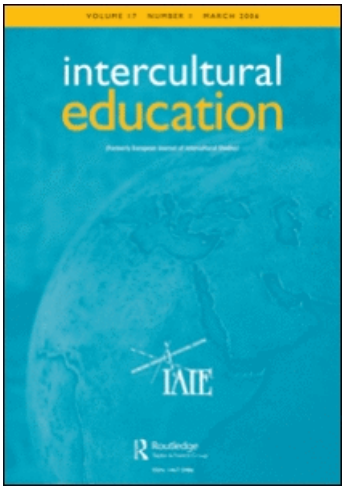

Intercultural Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713393965

The Palestinian minority in Israel: when common core curriculum in education meets conflicting national narratives

Yossi Yonah[a]
[a] Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel

To cite this Article Yonah, Yossi(2008) 'The Palestinian minority in Israel: when common core curriculum in education meets conflicting national narratives', Intercultural Education, 19: 2, 105 — 117
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14675980801889633
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14675980801889633

Intercultural Education
Vol. 19, No. 2, April 2008, 105–117

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Palestinian minority in Israel: when common core curriculum in education meets conflicting national narratives

Yossi Yonah*

Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel

This paper starts with a brief survey of how the Israeli education system has handled the issue of the existence of an Arab community in Israel's collective identity, and how this was affected by reforms that were initiated in the education system throughout the years. The second part of the paper examines various possibilities regarding how the inclusion of the Arab collective identity can best be accommodated in the education system and its curricula.

Introduction

There are many questions that immediately present themselves when trying the conceptualize the relationship between the Israeli education system and the Palestinian community that it must also serve. A key question relates to the curriculum. What should be the content and character of the curriculum serving Palestinian children enrolled in Israeli public education within? What should be the content and character of the curriculum serving these children, following the defeat of the Palestinians in 1948, which has transformed them into a national minority within the Jewish state? Israeli public officials have had to address this issue since the inception of the State of Israel in 1948.

The response to this question, as manifested in state policies and practices, has always transcended pure pedagogical and administrative considerations. It reflected the perception of Israeli Arabs as a challenge to the legitimacy of the state of Israel and as a demographic threat to the Jewish 'precarious' majority (Yonah 2000, 2004; Rinawie-Zoabi 2006; Yiftachel 2006). Given this perception, the overarching ideological goal of Israel's education system has not only been to inculcate – for Jewish and Arab pupils alike – the Zionist narrative and its central values, but also to curtail the cultivation of Israeli Palestinians as a national minority with a common heritage and shared history (Gur-Ze'ev and Pappe 2003).

The purpose of this paper is, first, to describe briefly how the Israeli education system has handled the issue of the existence of an Arab community in Israel's collective identity, and how this was affected by reforms that were initiated in the education system throughout the years. It looks at official documents and assesses whether they reveal significant changes in the way the aims of Arab education have been viewed since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, from the perspective of officials in charge of Israeli education system. This long time span is divided into two main stages: the stage of nation-building and the stage of 'post-national era'. I argue that, despite the claim that around the beginning of the 1990s Israel witnessed a transition from the stage where Israeli society was consumed with existential fears and absorbed with tasks of nation-building to the stage where it emerged as a confident and self-assured society, free of existential anxieties, and a comfortable agent in the new global order (Shafir and Peled 2002), it did not significantly change its perception of Israel's Arab minority as an existential threat. This,

*Email: yyona@bgu.ac.il

ISSN 1467-5986 print/ISSN 1469-8439 online

DOI: 10.1080/14675980801889633
http://www.informaworld.com

I argue, becomes apparent in the field of education where the aims of Arab education, as defined by officials in charge of the Israeli education system, have remained, more or less, invariable.

The second part of the paper examines various possibilities regarding how the inclusion of the Arab collective identity can best be accommodated in the education system and its curricula. These possibilities draw, first, on theoretical literature that discusses the desired relationship between the majority and the minority in a nation state and second, echo common views appearing in position papers and studies recently conducted mainly by Arab intellectuals and educators. Thus, this part of the paper is essentially programmatic and prescriptive, attempting to offer a multicultural perspective from which the relationship between the majority and the minority in a nation state ought to be articulated.

Educational reforms in Israel and Palestinian collective identity: the nation-building stage

The perception of the Palestinian national narrative as being in competition with the Jewish/Zionist narrative has constituted one of the central characteristics guiding the Israeli education system over the years. It is manifested through a set of practices that serve to forestall or to mitigate the development of the Israeli Palestinian minority as a community sharing a unique national identity. The Israeli education system has basically adopted a two-layered position towards the cultural heritage of Israel's Palestinian minority. On the one hand, it has acknowledged their heritage and recognized Arabic as the official language to be used in schools and has left room for an Arabic literary legacy in the school curriculum (Tzartzur 1985; Gabizon 1999). This acknowledgement has been facilitated both by the fact that there is *de facto* segregation between Jewish and Arab residential areas and by school registration policies imposed by the Ministry of Education. In other words, residential segregation is supported and authorized by the formal policy of school registration (especially at the primary school level) according to one's place of residence.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education's policy pertaining to the Arab minority in Israel has been characterized by an adamant refusal to include the national Palestinian narrative in the curriculum of either Arab or Jewish pupils. This ambivalent attitude is displayed in numerous public reports that have been written over the years and that have dealt with 'The goals of Arab education'. For example, a report drafted by Deputy Education Minister Aharon Yadlin and submitted to the Education Minister Yigal Alon in 1972 included the following goals of education for Palestinian pupils:

> Education grounded in Peace values; identification with Democracy and social morality; education for loyalty to the State of Israel, while emphasizing the common interests of all its citizens and cultivating the uniqueness of Israeli Arabs; bequeathing programs intended to alleviate social and economic integration; and educating girls towards independence and improvement of their social status. (Yadlin Document 1972; cited in Tzartzur 1985, 499)

Even though later reports placed greater emphasis on the need to recognize the cultural uniqueness of Israel's Palestinian minority as a whole and in the education system in particular, none proposed an acknowledgement of their national cultural uniqueness. Thus, for instance, a report prepared by Elad Peled, former Director General of the Ministry of Education, designed to put forward the principles guiding the future of Arab education in the 1980s, repeated in general lines the recommendations that appeared in the previous report. 'The goal of public education in the Arab sector in Israel,' the report stated, 'is to ground education on the foundations of the Arab culture […].' The report further asserted that the education of Arab students should be based 'on a love of the homeland shared by all the state citizens and on loyalty to the State of Israel – while emphasizing their common interests and reference to the distinctiveness that Israeli Arabs have' (Peled 1976, 421).

Educational reforms in Israel and the Palestinian collective identity: the stage of 'post-nationalism'

The 1990s started with high hopes among the Palestinian population but ended with deep disillusionment about Israeli society. In 1992, Rabin formed a left-wing coalition government. In the following year, Israel signed the Oslo agreements with the Palestinian authority and, a year later, a peace treaty with Jordan. In addition to these political breakthroughs, the 1990s signaled an intensified global process, warmly embraced by Israel's political and economic elites. Thus, the combination of what seemed to be a new era in terms of the Arab/Israeli relationship and Israel's fast track entry into the global order created, so it seemed, a political atmosphere favoring the formal accommodation of Israeli Arabs as a national minority within Israeli society. As stated, these developments, so it was argued, encouraged a transition from the stage where Israeli society was consumed with existential fears and absorbed in tasks of nation-building to the stage where it emerged as a confident and self-assured society, free of existential anxieties, and a comfortable agent in the new global order (Shafir and Peled 2002). But the optimism proved to be unfounded. Fueled in part by a deadlock in peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, the relationship that has been rearticulated between nationalism and the neoliberal ideology over the last decades in Israel, as well as in other societies in the world, actually encouraged the resurgence of chauvinistic zeal and a siege mentality. We witnessed dialectical processes where the weakening of the state in certain spheres was accompanied by its strengthening in others, giving rise to the re-emergence of a fervent national discourse and an active role of the state in promoting it (Dahan and Yonah 2007). These dialectical processes have also permeated the field of education, especially in the way in which the aims of Arab education in Israel have been reiterated.

A few months before the outbreak of the second Intifada (October 2000), the Israeli Parliament accepted an amendment to the 1953 Compulsory Public Education Law, revising its basic aims. The law states that one of the goals of public education in Israel is to provide pupils with the option of 'getting to know the language, culture, history, heritage, and the unique tradition of the Arab population and of other population groups in the State of Israel and to acknowledge the equal rights of all the citizens of Israel' (section 2.11). Although signaling some positive change towards the legal status of Israeli Palestinians in the Israeli educational system, this amendment did not go far enough as to recognize Israeli Arabs as a national minority. It only recognized them as a distinct cultural group, as if they constituted nothing more than an ethnic minority.

If Israeli Arabs anticipated further auspicious developments in this regard, the ensuing events of that year betrayed this anticipation. The year 2000 saw the collapse of the Oslo agreements, leading to the second Palestinian uprising (Second Intifada). Protesting in support of their Palestinian brethren, Israeli Palestinians became engulfed in a circle of violence leading to the killing of 13 Arab protesters. Following this tragic event, a group of Israeli academics, composed of both Jews and Palestinians, wrote an emergency report in which they demanded that the Israeli government initiate large-scale programs intended to integrate Israeli Palestinians into Israeli society while recognizing their unique national heritage. With respect to the field of education, the report stated the following:

> An analysis of the professed goals of education and an examination of the Arab education's curriculum illustrate that there is no acknowledgement of the Arabs in Israel being a national minority and in their being an inseparable part of the Palestinian nation. Instead, it is evident that the system is governed by the aim of creating a subservient Arab, lacking any clear identity. (Al-Haj, Abusaad and Yonah 2000, 33)

Writing along these lines, Andre Mazawi has argued that the leaders of the education system view education as a political and ideological instrument to control the Palestinian population in

Israel (Mazawi 1999, 388). The education system distributes resources that serve to blur the national identity of Israeli Palestinian citizens while continuing to reinforce the national-Zionist character of education in frameworks that serve Jewish pupils (Al-Haj 1998, 705). Moreover, the schools serving Arab pupils 'put pressure on the [Arab-Palestinian] minority towards unilateral bilingualism and biculturalism' (Saban 2002, 269). In other words, mandatory requirements are placed on Arab pupils, including learning the Hebrew language and Jewish culture and history, while the Jewish pupils are not required to learn about Palestinian language, culture and history. Aside from the fact that the Israeli education system leaves little room for Palestinian national heritage, it systematically discriminates Palestinian pupils in the allocation of material resources. Before elaborating on this issue, it should be noted that the state of Israel has formally acknowledged, in an official report it submitted to the UN, that Arabs face discrimination in the allocation of educational resources (Government of Israel 1997). This discrimination was again formally acknowledged by the 'Or Commission', which investigated the precursors to the 2000 riots and to the killing of 13 Israeli Arab citizens by Israeli security forces (Government of Israel 2003).

As these documents acknowledge, Arabs have been systematically discriminated against in the field of education, and this discrimination can be readily noticed in underinvestment in the physical infrastructure, teacher on-the-job training, teaching hours, special educational programs and more (Rouhana and Ghanem 1998; Abuasba 2005).

Following are some examples of enduring discrimination in this regard. In 1998, the government approved a policy (called 'Areas of National Priority'), which was designed to assist geographical areas that are eligible for special benefits due to an assessment of vital national interests. Areas of national priority have been divided into two levels: A and B. The first level (A) refers to the highest national priority and the second (B) to secondary national priorities. As stipulated by the policy, only areas falling under the first category are eligible for benefits in the field of education. Of the 418 towns and villages in the first category, only 14 are Arab. The overwhelming amount of assistance is allocated to underdeveloped towns populated by Jews and to settlements in the occupied West Bank. It is to be noted, however, that, following an appeal by Adala to the Supreme Court, the court determined that this policy was unjustly discriminatory and called for the government to end this type of discrimination at the beginning of the 2007 school year (Abu-Asbah 2007).

Another policy that overtly discriminates against the Arab education system is the one designed to offer special benefits to 'deprived' children. The criteria used to define deprivation refer to the relative socioeconomic standing of towns and villages. However, instead of using the model developed by the Central Bureau of Statistics, which indicate that Arab villages and towns score very high on measures of socioeconomic deprivation, the Ministry of Education has developed its own model, offering different measures to gauge deprivation: one for Arab and one for Jewish communities. Using this method, the Ministry of Education has been able to allocate resources and benefits that defy universal criteria that – if implemented – would necessitate the allocation of a larger amount of resources to Arab children. Thus, a simple survey of the model adopted by the Ministry shows that Jewish schools located in high SES areas (according to the model developed by the Central Bureau of Statistics) receive more financial support than Arab schools located in relatively low SES areas (Abu-Asbah 2007).

Thus, the 1997 data show that, in primary education, the annual financial allocation for special assistance to Arab children was about one-third of that allocated to Jewish children, while in middle schools it was about half. According to Kahan and Yelni (2000), if universal criteria were to be adopted, the allocation of resources to Arab schools, taking into account only socioeconomic conditions, would need to increased by 300% or 400%.

The Dovrat Committee and the status of Arab education in Israel

Five years later, the political atmosphere seemed ripe again for the introduction of new initiatives, aiming to accommodate Israeli Palestinians within Israeli society, as a national minority deserving collective rights. As far as educational affairs are concerned, it seemed that the combination of cultural misrecognition of Israeli Arabs and their discrimination in the allocation of material resources was about to end with the creation of the Dovrat Committee and the publication of its report – the Dovrat Report (The Ministry of Education 2005). Written basically within the ideological strictures of neoliberalism and receiving the support of the Israeli government and the Ministry of Education, the Dovrat Report was heralded as the most comprehensive educational reform package proposed in Israel in the last four decades. The report stressed the need to bring about a revolution in the Israeli education system. In addition to recommendations calling for a reduction in the state's role in managing and financing education services (Dahan and Yonah 2005, 2006), the Dovrat Report also included a vision of the educated person and recommendations regarding the desired goals of education. But the ambivalent attitude towards the Arab-Palestinian minority in the field of education continues to guide education policymakers in Israel, even in the Dovrat.

The report suggests the beginning of a new era in regard to the relationship between the state of Israel and its Arab citizens in the field of education. Thus the Report 'recommends turning over a new leaf … despite the existence of a national conflict'. This conflict, adds the report, should not prevent the educational system from 'giving expression to the Arab heritage' (p. 218). As part of this new dawn, the Report proposes to add the following clauses to the Public Education Law: '(A) Developing and cultivating the personal and collective Arab identity as a psychosocial educational anchor, complete integration in Israeli society and in the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state; (B) Knowledge and cultivation of the Arabic language, and introduction to Arab culture and heritage; (C) Introduction to Jewish culture, the Hebrew language and the history of the Jewish nation' (Ministry of Education 2005, 219).

However, even though former Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein called the recommendations dealing with this issue a 'historical document'[1] and even though the report determined that 'the right for a separate education system to exist is correct in the case of [groups belonging] to a separate nation and language' (Ministry of Education 2005, 215), the report does not go as far as to recognize the right of the Palestinian minority in Israel to enjoy a separate stream of education.

Denying Arabs a separate stream looms large if we consider that the Report recommends to ground legally the special status of four educational communities in Israel: the religious community, the ultra-orthodox religious community, the Arab community and the Druze community. The main criterion for granting special status is 'the existence of a separate nationality and language, or a distinct and separate lifestyle' (Ministry of Education 2005, 215). Despite the fact that the Arab minority fully satisfies this criterion, the report does not recognize its right to a separate educational stream.

While the Zionist-religious and ultra-orthodox communities are entitled to express their cultural and educational autonomy via independent educational administrations under their control, the Arab community and the Druze community are not granted independent administrations that can express their autonomy and facilitate collective control over the Arab schools. The institutional expression for Arab community autonomy is mainly symbolic and is manifested in general recommendations about the appointment of representatives and advisers in the Ministry of Education's various units, in the continued existence of an advisory council established in 1995, as well as in a recommendation that a regional education administration with more than 50% Arab pupils will appoint an Arab as the Director or Deputy Director of the regional education administration.

Here it should be mentioned that the Dovrat Committee stated that the Ministry of Education was intending to discontinue the position of Deputy Commissioner of the Arab Education Department. The principle role of the Deputy Commissioner, who is a representative of the General Security Service (the Shabak), is to give security clearance for each candidate accepting a position in the Arab education system (Gabison 1999, 14). According to a petition by the Palestinian human rights organization Adalah, a candidate that is disqualified for security and not pedagogical reasons is unaware that he/she has been disqualified for such reasons and cannot appeal the decision. The former Director General of the Ministry of Education, Ronit Tirosh, authorized and justified the Shabak's supervision of the appointment of teachers in the Arab sector, claiming that everyone – Jews and Arabs alike – need security clearance. Jews get such clearance by virtue of their service in the Army. Since Arab citizens do not serve in Israeli Army and therefore cannot receive security clearance in this manner, they must be subjected to clearance procedures by the security service (Atinger 2005).

Despite the promise to 'turn a new leaf' in the relationship between the state of Israel and its Arab minority in the field of education, the Dovrat Report did not significantly transcend previous reports in this regard. Its vision of Arab Education does not challenge the definition of the state of Israel as Jewish and democratic. According to this vision, the Arab pupil is required to adopt the State of Israel's goals and values as a Jewish state, while this very character of the state is manifested in central institutional arrangements that openly discriminate against him/her. This perspective is poignantly manifested in an experimental core curriculum that the Ministry of Education drafted and which is endorsed by the Report as a pre-condition for public funding of education. One-third of the concepts appearing in this curriculum – called '100 Foundation Concepts for Arab Education' (Ministry of Education 2003) – relates to the category 'Zionist Concepts for Arab Education'. The Arab pupil is required to learn about the first Jewish settlements in modern Palestine (for instance Dgania and Nahalal), about Eli Cohen (who infiltrated into highest circles of Power in Syria) and about pre-state Jewish military organizations such as Etzel, the Lehi and the Palmach. The second category, 'Arab Sector Heritage', includes, among other things, a list of terms from Arab folklore such as Al-diyafa (the culture of Arab hospitality), Aljhaha (a group of men with religious and cultural status that participates in important cultural events such as engagements, deaths and marriages) and Al-hima (the Tent). While the Arab pupil is required to study and know concepts from the history of the Israeli nation and learn the words of the national anthem, the Jewish pupil is not at all exposed to the Israeli Arab heritage. This asymmetry reflects, as mentioned, the ongoing policy of the state towards the national Palestinian minority whose essence is 'putting pressure [on it] … towards unilateral bilingualism and biculturalism' (Saban 2002, 269; see also Gabison 1999, 14, 18).

Arab education in Israel: multicultural perspectives

Multiculturalism is not uniform in its meaning or implementation. Common to all interpretations of multiculturalism is an affirmative approach to cultural differences. Cultural differences are not viewed as something to be liquidated or grudgingly tolerated, but as an asset be protected and celebrated. Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional liberal position that advocates tolerance towards cultural differences, multiculturalism – interpreted as a moral and political position – holds that the state should play an active role in the protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of social groups that compose society (Young 1990; Taylor 1994; Kymlicka 1995). This approach, multiculturalists argue, should be practiced especially towards cultural minorities which face the threat of cultural extinction due to the dominance of hegemonic cultural groups. Furthermore, this approach is particularly relevant to national minorities or/and indigenous

groups that have been deprived of their dominance over the land, following fierce national conflicts or an incursion of foreign populations.

Having stated these general features of multiculturalism, we should recognize that its meaning and implementation significantly vary according to the nature of the relationship between the various groups that compose society. That is, they vary according to the mutual cultural distance between these groups. This complex social reality requires a theoretical distinction to be made between multiculturalism implemented in *separate public domains* and multiculturalism implemented in *shared public domains*. This distinction suggests that the greater the degree of cultural distance between cultural groups, the more the multicultural project should be expressed in separate public domains, and vice versa. Thus, when social groups practice distinct ways of life and embrace cultural norms that have little in common with the ways of life and cultural norms of other groups, multiculturalism must provide institutional arrangements allowing all groups to maintain their ways of life in segregated public domains. The multicultural project in these cases – having to deal with 'thick cultural differences' (Tamir 1995; Spinner-Halev 1999) or 'societal cultures' (Kymlicka 1995) – refers then to cultural groups that are typically confined to separate residential neighborhoods, send their children to schools that promote a unique cultural heritage and use distinct cultural and social services (communication, religion and more).

The reverse situation – multiculturalism in common public domains – refers to cases where the cleavage between the cultural heritage and norms of social groups composing society is not significantly deep. This situation allows the relevant social groups to share common public domains. Still, however, the multicultural project in these cases should ensure that the common public domains will appropriately express the cultural heritages of all social groups that comprise society.

The dichotomous distinction between the different social circumstances is mainly analytic, since cultural reality rarely allows for full segregation in the public domains where the various cultural groups exist. Furthermore, even when there is a segregation of this type, it should not be indicative of a static and unchanging reality. That is, collective identities should not be seen as rigid and inflexible entities; they are changing and fluid entities. They emerge out of a continuous dialogue between various groups, and they are articulated against contingent historical, geographical, political and economic backgrounds.

The multicultural position proposed here espouses this insight regarding the fluid and contingent nature of cultural identities, but recognizes nonetheless the limited relevance of this insight into various concrete cases. In other words, the multicultural position proposed in this paper does not require social groups to confine themselves to segregated cultural frameworks, but argues that when social groups desire to do so, their desire must be respected. It is difficult to imagine for example that the Israeli Palestinians' claim to preserve their separate public domains would be rejected on account of collective identities not being inflexible identities. As researchers of Arab society in Israel have noted, Arab Israeli citizens constitute an inassimilable group, wishing to preserve their unique national heritage and cultural identity (Manaa 1997; Jabarin 2000).

Multiculturalism in separate public domains is relevant to the relationship between Jews and Arabs. Since the Jewish population has already been granted the possibility to maintain and cultivate its cultural and national heritage – for Israel is defined as a Jewish state – multiculturalism requires that the state of Israel allow its Palestinian minority to establish separate public domains in which it is allowed to maintain and cultivate its unique cultural and national heritage. As far as education is concerned, it means that multiculturalism requires that the state of Israel should allow its Palestinian minority to establish an independent education system.. This interpretation of multiculturalism guided, for instance, the writing of the previously mentioned Emergency Report submitted to former Prime Minister Ehud Barak following the events of October 2000 (Al-Haj, Abusaad, and Yonah 2000, 34). It re-emerged in the report that The High Follow up Committee

submitted in 2003 to the Israeli Government. Both reports argued in favor of establishing a separate Arab education system in the Ministry of Education 'that will behave in a similar manner to the religious education administration responsible for the religious-public schools'. The latter report, however, also included a recommendation to establish 'an independent pedagogical council composed of Arab educators and public functionaries, to make the main decisions regarding the future of Arab education and to determine the academic content' (Feffer 2003).

Such recommendations – or demands – were repeated in a recently drafted report composed by prominent Arab intellectuals. The report, drawing on a strategic work plan for Israel's Arab minority, states '[t]he right of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel (as indigenous people in their homeland) to self-administration of the educational system and to self-determination of its policy' (Rinawie-Zoabi 2006, 28).

The idea that national minority groups should be allowed to cultivate and preserve their cultural uniqueness and pass this on to their children does not rule out the need to expose them, as well as the majority groups, to each other's cultural heritage and national narrative. This exposure, multiculturalists argue, is mainly designed to undermine the cultural–national hegemony of the dominant group in the society. The purpose is to challenge the legitimacy of the economic and political advantages grounded in this hegemony. Thus for instance, when Jewish school pupils are required to learn about the Palestinian national narrative, the result may be mounting doubts among them concerning the Jewish/Zionist narrative. This is the basic insight of Roger Simon's argument that at the foundation of true willingness to listen to the story of the "other" is actually the willingness of the listeners to revise their own narrative (Simon 2002).

The various attempts made to date in Israel along Roger Simon's lines have aroused deep fear and anxiety among many Jewish citizens of Israel. The attempt by the Education Minister Yossi Sarid (2000), to implement a new school curriculum in literature for public secondary schools provides a glaring example of such attempts. Sarid announced that this new curriculum would include 'new' components, such as works of Palestinian and Mizrahi poets and authors. He emphasized mainly the inclusion of poems by the Palestinian poets Siham Daud and Mahmoud Darwish, the national Palestinian poet. However, the poems of both poets were already included in a previous school curriculum, which was composed of 300 poems from which teachers could choose. The public announcement by the minister provoked a strong public outcry. The opposition to Sarid's announcement stemmed from widespread apprehensions in the Jewish community that exposure of Jewish pupils to the Palestinian narrative might challenge the Zionist narrative, but might also be the precursor to a more comprehensive curriculum, that might bring together Jewish and Arab pupils in a homogeneous collective.

Whether or not this was the Ministry of Education's intention, the multicultural approach definitely does not disqualify public arrangements that encourage the 'merger' of cultural groups. It does not sanctify social segregation. It upholds the necessity of social segregation and requires it only when it reflects a preference for a particular cultural group. The initiative to introduce the poems of Mahmoud Darwish into the general literature curriculum and the attempt to expose all pupils to the national-historical Palestinian narrative does not represent an attempt to mutually assimilate Jews and Arabs into a homogenous collective. Actually, the attempt by the Minister of Education assumes the desire on the part of both groups to implement a multicultural approach in separate pubic domains, but did not assume that multiculturalism would ban exposure of cultural and national groups to each other's national narratives, believing that such exposure might mitigate tension and facilitate mutual respect between rival groups.[2]

One should not underestimate the challenge posed by Israel's Arab minority to Israeli society and its public institutions. This minority does not only pose a formidable moral challenge to Israel's aspirations to arrange its basic political structure on democratic principles (Yonah 2000), it also espouses a version of multiculturalism that goes beyond the recently developed liberal

tradition associated with Kymlicka (1995) and Taylor (1994). Representatives of Israel's Arab minority contend that, in itself, this tradition does not provide a satisfactory answer regarding how to envision the desirable relationship between Israeli Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Their ideas and positions, as we shall see shortly, are in line with polycentric multiculturalism (Shohat and Stam 2001), which traces ethnic and national hierarchies existing in many liberal democracies back to the ethnocentric perspective of the western world. This type of multiculturalism, which adopts a postcolonial viewpoint, analyses these hierarchies against the western perspective that defines itself as modern, rational and homogeneous while defining its 'others' (i.e. 'the East', 'The Third World', 'the native', 'the ethnic') as passive and irrational (Said 1978; Gandhi 1998). Polycentric multiculturalism reflects a type of multiculturalism that challenges hegemonic cultures and aspires to create a multi-centered society on the one hand, and to bring about a radical change in the culture common to all citizens, on the other. In this respect, polycentric multiculturalism proposes perceiving the postcolonial tradition not only as a deconstructive discourse, but also as a tradition that offers its vision of the 'good society'. According to polycentric multiculturalism, then, in order to address these symbolic practices and the attending discriminatory practices in the allocation of material resources, one must make room for the absence of western culture and find a language through which the 'subalterns' can make their voices heard (Shohat and Stam 2001).

Polycentric multiculturalism is echoed, for instance, in a document drafted by Palestinian intellectuals, titled 'Identity and belonging' (Amara and Kabaha 2005). This document includes 100 basic concepts, and it has been offered as an alternative to the document written for Arab pupils by the Ministry of Education. The main purpose of the document is to inculcate the national Palestinian narrative to Arab pupils in elementary schools. The document includes five chapters: (1) Events and facts; (2) Viewpoints and places; (3) Institutions; (4) Important people; (5) General concepts, symbols and values. The authors of the document wanted Palestinian national history to receive priority compared with Jewish national ideology. It is therefore possible to find in the first chapter the following: crucial events in the history of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and pivotal UN decisions in this regard (the Balfour Declaration, the Palestinian Revolt of 1936–1939, UN resolution 242, UN resolution 338, and others); massacres, various struggles of the Palestinian people, the different wars that were waged in the Middle East between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the first and second Intifada and the Oslo Accords from 1993.

The second chapter deals with concepts that relate to geopolitical entities and forms of settlements in Israel/Palestine. Thus the chapter includes concepts such as Canaan, Palestine, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Gaza, Unrecognized Settlements and refugee camps. The third chapter includes concepts that relate to political, cultural and religious organizations and institutions – Palestinian and Israeli. They include political organizations and institutions of the Arab community in Israel (The High Follow up Committee, political parties, the local Palestinian government and the Palestinian Land Movement, which has fought against confiscation of lands form Israeli Arabs); Palestinian political institutions in the territories (The Palestine Liberation Organization, The High Islamic Congress and others); Jewish institutions (The Jewish National Fund, The Jewish Agency, Israeli Black Panthers, The Peace Movement, pre-state military movements, the Knesset, The Holocaust and more); and international institutions such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the United Nations, etc.). The fourth chapter relates to important Palestinian and Jewish people, and it includes figures such as Ahmed Yassin (the late spiritual leader of Hammas 1938–2004), Emil Habibi (author, 1922–1996), Edward Said, Yasser Arafat, Mufti Haj Amin al-Hhusseini (a notable Palestinian national leader, 1898–1974), Tawfik Ziad (an Israeli-Palestinian member of the Kenesset 1929–1994), Abad Al Naser, Sheikh Izz Al-Din al-Qassam (a national Palestinian leader 1981–1935), Gasan Kanfani (a notable Palestinian author and a member of the PLO 1936–1972), Binyamin Hertzel,

Menachem Begin, David Ben Gurion, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Itzhak Rabin and others. The fifth chapter includes concepts such as colonialism, national minority, racial discrimination, the Palestinian flag, the right to self-definition, Democracy, the Right of Return, separation of powers, demonstration and coercion.

As previously stated, the authors of the document give priority both to the concepts that relate to prominent Palestinian and Arab figures and to the Palestinian national narrative, compared with the rival Israeli national narrative. Yet, the priority given to the Palestinian narrative does not resemble the priority given to the Israeli national narrative emerging from the documents drafted by the Ministry of Education for both the Jewish pupils and the Palestinian pupils: the latter documents actually completely ignore the Palestinian narrative and give exclusive expression to the Jewish/Zionist narrative.

The Ministry of Education's official response to the presentation of the initiative of Arab intellectuals to draft an alternative document was unequivocal. Former Education Minister Limor Livnat threatened that any attempt to place the document into schools would constitute a criminal offense and would subsequently be handled by the Israeli police. Here it ought to be mentioned that schools serving Arab children were generally and traditionally reluctant to introduce Palestinian national themes into the school curriculum and school activities. This reluctance stems mainly out of fear of severe sanctions (e.g. being fired and/or limited promotion opportunities) inflicted upon school personnel by the Ministry of Education, which maintains strict control over Arab schools.

But changes are nonetheless noticeable. For instance, the teacher college Beit Berl runs a program designed to enable teachers to introduce concomitantly Zionist and Palestinian national narratives to schoolchildren. Furthermore, there are a few, independent bilingual/binational schools committed to promoting an even-handed approach to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

These initiatives, however, do not indicate a structural change in Israeli society. On the whole, as Bar-Tal (2006, 21) argues, 'Israeli society is still recruited in the service of a continuous conflict'. And thus attempts to introduce Palestinian national themes into Israeli education system, serving either Arab or Jewish schools, does not only evoke vehement criticisms among those who are in charge of the system – it encounters fierce objection among the general Jewish public including politicians, columnists, intellectuals and others. Thus, for instance, commenting on the previously mentioned initiative by the former Minister of Education Yossi Sarid to implement a new school curriculum in literature figuring the poems of the Palestinian poets Siham Daud and Mahmood Darwish, the former chairperson of the Israeli parliament Reuven Rivlin argued that allowing the introduction of such poems would undermine the moral legitimacy of the Jewish state. In his point of view – widely shared in Israeli Jewish society – current political reality reflects a struggle between two national groups that undermine the legitimacy of each other. The struggle, he added, is not about the mutual inclusion of the 'other' in the respective narratives of the Jews and Palestinians; it reflects both sides' position, saying that each side feels that such inclusion may crucially undermine the moral justification of its national narrative.

The position held by many Israelis is that as long as the Jewish/Palestinian conflict does not come to an end, it makes no sense for Israeli Jews to allow an encounter between the Jewish/Zionist narrative and the national Palestinian narrative, meaning an encounter in which there is a true willingness, as Roger Simon proposes, to listen to the story of the 'other' and consequently to change the listener's narrative (Firer 2006). Reuven Rivlin argued that

> If we allow the teaching of a Palestinian national poet who denies our right for self determination, we actually renounce moral justice. If we do that we actually instill in our children, to whom we introduce Mahmood Darwish, the thought that maybe the Zionist movement was not a moral movement after all.

Further elaborating on his position, Rivilin continued to ask sarcastically: 'Maybe there is an injustice in the wish of the Jewish people's desire to return to its homeland after 2000 years of exile? Maybe we should get out of here.'[3] The poet Aharon Amir has expressed a similar opinion. 'Before we are completely swept away to the "other's" shore,' he wrote, 'is it not fitting that we will first of all be sure of our own identity? Is it not important to us, at least to the same degree, that we know which direction we face, that we stand up for our beliefs and independence? Perhaps we should remember the same sages that warn that "he who hears many voices will never hear his own voice"' (Amir 2000).

It seems that the positions held by Rivlin and Amir guide policy-makers in the Ministry of Education. Translated to the school curriculum, this position facilitates the emergence among children of national and even nationalistic worldviews that become ever more rigid and ever more entrenched. In other words, the Ministry of Education's unwillingness to allow the mutual exposure of Jewish and Palestinian pupils to their different and opposed narratives contributes to the continuation of the conflict by encouraging the development of one-dimensional and uncompromising opinions and worldviews. The nefarious role played by the education system *vis-à-vis* the Israeli/Palestinian conflict hence becomes distressingly conspicuous. Instead of encouraging openness, criticism, tolerance and inclusion among its pupils, the education system works in opposition to these values. But the actual role that the educational system currently plays in Israel does not render the models of multiculturalism sketched in this paper null; it displays the strenuous challenges facing multicultural education worldwide.

Notes

1. Quoted by Yair Atinger (2005).
2. Hassan Jabarin (2000) makes similar claims in favor of the creation of separate public domains, enabling Palestinian communities to preserve their national-cultural uniqueness.
3. *The Knesset Chronicles* 24: 6594–5.

Notes on contributor

Professor Yonah teaches political philosophy and philosophy of education in the department of education, Ben Gurion University of the Negev and fellow co-Director of the Forum on Israeli Culture and Society at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. He publishes extensively on topics pertaining to moral and political philosophy and in philosophy of education. The latest book he edited (with Yehuda Goodman), *In the whirlpool of identities: A critical look at religion and secularity in Israel* (in Hebrew), was published by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House in May 2004. His book, In Virtue of Difference: The Multicultural Project in Israel (Hebrew) was published by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House in July 2005.

References

Abu-Asbah, Khaled. 2005. The Arab educational system in Israel: development and current picture. In *Arab society in Israel: Population, society and economy,* ed. Aziz Haidar, 201–21. Tel Aviv: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute/Hakibbutz Hameuchad.

———. 2007. The Arab education in Israel: dilemmas of national minority. Jerusalem: Fleorshermer Studies, publication 3/52.

Al-Haj, Majed. 1998. Multicultural education in Israel in light of the Peace Process. In *Multiculturalism in a democratic and Jewish state,* ed. Menachem Mautner, Avi Sagi and Ronen Shamir, Ramot, 703–13. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University.

Al-Haj, Majed Ismail Abu-saad, and Yossi Yonah. 2000. Education and higher education. In *After the divide: New directions for government policy towards Arabs in Israel,* ed. Danny Rabinowitz, Assad Ganem, and Oren Iftachel, 33–7. Independently published.

Amara, Muhammad, and Mustafa Kabaha, eds. 2005. *Identity and belonging: The basic concepts to Arab pupils* [in Arabic]. Tamra: Iban Haldun.

Amir, Aharon. 2000. The other's poem. *Maariv* February 13: 7.
Atinger, Yair. 2005. This is how we became familiar with the collective Arab identity. *Ha'aretz* February 10: B3, B4.
Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2006. Socialization in the service of the conflict. In *I know how to speak only about the conflict*: *Socialization in the service of the conflict in Israeli-Jewish society* [in Hebrew], ed. Rachmim Yechezkel, and Daniel Bar-Tal, 15–22. Tel Aviv: Walter Lebach Institute for Jewish-Arab.
Dahan, Yossi, and Yossi Yonah. 2006. Dovrat Report, equal opportunity in education and the Israeli society [in Hebrew]. *Theory and Criticism* 28: 101–26.
———. 2007. Israel's education system: equality of opportunity – from nation building to neo-liberalism. In *Oxford studies in comparative education: Aspects of education in the Middle East and North Africa,* ed. Colin Brock and Lila Zia Lever. Oxford: Symposium Books.
Feffer, Anshel. 2004. Demand: separate status for Arab education, just like for a religious person. *Haaretz* January 18: A4.
Firer, Ruth. 2006. Agents of Zionist education: learning books in Hebrew language in Eretz Israel since the beginning of the 20th century to present time. In *I know how to speak only about the conflict*: *Socialization in the service of the conflict in Israeli-Jewish society* [in Hebrew], ed. Rachmim Yechezkel and Daniel Bar-Tal, 63–72. Tel Aviv: Walter Lebach Institute for Jewish-Arab.
Gabizon, Ruth. 1999. Does *equality require integration? The case of the education system in Jaffa, Position Paper.* Beit Berl: The Study of Arab Society in Israel Research.
Gandhi, Leela. 1998. *Post colonial theory: A critical introduction.* New York: Columbia University.
Government of Israel. 1997. *The Israel report to the UN* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: The Government of Israel.
———. 2003. *The Or Commission* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: The Government of Israel.
Gur-Ze'ev, Ilan, and Ilan Pappe. 2003. Beyond the destruction of the other's collective memory: blueprints for a Palestinian–Israeli dialogue. *Theory, Culture and Society* 20: 93–108.
Jabarin, Hassan. 2000. Israeli-ness that 'anticipate the future' of Arabs according to Jewish/Zionist temporality, in a space lacking Palestinian time [in Hebrew]. *Law and Government* 6: 53–86.
Kahan, Surel, and Yaccov Yelni. 2000. The discrimination of the Arab sector in the allocation of special resources in education: its scope and the implications of its cancellation. Working paper, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
Manaa, Adel. 1997. *Double marginalization: Israeli Palestinian in Jerusalem.* Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute.
Mazawi, Andre. 1999. Concentrated disadvantage and access to educational credentials in Arab and Jewish localities in Israel. *British Educational Research Journal* 25, no. 3: 355–70.
Ministry of Education 2003. Concepts in Zionism for the Arab sector. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture.
———. 2005. *The national plan for education (The Dovrat Report)* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture.
Peled, Elad. 1976. *Education in Israel during the 1980s* [in Hebrew]. Jerusalem: The Ministry of Education and Culture.
Rinawie-Zoabi, Ghaida, ed. 2006. *The future vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel* [in Hebrew]. Nazareth: The National Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Authorities in Israel.
Rouhana, Nadim, and As'ad Ghanem. 1998. The crisis of minorities in ethnic states: the case of Palestinian citizens in Israel. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 3: 321–46.
Saban, Ilan. 2003. The collective rights of the Arab-Palestinian minority: what there is, what there is not and the Taboo. *Iyune Mishpat* 26, no. 1: 241–319.
Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism* [in Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.
Shafir, Gershon, and Yoav Peled. 2002. *Being Israeli: The dynamics of multiple citizenship.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. 2001. Controversial histories: between eurocentricity and multiculturalism. In *Forbidden memories: Towards multicultural thinking* [in Hebrew], ed. Ella Shohat, 13–56. Tel Aviv: Keshet Mizrach.
Simon, Roger. 2002. The poverty of the present and the pedagogical force of public memory. Paper presented at Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel, 15 February 2002.
Spinner-Halev, Jeff. 1999. Cultural pluralism and partial citizenship. In *Multicultural questions,* ed. Christian Joppke, and Steven Lukes, 65–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Tamir, Yael. 1995. Two concepts of multiculturalism. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 29, no. 2: 161–72.
Taylor, Charles. 1994. The politics of recognition. In *Multiculturalism,* ed. Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tzartzur, Saad. 1985. Regarding the problem of educating a foreign minority in his country. In *Education in a forming country* [in Hebrew], ed. Walter Ackerman, Eric Carmon, and David Zucker, 473–526. Tel Aviv/Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute/HaKibbutz Hameuchad.

Yiftachel, Oren. 2006. *Ethnocracy: Land and identity politics in Israel/Palestine.* Philadelphia, PA: UP University Press.

Yonah, Yossi. 2000. Israel's political stability: a matter of principle. *Israel Affairs* 5, no. 2: 128–53.

———. 2004. Israel's immigration policies: the twofold face of the 'demographic threat. *Social Identities* 10, no. 2: 195–218.

———. 2005. *In virtue of difference: The Multicultural Project in Israel* [in Hebrew]. Tel Aviv/Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute/HaKibbutz Hameuchad.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the politics of difference.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.