

**Divide and Rule**

**The Israeli School System as a Political Tool to Further Divisions among the Arab Palestinian  
Citizens in Israel**

**By Mona Bieling**

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## Abstract

Recent efforts by the state of Israel to single out its Arab Christian citizens regarding conscription and education suggest that the education system in its current form is more than just a provider of knowledge for the citizens of the state. The education system functions as a political tool used by the state to advance its goals of furthering the Jewish character of the state and entrenching division rather than to provide the best possible education for all its citizens. The main question of this paper is in which ways the current Israeli school system furthers divisions among the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel and to what extent these divisions are actively created and/or emphasized by the state. This study suggests that there are two main ways the state education system promotes divisions among the Palestinian citizens in Israel: directly via the separation of different religious communities in separate schools, the creation of separate curricula and the appointment of teachers and principals; and indirectly via issues regarding funding, infrastructure, private schools and access to higher education.

## 1. Introduction

Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel constitute about 20% of the total population. They present a cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, national<sup>1</sup> and indigenous sizable minority, living among the mostly Jewish Israeli majority and, at the same time, being separate from them in various ways. Palestinians within Israel live in separate villages and towns, mainly in the Galilee in the north, the Triangle in the East, the Naqab (Negev) in the south and in some mixed cities, as for example Haifa and Jaffa. Moreover, they are linguistically segregated from the Jewish Israeli population: while they all speak Hebrew, which is the dominant language in Israel, Arabic is their native language and, as such, naturally used in conversations amongst them.

Another main segregation between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis is established within the Israeli school system that is strictly divided into different sectors, based on both religion and ethnicity. The structure of the school system in its present form was established in 1953 with the State Education Law. This law provides the legal framework for the establishment of two sectors: A Jewish secular and a Jewish religious one. While the Palestinian minority is not mentioned in this law, the establishment of an Arab school sector that is separate from the two Jewish ones followed rather inevitably from it. Despite an amendment to the law in 2000, the Arab sector has no official legal standing but exists alongside the two 'official and recognized' Jewish sectors as an 'unofficial but recognized' one. The particular set-up of this system implies that since the inception of the state

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<sup>1</sup> The Palestinians are legally not recognized as a national minority but generally define themselves as such.

school system in 1953, Arab Palestinians and Jewish Israelis are prevented from attending school together.<sup>2</sup>

This separate Arab education sector poses various challenges to Palestinians in Israel. Recent efforts of singling out the Arab Christian population in Israel regarding conscription and education, discussed in further detail below, suggest that the education system in its current form is more than just a provider of knowledge for the citizens of the state. The Ministry of Education has complete control over the school curricula of all types of schools – Jewish, Druze, Arab public and private schools, from kindergarten to high school. This becomes relevant when considering that the Ministry of Education is mainly staffed with Jewish citizens of Israel and follows the policies set out by the Israeli government, which often adopts a hardline political stance regarding its Arab citizens. Therefore, the education system will be explored here as being a political tool used by the state to advance its goals of furthering the Jewish character of the state rather than to provide the best possible education for all its citizens. The main question is in which ways the current Israeli school system furthers divisions among the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel and to what extent these divisions are actively created and/or emphasized by the state.

The focus here will be on the Palestinians within Israel as defined by the 1949 Green Line. They are citizens of Israel and, as such, constitute a unique group among the broader Palestinians community, subject to a specific set of rights and obligations defined by the Israeli state. However, it must be emphasized that divisions created among this group will also have consequences for the wider Palestinian quest for statehood and self-determination. Therefore, dividing the Palestinian communities into one inside and one outside of Israel only makes sense for purposes of analysis and does not intend to undermine the concept of a collective Palestinian nation.

This study suggests that there are two main ways the state education system promotes divisions among the Palestinian citizens in Israel: directly via the separation of different religious communities in separate schools, the determination of the curriculum and the appointment of teachers and principals; and indirectly via issues regarding funding, infrastructure, private schools and access to higher education. The Palestinian community, on the other hand, demands complete

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<sup>2</sup> There are some exceptions to this rule in the form of private schools that emphasize coexistence and teach both groups together. So far, these projects operate on a small scale and are run, for example, by Hand in Hand – Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel or The Abraham Fund Initiatives. Such projects are seen very critically by the Palestinian community because they undermine the community's goal for academic autonomy and self-determination.

autonomy for Arab education in Israel; a demand which can be placed in the wider struggle of the Palestinians for the recognition of minority rights in Israel.

## **2. Attempts at Direct Separation**

### 2.1 Separation based on religion and lifestyle

Israel systematically divides the Arab Palestinian community in Israel into four main groups: Muslim, Christian, Bedouin and Druze. The main and most apparent active intervention by Israel in the education system in order to divide its Palestinian community are the attempts to separate the community based on their religion. After the establishment of Israel, David Ben-Gurion fully grasped the advantages of a divide-and-rule policy for the new state, introducing it as a main policy for the education system. Divide-and-rule as a practice dates back as early as 1956 when a separate school system for the Druze in Israel was established.<sup>3</sup> This development has to be seen in the broader context of Israel trying to single out the Druze community as ‘a people apart’, not belonging to the Palestinian community in any way. Instead, the Druze’s loyalty to the state was emphasized and ensured by conscribing all male Druze to the Israeli army.

In the Druze schools, great efforts are made to emphasize the Druze as ‘a people apart’ with a special standing in society. According to Ra’afat Harb, a Druze political activist, both atmosphere and curriculum in Druze schools differ from the one in other Arab Palestinian schools. Druze who want to study prestigious subjects have to participate in a so-called military class from grade 10-12 in which they are prepared for military service, have to raise the Israeli flag every morning, wear military uniforms to school and, generally, undergo a program that emphasizes their obligation to serve. In the final years of high school, organizations or individuals from outside are welcomed in the school to talk to the students about the different positions they can fulfill in the army.<sup>4</sup> Organizations from the Palestinian civil society, on the other hand, face many obstacles if they want to enter Druze schools to talk about politically neutral issues such as gender equality and prevention of violence. Arab Palestinian organizations with a political agenda, for example ‘*Urfod* – Refuse, Your People Will Protect You’, campaigning against compulsory military conscription of the Druze, are entirely prevented from entering these schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Aatef Moadei. General Director of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ra’afat Harb. Political activist and co-founder of *Urfod* – Refuse, Your People Will Protect You. Personal interview. Haifa, 10 July 2016.

The result of this segregated, limited and biased education is that Druze identity is being remodeled in a way that suits the goals of the state and the Jewish majority. Of course, identity is always a shifting concept that differs individually and collectively and that can constitute itself in various ways. Again, according to Harb, there are Druze that identify as Palestinians, as Arabs, as Israelis or even as Zionists. However, through the education system, the state actively suppresses the development of the Druze's Arab and Palestinian identity and instead imposes a separate uniquely Druze/Israeli identity on them. The Druze's culture and history are actively distorted and replaced by a more 'Israel-friendly' version. In doing so, the state clearly follows an agenda of steering the Druze away from the Arab Palestinian community. In the words of Eyad Barghuthy, the director of the Arab Cultural Association, the state tries to "design" the identity of the Druze and other Arab students in order to control them.<sup>5</sup> Designing an identity, however, implies that this identity is created artificially and in accordance with a specific agenda; it does not have room to develop on its own. This actively enforced artificial identity, is not one that simply comes by default, but rather something which is in direct opposition with the demand by Palestinian citizens of Israel for an autonomous minority education system.

The divisions imposed by the educational system on the Palestinian community in Israel also operate on distinguishing between the Christian and Muslim communities on the one hand and Bedouin communities on the other hand. This division is often mistaken by outsiders as one based on religion but, in fact, the Bedouins in Israel are Muslim and the term 'Bedouin' only refers to a particular lifestyle and the shared history of this community. Most Bedouins in Israel live in the Naqab in the south of the country where they face abject living conditions due to Israel's attempt to uproot them from their land and to relocate them in a few concentrated villages and towns. As inhabitants of the unrecognized villages, the Bedouins suffer from the poorest living conditions in the country.<sup>6</sup> While the state is obligated to provide education for all its citizens from the age 3-4, schools in the Naqab can only be found in the recognized villages and towns. This can make it difficult for children from unrecognized villages to attend school regularly as it implies daily long and strenuous, possibly dangerous, commute to school and back. Because parents can face legal prosecution if they fail to send their children to school, some families have moved from the unrecognized to the recognized villages in order to facilitate school attendance and to avoid criminal

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<sup>5</sup> Eyad Barghuthy. Director of the Arab Cultural Association. Personal interview. Haifa, 14 July 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Noga Dagan-Buzaglo. Researcher at Adva Center – Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel. Personal interview. Tel Aviv, 21 July 2016.

charges.<sup>7</sup> Here again, education is used as a political tool to force the will of the state onto its Arab citizens, in this case by removing parts of the population from its ancestral land.

Regarding internal separation, the most contentious issue is the establishment of a separate department for Bedouin education within the Israeli Ministry of Education. One argument, brought forward for example by Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, a researcher at the Adva Center, is that the Bedouins are the most socio-economically disadvantaged group in Israeli society and, as such, have special needs that can be better addressed within a separate department. The counter-argument, however, emerging from within the Arab Palestinian community, calls for a separate department within the Ministry of Education for all Arabs within Israel. This department would be staffed and run by the Arab Palestinian community itself, assuming responsibility for the funds, content and all other issues related to the Arab schools – all of which is currently in the hands of the Ministry of Education and its mostly Jewish staff. Aatef Moadei, General Director of the Follow-Up Committee for Arab Education (FUCAE), believes that autonomy in education is of crucial importance for the Arab Palestinian community. Within such an autonomous department for Arab education, funds would be allocated where they are most needed. The diversity within the Arab Palestinian community would be upheld, but no artificial divisions created. Barghuthy supports this view. In an academically and culturally independent school system, diversity, he believes, would still be present, but it would develop naturally based on geography and not according to the political preferences of the state.

A third, fairly recent development is the attempt of Israel to single out the Christian Arabs in a similar fashion as they have done with the Druze for the past 60 years. In 2013, state efforts increased to encourage Christian Arabs to join the Israeli military, taking advantage of the fact that they are numerically inferior to the Muslim Arabs and trying to create fear of a “growing ‘Muslim threat’ in the region.”<sup>8</sup> Related to this is the current effort by the state to ascribe the Christian Arabs a new ethnicity. Odnat Copti, who works for FUCAE and is Christian herself, described these current developments as follows:

“The state is trying to empower the differences between us. They did something new now, saying that Arab Christians are not Arabs anymore. People have to change their ethnicity, but the ethnicity shouldn’t matter when you are a citizen to begin with. They describe us now as Aramaic instead of Arab. They say that we are a group of different religions and have nothing in common. But when you are talking about a nation, you are talking about a shared history, shared culture, shared language, even shared food. We are talking about things that unite us.

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<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Zidani and Muna Haddad. Researcher and lawyer at Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights. Personal interview. Haifa, 19 July 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Cook, ‘Israel Wants its Arab Christian Citizens - but not Muslim Citizens - to Join Military’, *The Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, October/November 2013, 16-17.

When I speak with somebody else who is Arab, it will never occur to me to actually ask him about his religion because culturally, it is not polite for Arabs to ask somebody about that.”<sup>9</sup>

The attempt of the state to single out Christians and make them adopt a new Aramaic identity has not yet taken hold among the people.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, many Arab Palestinians like Coptly mock these efforts as being unnatural and bound to fail. However, the past shows that similar efforts have been successful in the Druze context and the Palestinian community in Israel is highly aware of the similarities between these two developments. It is certainly possible that the treatment of Christian Arab citizens of Israel will follow a similar trajectory as it has with the Druze community. For example, there is at least one Christian village in Israel in which Aramaic is already taught in school.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this new divide-and-rule strategy should be taken seriously instead of being dismissed out of hand as absurd.

## 2.2 Divisions created by control over content

The second important area in which the state directly implements its divide-and-rule policy is the content the pupils learn in schools. The Ministry of Education has complete control over the school curricula of all types of schools – Jewish, Druze and Arab public and private schools, from kindergarten to high school. The whole education system is based “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 (...)” as laid out in the 1953 State Education Law.<sup>12</sup> In practice, this means that the curricula designed for the Jewish secular and religious sectors aim at teaching pupils the Jewish Zionist values and point of view. The curricula are then translated into Arabic and implemented in the Arab sector as well, with the aim of teaching Arab pupils the exact same narrative as the Jewish pupils. As a result, Arab Palestinian pupils do not learn anything about their own people’s history or culture during the 14 years they attend school. “I finished high school without knowing about ‘-48’ or ‘-67’ as I should,” said Muna Haddad, a lawyer at Adalah. “I know that the Jewish community is taught from

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<sup>9</sup> Odna Coptly. Employee of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

<sup>10</sup> The term Aramaic commonly refers to a subgroup of the Semitic languages. The connection to the Christian Arabs is being made because it was the language of Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> Julian Gavaghan, ‘The Israeli Village Where Christian Children Are Learning Aramaic in Bid to Revive Ancient Language that Jesus Spoke’, *Daily Mail*, 29 May 2012. Accessed 30 September 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2151686/The-Israeli-village-Christian-children-learning-Aramaic-bid-revive-ancient-language-Jesus-spoke.html>.

<sup>12</sup> State Education Law of 1953, Article 2.

first grade that ‘-48’ was the Liberation War. For us, it is a little piece of history that is nonexistent.” Her colleague Muhammad Zidani calls this “a gap in history.”<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, the image of Arab Palestinians that is portrayed to them in the school books is a very negative, if not an outright racist one. A good example is the new civics textbook, introduced by the current Minister of Education Naftali Bennett in May 2016. Despite pronounced protest by the Arab Palestinian community, Bennett insisted on the publication of the book that, among others, “needlessly divid[es] between Israel’s Muslim, Christian, Aramean and Druze segments and focusing more attention on the latter’s army service than on the largest subgroup”, namely Muslim Arabs.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the book, the terminology of the Jewish Zionist narrative is used, for example when arguing that the “outcome of the [1967] war allowed Arab citizens of Israel to renew the ties with their brethren in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. This reunion strengthened their Palestinian identity, which was weaker until then.” Regarding these examples, it becomes apparent why the Arab Cultural Association calls the textbooks used in the schools “a data bank for the Jewish history” and teaching their content “a process of brainwashing”.<sup>15</sup>

The only schools in which the curriculum differs slightly from the core curriculum as established by the state is in the Druze schools. For example, the Druze, being a secretive sect, are not taught about their religion in school. Instead, they attend so-called heritage classes in which their good relations throughout history with the State of Israel are emphasized. Furthermore, they attend the above mentioned military classes and some of their classes are taught in Hebrew instead of the usual Arabic. These examples show that Israel holds a firm grasp on the content that is being taught in all schools in Israel and, in doing so, again promotes its own agenda without recognition of the existence of an Arab Palestinian minority with a different narrative of past events.

Connected to this issue is the appointment of teachers and principals in Arab schools. Among the Palestinian community in Israel, it is commonly known that the Ministry of Education does not appoint the individual most suited for the task but the one that cooperates with the state. The fact that the Shabak (Shin Bet), Israel’s internal security service, is involved in the appointment – and the

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<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Zidani and Muna Haddad. Researcher and lawyer at Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights. Personal interview. Haifa, 19 July 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Marissa Newman, ‘Israel’s Contentious New Civics Textbook Illuminates Country’s Divisions’, *The Times of Israel*, 26 May 2016. Accessed 27 June 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-contentious-new-civics-textbook-illuminates-countrys-divisions/>.

<sup>15</sup> ‘The Curricula and Identity. Research on Language and Content Errors in the Textbooks of Arab Schools in Israel’, *The Arab Culture Association*, May 2011.



preceding screening - of the teachers and principals shows how crucial Israel considers the appointment of the 'right' people to be.<sup>16</sup> This would be analogous, for example, to the FBI vetting teachers in the United States and only allowing those with political viewpoints palatable to those in power to obtain employment. By choosing loyal or at least not openly critical teachers and principals, the state makes sure that only the content provided for in the school curriculum will be taught. While there are some teachers in Arab public schools who try to also address the Palestinian counter-narrative, attempts at providing the pupils with a balanced perspective have to be made carefully. Teachers who are suspected to have diverged from the official curriculum can face questioning, suspension or even lose their jobs.<sup>17</sup>

In private schools, there is a certain degree of freedom as to what the teachers can teach alongside the official curriculum. However, even in private schools, the teachers are aware of their role within the system and mainly stick to the dominant narrative. The experience of Haddad and Zidani who both attended different private schools in Nazareth, but still did not learn about the Nakba, is a good example of this. Moreover, Nida'a Nassar, research assistant at Mada al-Carmel: Arab Center for Applied Social Research, argues that there is a certain practice of self-censorship among teachers at Arab schools: "On the one hand, there is space for more activities that have to do with politics in the private schools. On the other hand, sometimes we control ourselves more than they control us. We do the job for them."<sup>18</sup> All these aspects together ensure that the state, by direct intervention in the education system, transmits only the dominant Zionist narrative that is supposed to protect the Jewish character of the state. This practice aims at sowing divisions among Arab Palestinian pupils because it denies the existence of a Palestinian nation and instead emphasizes all aspects that separate the community on religious or other terms.

### 3. Indirect Attempts at Separation

Besides the direct measures taken by the state to sow divisions among Palestinians in Israel by separating them into different school systems and controlling the knowledge they are taught in school, Israel also tries to undermine the cohesion of the Arab Palestinian community in a more indirect, subtle way. The examples given here regard funding, infrastructure, private schools and

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<sup>16</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel* (London, 2011) 61, 164; Ra'afat Harb. Political activist and co-founder of *Urfod* – Refuse, Your People Will Protect You. Personal interview. Haifa, 10 July 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Zidani and Muna Haddad. Researcher and lawyer at Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights. Personal interview. Haifa, 19 July 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Nida'a Nassar. Research assistant at Mada al-Carmel: Arab Center for Applied Social Research. Personal interview. Haifa, 4 July 2016.

access to higher education. All of these aspects are interconnected and reinforce each other in a way that prolongs the disadvantages of the system, as shown below.

There have been various studies conducted in the past that prove that there is a substantial gap between the Jewish and Arab education systems in terms of funding and the achievements of students.<sup>19</sup> While the exact numbers vary, it is obvious that the Ministry of Education allocates far fewer funds to Arab schools than to Jewish ones.<sup>20</sup> The lack of funds results in a severe lack of resources in all Arab public schools regarding the most basic infrastructure. For example, in 2008, FUCAE pointed out to the Ministry of Education that there was a shortage of 9,320 classrooms for Arab students. The Ministry agreed to build 3,000 additional classrooms in the years 2008-2012 while the natural increase of the Arab population demanded the building of 528 additional rooms per year, on top of the initial shortage.<sup>21</sup> Seeing those numbers, it is not surprising that many schools also lack more 'advanced' infrastructure as for example playgrounds, gyms, computer laboratories or libraries. Bedouin schools are considered to be well-equipped if they consist of houses made of brick with running water and electricity.<sup>22</sup>

The perseverant financial neglect of the Arab education sector is by no means accidental. Due to the persistent work of FUCAE, the Ministry of Education is fully aware of the amount of money needed per student per year to close the gap between Jewish and Arab students. According to Moadei, however, "nobody in Israel is talking about closing gaps. The state is more interested in not dealing with the issue, not solving the issue. It is more about managing the gaps, managing the policy. We know exactly by the shekel how much we need to close the gaps. But they will not make these decisions. We are not on the map."<sup>23</sup>

This disinterest of the state is all the more remarkable when considering that it is directed against people who make up one fifth of its own citizenry, all of whom pay taxes and expect to see

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example: Swirski, Shlomo and Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, 'Separation, Inequality and Faltering Leadership', *Adva Center. Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel*, 15 December 2009. Accessed 20 July 2016, <http://adva.org/en/post-slug-1567/>.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example: 'Via Dolorosa', *Hirak – Center for Advancement of Higher Education in Arab Society*, June 2013, 13; Report. *The Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education – Israel* (Nazareth), 1; Amjad Iraqi, 'Arab School Strike Highlights Israel's Discriminatory Education Policies', *+972*, 7 September 2015. Accessed 10 July 2016, <http://972mag.com/arab-school-strike-highlights-israels-discriminatory-education-policies/111480/>.

<sup>21</sup> Aatef Moadei. General Director of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, 'The Abu Basma Villages. A Decade of Underdevelopment', *Adva Center. Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel*, August 2014, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Aatef Moadei. General Director of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

meaningful investments in return. Meaningful investments in the Arab education system, however, are never made. On the contrary, allocation of funds is often connected to conditions. Copty presents a striking example when explaining that the allocation of funds that have been agreed upon by the Ministry of Education and the different Arab committees depends on the Arab municipalities first demolishing a certain number of Arab houses that were built without a legal permission by the state.<sup>24</sup> Remarkably, these demolitions have to be carried out by special Arab police forces set up for this purpose. Again, the intent of forcing conflict upon the Arab Palestinian community in Israel is obvious.

As a result of the lack of funding and the poor infrastructure in most public schools, Arab private schools have become the preferred alternative for parents who want their children to receive a better education. Most Arab private schools are run and partly funded by Churches, which means that they have more funds to draw on and which gives them more freedom in handling the internal affairs of the school. Arab Church schools are open to all Arab pupils, not only Christians. However, as parents pay tuition fees for these schools, poorer Arab families who are often Muslim, are excluded from this alternative. As a result, by intentionally underfunding the public schools and forcing the Arab community to divert to private education that is partly self-paid, the state again enforces a separation of the community based on religion, in addition to highlighting the stratification along the lines of class.

Private schools have been somewhat successful in providing a better education to Arab youth than the public schools. However, since the Ministry of Education realized that the best achievements in the Arab sector come from students at private schools, it has introduced new budget cuts. After budget cuts in 2013, the government only provided 34% of the money for private schools, compared to 65% before 2013<sup>25</sup> - and compared to almost 90% that it provides for Jewish religious schools that have the same status: 'unofficial but recognized'.<sup>26</sup> The rest of the money is supposed to be provided by the parents, however, even the amount that the parents are legally allowed to contribute to the schools has been severely limited.<sup>27</sup> Even a month-long strike by the

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<sup>24</sup> Odna Copty. Employee of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Jack Khoury, 'Christian Schools to Reopen Monday as Strike Ends', *Haaretz*, 27 September 2015. Accessed 10 July 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.677724>.

<sup>26</sup> 'Adalah Demands Full Funding for Arab Church Schools from Israeli Education and Finance Ministries', *Adalah. The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel*, 10 June 2015. Accessed 31 July 2016, <http://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/8579>.

<sup>27</sup> Yarden Skop and Jack Khoury, 'Christian School Students in Israel Protest for More Funding', *Haaretz*, 29 May 2015. Accessed 31 July 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.658600>.

private schools could not fully prevent new budget cuts in 2015. On the contrary, the strike was again used by the state to advance its own goal, portraying it as if the Christian private schools were not supported in their cause by the rest of the Arab Palestinian community.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Consequences

The state's strategy regarding the Arab education system seeks to ensure that the Palestinian citizens in Israel remain undereducated whilst providing enough education to mask the reality to both the international community and the Israeli public. The grave consequences this has for the Arab community in Israel can only be hinted at here. Arab pupils only complete an average of 11 years of school compared to the 14 years Jewish citizens complete.<sup>29</sup> The range of topics offered in high schools is much more limited in Arab schools than in Jewish schools due to the lack of funding. Only a small percentage of Arab pupils receive a full matriculation diploma, which allows for access to higher education, and even fewer students pass the psychometric exam required by the universities to be admitted. Both matriculation and psychometric exams are culturally biased and, therefore, much more difficult to pass for Arab than for Jewish students.<sup>30</sup> As a result, only one in every four Arab pupils goes on to higher education, compared to one out of every two Jewish pupils.<sup>31</sup> Arab pupils who cannot go to university due to all these obstacles often end up in the same recurring fields of employment, for example, nursing and teaching. As there are no classes for Arab students in their final years of school that would prepare them for the exit into the labor market, these jobs are chosen because they seem to be safe options and not because the pupils are particularly interested in them or qualified to carry them out.

As a result, the direct and indirect measures discussed above that are sustained by the state do not only result in the reinforcement of differences within the Arab Palestinian community. On a greater scale, these measures also result in a system that produces a relatively low-skilled labor force, for example by producing badly trained Arab teachers that, in turn, will have an effect on the next generation of Arab Palestinian pupils – ensuring a continued marginalization of the Palestinian minority within Israel.

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<sup>28</sup> Odná Coptý. Employee of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. Personal interview. Nazareth, 13 July 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Report. *The Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education – Israel* (Nazareth), 4.

<sup>30</sup> See for example: Isamel Abu-Saad, Ismael, 'State-Controlled Education and Identity Formation Among the Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel', *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (2006) 8, 1094; 'Via Dolorosa', *Hirak*, 15; Shtull-Trauring, Asaf, 'Head to Head Why Are So Few Arabs in Higher Education? An Interview with Haifa Professor Majid Al-Haj', *Haaretz*, 28 June 2011. Accessed 5 July 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/head-to-head-why-are-so-few-arabs-in-higher-education-1.369967>.

<sup>31</sup> 'Via Dolorosa', *Hirak*, 14.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is obvious that the state interferes in various ways with the Arab education sector in order to sow divisions among the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. This is done directly and indirectly and aims at enforcing separations based on ethnicity, religion, geography and class. Therefore, the school system, as it currently exists, clearly caters to the best interests of the state instead of the students. The Arab Palestinian community in Israel recognizes these attempts by the state and tries to counter them. Palestinians in Israel are far from seeing themselves as a homogenous people. However, while the community is aware of its diversity, it claims that the state uses the education system to reinforce the existing differences that would not be so problematic if not stressed continuously by the state. The control of their schools by the Ministry of Education and especially the complete lack of freedom regarding the content that is being taught are two practices that are widely rejected.

Therefore, the Arab Palestinian community in Israel demands complete autonomy for the Arab educational sector. Arab public and private schools should be supervised by an independent department within the Ministry of Education that is run by the Arab Palestinians themselves. Funding should be equally allocated to the Jewish and the Arab sector based on need and number of enrolled students. Within the Arab sector, the distribution of funds, the appointment of teachers and principals and, most importantly, the composition of a curriculum would be carried out autonomously by the Arab Palestinian community. The autonomy of the Arab educational sector in Israel would be an important step towards the improvement of Arab education in general. The call for educational and cultural autonomy falls within the wider struggle for legal recognition of Palestinian minority rights and is technically intrinsically linked to it, meaning that achieving educational autonomy becomes a tangible reality within securing a legal platform recognizing the Arab citizens as a minority group. Moreover, it would provide a chance for the Arab Palestinian citizens in Israel to halt the state's attempts to divide them into ever smaller communities in order to jeopardize the Palestinian national movement.

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