their homeland. (p. 162)

The critical omission of Palestinian Arabs' history, pre-1948 life in Palestine, national aspirations, and their consequent dispossession, was in actual fact the ultimate delegitimisation of their identity and struggle. It was central to the Zionist narrative of the history of "*Eretz Israel*" (Land of Israel), "as a land without a people for a people without land" and the ancient and external homeland of the Jews, that was disseminated through the Ministry of Education textbooks. The curriculum up until the late 1960s was concerned primarily with the needs of nation-building and the construction of a homogeneous national identity, and to this end, it used mechanisms of denial, omission and exclusion toward Arabs (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005).

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, a few textbooks began to include references to and descriptions of Palestinian nationalism, or positive descriptions of the Arab citizens of Israel (though still disregarding their Palestinian identity) written by Jewish Zionist writers and from a Zionist perspective, however, the use of these textbooks was optional and they were eventually dropped from the curriculum (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005). The overwhelming trend in portraying Arabs during this period in history, geography, civics studies and Hebrew (readers) remained negative (Bar-Tal and Tichman 2005).

The Zionist historical narrative perpetuated the image of the Arab, and the Palestinian Arab in particular, as an ahistorical, irrational enemy. A 17-year-old Jewish high school student described

the contents of the schoolbooks in Jewish schools and viewpoints expressed by some Jewish teachers as follows:

Our books basically tell us that everything the Jews do is fine and legitimate and Arabs are wrong and violent and are trying to exterminate us... We are accustomed to hearing the same thing, only one side of the story. They teach us that Israel became a state in 1948 and that the Arabs started a war. They don't mention what happened to the Arabs—they never mention anything about refugees or Arabs having to leave their towns and homes... Instead of tolerance and reconciliation, the books and some teachers' attitudes are increasing hatred for Arabs (Meehan 1999, p.20)

Furthermore, some of the geography textbooks for high school published in the early 1990s portrayed Arabs in terms of a 'demographic problem' – a new type of threat to the Zionist vision of a 'Jewish *and* democratic' state (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005; Orni and Efrat, 1992; Sorkis, Raf and Sharar, 1991).

The curriculum in Jewish Israeli schools has been instrumental in explicitly and implicitly constructing racist and threatening stereotypes and a one-sided historical narrative that, through the educational system, is internalised in the Jewish Israeli psyche; and that has, in turn, provided the basis for maintaining a deeply divided society and its many discriminatory practices. As a former-Israeli academic, Oren Ben-Dor, stated about his educational experience in the Jewish school system:

All my education in Israel was one sided, treating the other [for example, the Arabs] as the enemy, the murderers, the rioters, the terrorists ... without alluding, in any way, to their pains and longings. For my teachers and, as a result, for me also, for many years, Zionism was beyond reproach; it was a return to the promised land as a result of persecution, it was draining the swamps, it was building a state based on Jewish genius. (Ben-Dor, 2005)

According to Podeh (2002), however, analysis of history textbooks for the higher grades published toward the end of the 1990s indicated a major and significant change in the depiction of Palestinians, Palestinian nationalism, Arabs, and the Israeli-Arab conflict. Some of these textbooks included recently declassified Israeli governmental archival materials and were based on critical historical research that shed a more balanced light on the conflict and for the first time portrayed Palestinian Arabs not only as spectators or aggressors but also as victims of the conflict. However, even with these much celebrated revisions in textbooks, Raz-Krakotzkin noted that:

...in all the textbooks there is not one single geographical map which shows the [pre-1948 Palestinian] Arab settlements – only the Jewish settlements are shown. Generally speaking, the land itself has no history of its own, and the history of the land is presented as the history of the Jewish myth about it. The whole period, between the second temple and the Zionist settlement is not taught at all. But more precisely, the Israeli student has no idea whatsoever about the settlement of the country before '48, that is to say, has no idea about the history of the expelled themselves and of their life before the expulsion. And so the mythical image of the country was created as 'the Promised Land of the Jews' and not as a cultural-geographical entity in which the [Jewish] colonisation took place. (1999, p. 5)

Even with the deficiencies Raz-Krakotzkin noted, though, the publication of the new history textbooks led to heated debates in Israeli society, and in November 2000, the parliamentary Education Committee decided to delay the use of one of these textbooks. Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) characterised this as "an act that shows that part of the society and its representatives have difficulty in accepting changes in school textbooks that question the Zionist narrative" (pp. 72-3).

They further suggested that this decision may have been due to a counter-trend in Israeli society brought about by the "outbreak of violence" with the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. They concluded that since the parents and grandparents of the present generation were consistently presented with negative images of Arabs in school textbooks, it would take many years, indeed another several generations, to rewrite and introduce a balanced presentation of Arabs into the school textbooks, without negative stereotypes and delegitimising labels. However, according to their own argument, maintaining this same approach in the textbooks can only perpetuate the conflict as additional generations of Israeli Jews are educated in a manner that continues to deny the history, humanity, legitimate grievances, and aspirations of Palestinian Arabs. Paradoxically, it is precisely a more balanced picture of Palestinian history and aspirations that would enable the Israeli Jewish population to understand the roots of, and perhaps even begin to break out of the cycle of violence.

The Jewish school system further contributes to the marginalisation of the Palestinian minority by giving Jewish students little, if any, exposure to the Arabic language or culture, directly, rather than filtered through Zionist lenses. Despite the fact that Arabic is one of the two official languages in Israel, the study of Arabic is not required in Jewish schools as a matriculation subject (for example, a requirement for obtaining a high school diploma). Less than 4 per cent of Jewish high school students voluntarily study Arabic as one of their matriculation subjects (Lev-Ari, 2003). According to the Education Ministry Director General, Ronit Tirosh, Jewish students feel antagonistic toward the Arabic language. Tirosh stated that:

[Arabic] is a language that is identified with a population that makes your life difficult and endangers your security. Even so, students understand that knowing Arabic helps them to view life in Israel through the eyes of the Arabs....We thought about making Arabic compulsory for matriculation, but concluded that if less than 10 per cent of students learn it voluntarily, it would be impossible to force it on the rest. (Lev-Ari, 2003)

CURRICULUM IN THE ARAB SCHOOL SYSTEM

In sharp contrast to the promotion of a Jewish and Zionist identity in the curricular goals and materials in the Jewish schools, the curricular goals that the central Ministry of Education developed for Arab education tend to blur rather than enhance the formation of an Arab identity. Palestinian identity in particular is treated as something at best irrelevant and at worst, antithetical, to the overriding goals and aims of the Zionist educational project. Thus, consistent with the "100 Concepts" program, the aims of the Arab educational system, as well as specific curricular goals, require students to learn about Jewish values and culture, while receiving superficial exposure to carefully screened and censored Arabic values and culture, and the results of this can be seen clearly in the government-controlled curriculum for elementary and secondary schools (Abu-Saad, 2004b; Al-Haj, 1995; Mar'i 1978, 1985; Peres, Ehrlich and Yuval-Davis, 1970). Arab students are required to spend many class hours in the study of Jewish culture and history and the Hebrew language (and in total, more than they spend on Arabic literature and history). Thus, they are required to develop identification with Jewish values and further Zionist aspirations at the expense of the development of their own national awareness and sense of belonging to their own people. The Arab national identity is much less emphasised, and the Palestinian identity goes completely unrecognised (Al-Haj, 1995; Ma'ri, 1978; 1985). Furthermore, the basic goal of Jewish studies in Arab education is not the development of cultural competence as a bridge to Jewish Israeli society but is rather to make Arabs understand and sympathise with Jewish and Zionist causes and blur their own national identity in Israel (Al-Haj, 1995; Mar'i 1978, 1985; Swirski, 1999).

In the 1970s, a group of Jewish Israeli researchers, Peres, Ehrlich and Yuval-Davis, addressed the same issues. They criticised the curriculum imposed upon Arab schools by the Ministry of

Education for attempting to instil patriotic sentiments in Arab students through the study of Jewish history, and pointed out the absurdity of the orientalist expectation that the “Arab pupil ... serve the state not because the latter is important to *him* and fulfills *his* needs, but because it is important to the Jewish people” (Peres, Ehrlich, and Yuval-Davis, 1970, p. 151).

Nevertheless, the Arab educational system has maintained its emphasis on the Zionist national project that has dispossessed and continues to marginalised the Palestinian people; while at the same time suppressing the students’ knowledge of and identification with the Palestinian and broader Arab peoples/nations. Specifically, though Palestinian Arab students are required to read the literature and poetry of the Zionist movement, celebrating the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, their curriculum does not include the Palestinian Arab literary classics studied throughout the Arab world (Adalah, 2003). As a Palestinian Arab student stated:

Everything we study is about the Jews. Everything is Jewish culture. We study Bialik and Rachel [Jewish nationalist poets]. Why do I have to study them? Why don't they teach me Mahmud Darwish [Palestinian nationalist poet]? Why don't they teach me Nizar Qabbani [Arab nationalist poet]? Why don't they teach me Edward Said? Why don't they teach me about Arab philosophers and Palestinian poets? I know that my Arabic language is not very strong, because I know if I don't speak fluent Hebrew I can't function in this country.... I know that the Arabic language in Palestine is endangered. Schools, not individually, but the educational system as a whole has a very negative impact on our identity. The whole world now recognises the existence of Palestine and that there is something called the Palestinian people. So why are they still teaching me about Bialik and Rachel? What is the problem in teaching us Palestinian history? The problem is that they are afraid. They don't want us, Palestinian Arabs, to develop an awareness of our national identity. (quoted in Makkawi, 2002, p.50)

This suppression of Arab identity, culture, and political concerns has incessantly been maintained in the curriculum for Arab schools. Consistent with the orientalist approach of imposing the so-called ‘superior’ Western (and in this case, Zionist Israeli) perspective, interpretations and priorities upon the ‘inferior Other,’ the curriculum for the Arab education system is designed to further and implement the aims of Zionism among the state's Palestinian Arab students through the displacement of their history and nationality with the Zionist narrative.

In 1978, the late Arab educator and researcher, Sami Mar'i described the explicitly monocultural status of Palestinian Arab education within the Israeli public school system in the following terms which, unfortunately, still provide an accurate description over 25 years later:

Arab education is a victim of Israeli pluralism not only in that it is directed and managed by the majority, but it is also a tool by which the whole minority is manipulated....[It] is not only an example of the Israeli pluralism by which Arabs are denied power, it is also a means through which the lack of power can be maintained and perpetuated. Arab citizens are marginal, if not outsiders.... The Arab Education Department is directed by members of the Jewish majority, and curricula are decided upon by the authorities with little, if any, participation of Arabs. Arab participation does not exceed writing or translating books and materials according to carefully specified guidelines, nor does it extend beyond implementing the majority's policies. (Mar'i, 1978, p. 180)

Reform efforts have repeatedly failed to bring about change, since none of the recommendations of the many committees appointed by the government to study or improve the Arab education system have ever had any binding power (Abu-Saad, 2001; Al-Haj, 1995). As such, Palestinian Arab students continue to be subjected to a curricular and educational program designed to

address the needs and meet the concerns of the ruling majority, and ensure the marginalisation and subordination of the minority.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ISRAELI STATE EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Current Israeli public statistical data reveals that the Palestinian Arab population has higher levels of unemployment (14 per cent versus the national average of 9 per cent), lower average income (3,992 NIS versus the national average of 6,314 NIS), and almost twice the rate of children living in poverty (58 per cent) as in Israeli society as a whole (31 per cent) (Fares, 2004). Since these national averages include the Arab sector, the above figures de-emphasise the extremity of the gap between the Israel's Palestinian Arab and Jewish citizens.

The government produces an official report grouping local authorities in Israel into socio-economic clusters. In its most recent report, the 82 Palestinian Arab Local Authorities in Israel were primarily located at the bottom of the scale. They represented an overwhelming majority in the lowest clusters, making up 80 per cent of the first (lowest), 93 per cent of the second, and 87 per cent of the third cluster, and had no representation at all in the highest four clusters (Fares, 2004).

Another key indicator of the marginalisation and subordination of the Palestinian Arab community is the glaring lack of parity in the hiring and promotion of Arabs within the nation's civil service. This is a concern for Palestinian Arab citizens because civil service jobs are a direct and indirect gateway to professional advancement in various realms of the public sector. In 2003, of total of 55,409 civil service employees nationally, only 2,798 (5 per cent) were Palestinian Arabs (Fares, 2004).

The marginalisation of Palestinian Arabs in Israel through political, economic and social discrimination, and their subordination to the Jewish majority in almost every aspect of stratification, including income, occupational distribution, employment participation, land ownership and community-level infrastructure and development has been extensively documented (Fares, 2004; Haider, 2005; Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1993). Its implications for the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel were articulated by Zeidani (2005), who stated:

The state of Israel discriminates against me negatively, it deprives and neglects me, consigns me to the economic, social and political margins.... The [Palestinian] Arabs in Israel are a more or less homogeneous ethnic/national group, a group that differs in a clear and distinct way from the Jewish majority. There are differences between us, barriers and boundaries of all types: a different language, a different religion, a different culture, and a different, if not rival, historical narrative... We have a separate education system that is controlled by a handful of Jews, who decide its content and goals, and fill the system's various positions. In other words: we are different and separate, and because we are different and separate, we do not enjoy equal status, and therefore, we are pushed to the margins. This is to say, that this marginality is a consequence of coercion – and not a result of free choice or free will. The [Palestinian] Arabs in Israel are... struggling to escape from the coerced marginality; they want to be full and active participants in determining their future and their fate. (pp. 89, 91-92)

CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates how Israeli educational policy and curriculum are designed to serve the Zionist national project. As such, they perpetuate racist and hostile images of Arabs to Jewish students, and silence the Palestinian Arab narrative while reshaping regional history for both Jewish and Arab students to fit the Zionist narrative. While the sense of Palestinian Arab belonging to the Zionist national project (for example, building the Jewish state) can only be

partial and incomplete, if it exists at all, the development of identification with the Palestinian people and Arab peoples more broadly is suppressed. The study of extensive required curricular materials is used to make the Palestinian Arab student understand the history and empathise with the suffering of the Jewish people. Thus, the policy and content of the state-controlled education system for Palestinian Arabs aim to re-educate the students to accept the loss of their history and identity. And it prepares them, ideologically and practically, to accept the superior status of the Jewish people, and the subordination of their needs and identity to the needs of the national Zionist project.

The consequences of the aggressively monocultural educational approach the Israeli state has adopted, not only for the Palestinian minority, but also the Jewish majority, are grave. The stereotypical, negative and ahistorical picture of Palestinian Arabs fostered in the Jewish school system promotes racism and cultural imperialism rather than openness to cultural pluralism and democracy. No serious effort is made to provide Jewish students with the tools they need for cultural competence in Palestinian and Arab societies linguistically, culturally, or historically. Instead, their school system encourages them to maintain a sense of distance from and superiority over the Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of Israel. It also serves to cripple any efforts to resolve the conflict over land, nationality and the basic rights of Palestinian Arabs (whether those holding Israeli citizenship, living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or living as refugees) since they are portrayed as a non-people, without a history.

The state's educational policy and curriculum for the Arab school system on one level appears to provide Palestinian Arab students with the tools they need for attaining cultural competence in Jewish Israeli society through extensive historical, linguistic, and socio-cultural studies of the Jewish people and Hebrew language and literature. Ironically, however, the system's concurrent efforts to re-educate the Palestinian students to forget their own history and identity, coupled with its discriminatory practices, seem to end up reinforcing the students' Palestinian identity and sense of the conflict with the Jewish majority. Taylor (1994) commented that "...misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (p.26). This study suggests that misrecognition can also create resistance among minority group members to learning about the majority's culture, while majority educational policy is at the same time ignoring, actively suppressing or trivialising the study of the minority's culture. Though the state-sponsored curriculum in Arab schools is aimed at suppressing and erasing the Palestinians' collective memory, it seems instead to succeed at providing them such an alienating educational experience that it fosters greater bitterness, enmity and separation between Israel's Jewish and Palestinian Arab communities.

One can only question whether this situation of discriminatory and antagonistic separation is, indeed, in the long-term interests of the State, whose ideology and mythology notwithstanding, is in fact a multi-ethnic state, with an indigenous minority that makes up nearly one fifth of the population. For the present, the situation seems to be satisfactory to the Jewish majority, and the public education system will continue to aid in perpetuating it, with considerable impact. However, as the sense of bitterness and alienation grows within the Palestinian Arab population, so does the threat of political and civil instability.

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