

she exclusively dates white men. In *Wolf's Head*, a woman describes being molested as a child. In *Bones*, a straight guy tells of his fantasies about another man. As the biographies unfold, the others in the groups play armchair shrinks, asking questions and, when needed, giving hugs. It's a far cry from *Mirror Images*, with its constant challenges and neuralgic homing in on members' flaws. And, if the old Bonesmen had a rather haughty view of their obligation to the rest of the world, at least they thought about it. For all their ideological trendiness, today's societies don't do much in the way of community service or political action. In fact, they rarely leave their tombs.

Not surprisingly, older alumni are furious. Ever since Skull and Bones went coed, many of the fusty old white alums have stopped attending reunions or donating cash. At *Wolf's Head*, alumni actually convened a task force that aimed to tone down the society's fixation on diversity and quash the complaints about racial preferences.

But the fixation on identity, and the fixation on self, can't be easily stamped out—they're desperate attempts to give inherently elitist organizations a populist veneer. Bonesmen used to flaunt their affiliation. In the nineteenth century they wore ties with a Skull and Bones insignia. Up until the middle of the last century, the names of incoming members were printed in *The New York Times* and the *Yale Daily News*. (George W.'s membership in Bones is trumpeted in his senior yearbook.) And, if you asked a Bonesman about the club, he would leave the room or issue an ostentatious denial—a

denial calculated to provide a clear answer to your question.

But it almost seems that the current crop of Bonespersons maintain vows of secrecy because they are genuinely embarrassed by their affiliation. Those I talked with turned logical somersaults to justify joining an organization that they had previously considered offensive. Even inside the Tomb, they approach the rituals with a dash of self-loathing. They mock the songs they sing, changing the lyrics. And they crack jokes about the "old white guys." When I asked a member of the current Bones class if he considered the group a collection of Yale's best and brightest, he replied, "I sure hope not."

ON A RECENT Sunday night, I staked out Skull and Bones with Nicholas Fleisher, an editor of the Yale tabloid *Rumpus*. The staff of *Rumpus* has filled many an issue by reporting on silly arcana of the university's secret societies. Reporters have sifted through Bones garbage and determined that Snapple is the drink of choice. Two years ago, they printed the code that opens the Bones door, inspiring a wave of trespassers. When I met up with Fleisher, he had already unsuccessfully tried to break into Bones that evening via the roof of an adjacent building. As we sat and watched Bonespersons walk out of the Tomb, dressed in hipster attire, Fleisher waxed nostalgic: "There's not much to make fun of anymore. They're so dull these days." Walking past Fleisher, a Bonesman put a hand to his face—a vain attempt to hide his identity. It was an emblematic gesture. ■

## Who removed Zionism from Israel's textbooks?

# Antisocial Texts

By YORAM HAZONY

FOR MONTHS, EHUD BARAK has feared his government would split apart over the Middle East peace process—what concessions to make to the Palestinians regarding Jerusalem, how much of the Golan Heights to hand over to the Syrians. But in March the Israeli prime minister was dealt an unexpected blow when three parties in his coalition—Natan Shtrasky's Israel B'aliya, the National Religious Party (NRP), and the Sephardi-Orthodox Shas—suddenly abandoned him in a close, emotionally charged vote of no confidence on the subject of . . . poetry.

At issue was the Education Ministry's decision, announced at a press conference by Education Minister Yossi Sarid, to include a small number of poems by Palestinian

poet Mahmoud Darwish in its new high school literature curriculum. Darwish is an outspoken anti-Zionist and opponent of the 1993 Oslo accords who resigned his post on the PLO executive committee over Yasir Arafat's agreements with Israel. In Israel he is best-known for a poem in which he tells the Jews: "Don't pass among us like flying insects. . . /The time has come for you to leave/Live where you will but don't live among us/The time has come for you to leave." Shrugging off concerns with the assertion that "even some of the Israeli poets are racists," Sarid praised Darwish's poetry and said its inclusion in the curriculum would be a "service" to Israel's students.

In the end, the no-confidence motion was defeated 48 to 42, but the signal it sent was unequivocal: Barak squeaked through due to the support of ten members of Arab parties that he has been trying to leave out of his coalition, while the 26 Shas, NRP, and Russian members of his coalition defected en masse, either supporting the motion or absenting themselves during the vote. "The people in the control

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# ZIONISM



LLOYD MILLER

tower have to understand that the government is on course to crash,” said one Shas parliamentarian, “and the navigator is Yossi Sarid.”

But, in truth, Sarid *isn't* navigating. The education minister's support for Darwish notwithstanding, Sarid's ten months in office have contributed little more than publicity to the sweeping changes in the way Zionism, the Jewish people, and Jewish civilization are studied in Israel's schools. The real force behind the changes is Israel's academics, who have been overseeing the attenuation of the Zionist perspective in Israeli education for more than a decade now, under Likud and Labor governments alike. It is a process whose implications for Barak's government—and for all of Israeli society—we are only beginning to understand.

The Israeli school system as presently configured was created by the State Education Law of 1953, a classic piece of Labor Zionist legislation. Foremost among its concerns was that Israel's schools inculcate “the values of Jewish culture,” “love of the homeland,” and “loyalty to the Jewish state.” And this mandate was given concrete meaning through a required curriculum of Jewish studies, including Bible, Jewish history, Talmud, and Jewish thought, as well as “motherland” studies like Israeli geography, natural history, and archaeology—a curriculum that, according to the Education Ministry, aimed “to root the children in the land of Israel.” Indeed, such was the importance of the State Education Law—and the Jewish school system it created—that David Ben-Gurion referred to it as one of the country's two “supreme laws” that together embodied the historical mission of the Jewish state. (The other was the Law of Return.)

The curriculum itself was designed by Ben-Gurion's tireless education minister, Benzion Dinur. A towering figure who helped found what has been called the “Jerusalem

School” of history, Dinur viewed Jewish history as the story of a distinct and unique people who, despite centuries of exile and persecution, remained united in the belief that they would one day be restored to their homeland. Zionism and the restoration of the Jewish state were thus understood as the just conclusion of the Jews' millennial struggle.

Dinur's “Zionist narrative” played a crucial role in the effort to establish a Jewish state. In the early years of the state, almost all Israelis were immigrants—from Germany, Eastern Europe, the Islamic world, and elsewhere—whose ability to forge a single, permanent Jewish society in their new land was by no means a foregone conclusion. It was the Zionist historical narrative, as explicated by intellectuals and political leaders, that all Jews held in common and that permitted Israeli schoolchildren from a host of different cultural and religious backgrounds to recognize themselves as part of a single people with a common and just cause.

Even today, most Israeli Jews probably still see teaching the traditional Zionist narrative—with occasional repairs when necessary—as one of the central aims of the Israeli school system. Nevertheless, this “ideological” approach to history has become the *bête noire* of a number of leading Israeli academics, including many of those who actually determine what goes into Israeli textbooks. Take Israel Bartal, chairman until last year of the Jewish history department at the Hebrew University and one of the most influential figures on the Education Ministry's curriculum committees. In an article in 1996, Bartal describes how, by the early '70s, he and his fellow scholars had begun to see that the old Israeli scholarship—as practiced in the universities and then channeled into the schoolbooks—had been based on “wishful thinking, resulting from ideological and other motives.” Striving to break free of these “chains of ideology,” they

embarked on a “systematic critique of the principles of Zionist historiography, severing themselves from its fundamental tenets”—an exercise so successful that when they were through, he says, “there was virtually no part of its teachings that they did not reject.”

In the 30 years that have since elapsed, the new history of Bartal and like-minded academics has replaced the old history as the dominant force in Israel’s universities. Today, writes Bartal, the “Zionist narrative has disappeared from the academic world.”

**I**T IS THIS revolution in Israel’s universities—not the fact that Yossi Sarid is education minister—that explains the sweeping changes in Israeli textbooks in recent years. Indeed, politicians of all parties have until now remained extraordinarily aloof from the process of curriculum development, leaving the job to a complex system of interlocking Education Ministry committees dominated by prominent scholars from the Hebrew University and other institutions. It is these committees that produce the detailed “programs of study” on which Israeli textbooks are based—both those composed by the in-house staff of the Education Ministry and those written by private individuals.

Beginning in 1991, these committees were commissioned to review and revise what Israeli children learned in classes on Zionist and Israeli history, Jewish history, literature, Jewish studies, civics, and archaeology—in short, nearly every subject that in some way touches on Israel’s identity. And, while these committees were by no means uniform in their recommendations, their general direction was clear: The old curriculum—last updated during the ’70s, when the Zionist historical narrative had not yet been seriously challenged—was deemed detached from reality.

“What was going on [in the schools] up until now was that the students were being fed myths and tales of heroism,” Hebrew University Professor Michael Heyd, who is chairman of the Education Ministry committee that oversees history teaching, told one newspaper last fall. “They weren’t made to face reality.” Bartal, who chairs another Education Ministry committee, this one directly responsible for revising the high school history curriculum, expressed a similar view in 1998. “There is no longer one accepted historic truth,” he explained. “The old history books, which in earlier years presented the Zionist narrative as an undisputed historical fact, do not fit in with the [present] historical and political discourse after the myths have been smashed. You can’t ignore Israel’s transformation into a multicultural society.”

Even more outspoken is Hebrew University historian Moshe Zimmermann, chairman of the committee that has already revised the middle school history curriculum. In Zimmermann’s view, the old Zionist history was written to address the needs of a particular group of “consumers” that has largely ceased to exist—and thus the premises underlying the old narrative have “expired.” “The ground has been swept away, not only from under the feet of Zionism,” he explains, “but also from under the entire interpretation that ... Zionism gave to Jewish history. All of Jewish history is in need of a new interpretation.”

Zimmermann proposes a new history better-suited to today’s “consumers”: one in which the unity imposed by what he calls the “problematic” idea of a unique Jewish nationality is no longer assumed and what we know as Jewish history is replaced by what Zimmermann calls “universal history.” In this view, each Jewish community is understood as standing on its own, without any necessary connection to the overall framework of the traditional Jewish historical narrative. In such a fragmented history, the concepts and aspirations of the Jews as a unitary and distinct people naturally dissipate and are replaced by a greater understanding of how a progression of non-Jewish civilizations (Greece, Rome, Germany, the United States) influenced the values and aspirations of the Jews who lived in them. Zimmermann believes that this “universal history,” which emphasizes the variety of Jewish historical experience, will permit a “reconsideration of the Israeli fixation regarding sovereignty” and of the “blatantly ethnocentric” concept of Israel as a Jewish state.

**T**HE HISTORY CURRICULUM first emerged as a public issue in Israel last summer, when *The New York Times* broke the story that, in the wake of the peace process, textbooks approved by the Education Ministry contained the information that some of the Arab population of Palestine was expelled by Jewish forces during the 1948 War of Independence and that the Jews enjoyed numerical superiority over the Arabs during that war. (The former is undeniably true; the latter is debatable.) Yet, despite the controversy surrounding the story, debate in both the United States and Israel has remained largely focused on the handful of facts originally reported by the *Times*—facts that, while important in themselves, do not fully describe the dramatic changes that scholars such as Bartal and Zimmermann have introduced into Israel’s classrooms.

The books in question were written in accordance with the middle school history curriculum published in 1995 by the Zimmermann committee, which had been appointed four years earlier by the Likud government of Yitzhak Shamir. For many years, Israeli middle schoolers had been required to take a four-year course covering Jewish history from the kingdom of David to the state of Israel. This program had, quite reasonably, included considerable material on the nations and cultures that the Jews encountered, but this was incorporated into what was essentially the story of the Jewish people. But, in early 1994, Zimmermann announced that this curriculum would be revised: “We’ve incorporated subjects that were not studied until now, such as the history of the Third World, which has an important place in modern historiography,” he said in an interview published in the newspaper *Ha’aretz*. “And the emancipation of women has no less important a place than the emancipation of the Jews, or of the blacks in the United States.” Moreover, “[l]earning about the [Jewish] people and the state [of Israel] appears in the program, but certainly not as a subject of primary importance,” he said.

Anyone familiar with Zimmermann’s ideas can easily recognize the influence of his theory of “universal history.” And, indeed, the influence of this approach can be felt throughout

the new Zimmermann curriculum. The treatment of the Jews during the biblical period is instructive. Until the release of the Zimmermann curriculum in 1995, it had been taken for granted that Jewish children in Israel should begin the study of history with the origins of their own people; the presence of the contemporary state of Israel in the heart of the Middle East is, after all, a little hard to explain without reference to the biblical Jewish kingdoms. And thus the entire first half of sixth grade was spent dealing with topics such as "From Tribes to a People," "The Kingdom of David," "Prophet Versus King," and "Jerusalem as a Capital." From the perspective of "universal history," however, these minuscule Jewish kingdoms hardly seem worth the bother, and, in fact, in the new curriculum the study of the Jews during these decisive early centuries has been eliminated entirely. Now Israeli children are to study a historical narrative that begins not with Jews but with Greeks: sixth-grade history opens with units on "The Polis, Athens and Sparta, and Greek Culture," "The Conquest of the East by Alexander," and "The Encounter between Greek Culture and the Cultures of the East." The Jews do not even appear until the fourth unit ("The Encounter between Hellenism and Judaism in the Period of the Ptolemies")—so that the Jews are first encountered not as an independent people with an important civilization of their own but as a subject people struggling to respond to Greek civilization.

Not all the new history books have been so refocused by the new "universalism." For example, the new eighth-grade textbook (which covers the period from the French Revolution to World War I) retains the heavy Judeocentric focus of the old schoolbooks, devoting 130 pages to the founding of the Zion-

ist movement. The same, however, cannot be said for the Education Ministry's new ninth-grade textbook, *A World of Changes*, written by a team advised by a panel of leading academics, including Hebrew University's Bartal. Although ostensibly providing Israeli children with a view of both Jewish and world history during the twentieth century, *A World of Changes* is in fact a full-fledged exposition of the new "universal history." Whereas the old ninth-grade books devoted 60 percent of their space to Zionism, Israel, and the Holocaust, in the new book these topics are slashed to less than 30 percent—the difference being made up by new subjects of the "universal" variety, including chapters on "Decolonization: The Establishment of Algeria," "New Trends in Art," "The Information Revolution," and "From the Kennedy Assassination to Watergate."

This change in emphasis, combined with the fact that the new schoolbook is far trimmer than the old ones, creates a perspective so "universal" that in many places the Zionists are simply lost. Thus, for instance, in the years from 1918 to 1948, Chaim Weizmann—who was, during almost that entire period, the leading Jewish statesman working for the establishment of Israel—is mentioned only once. The Zionist organization that he led is referred to only once in the entire book: in a sidebar about a meeting with Arab leaders in 1918. Similarly, the fact that Weizmann went on to become the first president of Israel in 1948 is not mentioned at all. Nor is Ben-Gurion, Israel's founding father and first prime minister, treated much better. His 40-year career as leader of Palestinian Jewry prior to the establishment of Israel is mentioned only once (apropos a meeting with General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1945). Similarly,

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Menachem Begin appears for the first time when he becomes prime minister; the fact that Begin led Jewish underground efforts against the British prior to independence does not make it into the book. Nor are there any photographs of Weizmann or Ben-Gurion. (There are, however, photographs of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Sigmund Freud, Salvador Dalí, and the Beatles.)

Watershed events in Israeli history are similarly minimized. There is no direct reference to the fact that in 1939 Britain capped Jewish immigration into Palestine and decided to establish an Arab state there. Similarly, Jewish armed resistance against the British in Palestine—which received 19 pages of treatment in the old Education Ministry textbook—is dispensed with in two sentences in the new book. Meanwhile, Israel's War of Independence, described in the old book in 20 pages, gets two paragraphs in the new one.

Not all of Israeli history is presented in such a cursory fashion. When it comes to the peace process, the Education Ministry is more generous. Thus, the new history books, which have no room for a picture of Ben-Gurion, include no fewer than *eight* color photos of Begin, Rabin, and Shimon Peres meeting and shaking hands with various Arab figures. Indeed, the twists and turns of the peace process since 1990 receive 15 pages (out of 38 pages devoted to Israeli history after independence), including an entire page on an obscure "trial agreement" negotiated in 1995 between PLO officials and then-Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin. It is only once Israeli leaders get around to signing peace agreements, it seems, that the eye of "universal history" finds their deeds worthy of sustained attention.

**B**UT THE MOST important difference between the new Israeli history books and the old ones is neither the downsizing of Jews on the world stage nor the minimizing of Zionist leaders whose achievements came in areas other than negotiating peace agreements. Rather, it is the effect that the attempt to achieve a "universal" perspective has on the way the schoolbooks present the Jewish national cause in Palestine. The old books told the story of Zionism so that students could empathize (even if they did not always agree) with the Jews who worked to establish the state of Israel. The new books, on the other hand, are frequently so preoccupied with being "universal" that they are in fact completely *neutral* toward the Zionist cause.

This is not to say the old books were perfect; one can easily point to instances—the role of Jewish forces in creating the Arab refugee problem in 1948 being an obvious case—in which a greater willingness to deal with unpleasant aspects of Zionist history would have been salutary. Nevertheless, the new books go far beyond a heightened capacity for Zionist self-criticism, often presenting the Zionist and Palestinian-Arab movements as though they were self-evidently moral Siamese twins ("The two nationalist movements that had taken root in the same land struggled against one another") so that neither seems more right or more just than the other. And when, at one point, the Zionists are actually given two

paragraphs to state their view on the need for a Jewish homeland, the student is immediately presented with two paragraphs outlining the contrary Arab position.

Or consider the November 1947 decision by the U.N. General Assembly to divide Palestine into two independent states, Jewish and Arab. In the old textbook, the four pages that describe this event conclude with a discussion emphasizing the significance of the historic decision for Jews everywhere:

In an atmosphere filled with tension, the [partition] proposal was brought to a vote.... The proposal passed.... So that 30 years after the granting of the Balfour Declaration—30 years during which the Jewish people had undergone the most horrific of holocausts; and during which, by means of constant struggle, the Jewish people had built up the infrastructure for the establishment of a Jewish state—the nations of the world ratified the right of the Jewish people to establish its sovereign state in its own land.

The new textbook, on the other hand, forgoes any such evaluation of the U.N. vote's significance within Jewish history, restricting itself to a bland report that the General Assembly's decision made the Jews of Palestine happy:

Emotions and tension in Jewish Palestine mounted. When it transpired that the [partition] proposal had passed, thousands poured out into the street to celebrate their happiness.

This rather clinical depiction of events of historical significance to Jews and Israelis is not simply a matter of taste but part of the historians' effort to implement what Israel Bartal referred to as "severing [oneself] from the fundamental tenets" of Zionist historiography. The issue here is not whether the *facts* in the old history books are wrong, as the "new historians" often claim; presumably no one will challenge the facts in the old textbooks regarding the 1947 U.N. vote on partition. What bothers historians of the new type are the *values* of the old textbooks: that the description of events was so thoroughly intertwined with the thoughts and feelings of the Jews. Indeed, the vast majority of the changes inserted into Israeli history textbooks have nothing to do with correcting falsehoods previously passed off as truth ("smashing myths"). Instead, they are about imposing a new value system on events—one in which the perspective of the Jewish people is simply not the baseline for determining what is worth teaching.

**I**N INSISTING THAT this approach is problematic—and that Zionist history *should* be taught from a Jewish perspective—it is not my intention to dismiss as irrelevant the perspective of the Palestinians. On the contrary, even if one is convinced that the Jewish cause was, on balance, the more just, this hardly means that there is no truth or justice on the other side. Yet all parents naturally want their children to understand their own values and perspectives better than those of a stranger. And with good reason: All human achievements not made of concrete and steel—cultures, religions, states—depend for their survival on the ability of the next generation to absorb much of their parents' way of seeing the world. Palestinians would

certainly not permit their children to study books so alienated from the Arab version of events that these children would not be sure whether the Arab cause was just. And yet this is what the new Israeli history often amounts to: an effort to teach Zionism to Jewish children as if it were no more morally compelling than the story of those who opposed it.

One can see this clearly in the emphasis that the new books place on the hardships endured by Palestinian Arabs during the Israeli War of Independence. As Bartal wrote in a recent article in an Israeli magazine for schoolteachers:

The victory of Zionism in Palestine was the catastrophe of the local Arab population. We have to teach this, and to show that nationalist movements are, by their nature, the saviors of one people and the destroyers of another.

And, indeed, the new Education Ministry textbook does just what Bartal demands. It does not merely describe the flight of Arab refugees during the war as resulting in part from expulsions by Jewish forces. It also includes a full-page, multicolor map depicting the flight of the Arabs from Israel, a photograph of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, and another shot of Jews building on the ruins of an abandoned Arab village. All this comes at the expense of the old Zionist narrative. One no longer finds a map showing the invasion routes of the five Arab armies that attacked Jewish Palestine in May 1948. Gone are the photographs showing the destruction of Kibbutz Ramat Rachel and the fall of the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City; indeed, not a single photograph depicting the Jewish struggle to repel the Arab invaders is included.

The same shift in values is evident in the new history book's description of the Six Day War, in which the crisis is attributed to Israel's downing of Syrian MiGs. No mention is made of Syrian efforts to divert the headwaters of the Jordan, nor of Nasser's decision to blockade the Israeli port of Eilat, nor of the infamous pronouncements by Arab leaders that the Jewish state was about to be destroyed. Indeed, if this was a defensive war provoked by Nasser's bellicosity—as most historians believe—one cannot glean that information from the textbook.

**E**VEN WORSE IS the altered presentation of Jerusalem's 1967 unification. In the old books, the struggle over Jerusalem is told the way most people remember it: as the result of a war with Jordan that Israel did not want but that, due to Jordan's insistence on entering the war, ended with some of the most heroic battles of Israeli history and with the return of the Jews to the Temple Mount. The old Education Ministry textbook described it thus:

With the outbreak of fighting on the Egyptian front, the Jordanians began bombarding Jerusalem. Israel warned King Hussein [of Jordan] not to join the war, but he ignored the warning... so that fighting erupted on this front as well... On the night between June 5 and 6, forces from the paratroops broke through Jordanian defenses in north Jerusalem in brutal battles on Ammunition Hill and in the area of the Rockefeller museum, and on

the morning of June 7 they stormed through the Lion's Gate into the Old City. The battle for Jerusalem ended at the Western Wall.

To further dramatize this story, the old textbooks carried a full-page photograph showing a grinning Moshe Dayan and Rabin entering the Old City on foot with their helmets still on.

The new books have none of this—no Israeli pleas for Jordan to stay out of the war, no heroic battles, no Western Wall. Instead, there is only this:

Later the Jordanians and the Syrians joined the war... Israel captured expansive territories... including East Jerusalem from the Jordanians... After the war, the Israeli government decided to annex East Jerusalem, including the Old City.

Needless to say, the new book does not include any heartstring-tugging photographs of Dayan entering the Old City. In fact, in the new ninth-grade history textbook there are no photographs of the Old City of Jerusalem that might leave the impression that East Jerusalem in some sense "belongs" to the Jewish people. On the contrary, the sole photograph from the Six Day War is a shot of an Israeli army half-track marooned in the middle of East Jerusalem's Kalandia Airport under a huge sign in Arabic. Thus the unification of Jerusalem, previously understood by Jews as a homecoming to their ancient capital after centuries of exile, is transformed into the occupation of an Arab city. History has been freed from the chains of Zionist ideology.

**T**HE EFFORTS TO create a "universal" curriculum in Israel's schools do not end with the history textbooks. A striking example is the 1995 high school archaeology curriculum designed by a committee headed by Hebrew University archaeologist Yoram Tzafrir. Not long ago, the idea of a neutral archaeology curriculum for Israeli students would have seemed impossible. The entire Zionist movement was built on the premise that the Jews were returning to their historic land, and the archaeological preoccupation of leading Zionists such as Yigal Yadin and Dayan played an important role in justifying this. Nevertheless, the ten aims of the Tzafrir curriculum are completely devoid of Zionist sentiments, proposing instead to teach Israeli high schoolers about the "societies that lived and created in the East in antiquity" and focusing on values such as "the spirit of man," "the culture of mankind," and "the heritage of world civilization." The aims of the new curriculum do not mention the Jewish people, Jewish history, or Judaism even once.

But this de-Judaization of Israeli schools is perhaps most audacious in the new civics curriculum, which governs a mandatory high school class called "Citizenship." One would think that if one course were to be designed to inculcate in students a devotion to Israel as a Jewish state, this would be it. But, as is clear from an examination of the new civics curriculum, completed in 1994 by a committee headed by Hebrew University political scientist Emanuel Gutmann, learning to cherish Israel as the Jewish state is not on the agenda. The new curriculum sets five normative aims

regarding the kinds of citizens the citizenship course is supposed to train, four of which are couched in active terms: Jewish students are to be taught to “work to realize” democratic values, to “work to realize” human rights and civil rights, to “be prepared to fulfill” their duties and defend their rights, and to “be involved” in the affairs of the public and of society. Only with regard to the fifth goal does the new curriculum become passive: the students are expected only to “understand the fact” that Israel is the state of the Jewish people, as though the existence of a Jewish state were not something in which the students had a personal stake.

**T**HIS NEUTRALITY TOWARD Israel’s Jewish character is also a striking characteristic of the Education Ministry’s long-awaited new civics textbook, *To Be Citizens in Israel*. Written by a team of Education Ministry staffers advised by Benyamin Neuberger of the Open University, who was until recently chairman of the Education Ministry committee overseeing the civics program, the new textbook dutifully devotes its opening chapters to trying to explain “the fact” that Israel is a Jewish state. Thus the first chapter informs the student that many nation-states founded in the last century—Israel among them—were established to secure self-determination for specific peoples and that in this sense they differ from countries, such as the United States, that have no such national or religious identity.

This is fine, as far as it goes. But in an average Israeli high school—just as in an American one—the concept of the particularistic nation-state requires some explaining: *Why* is the self-determination of the Jews (or anyone else) so important that it should justify an independent state, with all the potential for injustice that may involve? The Zionist literature was filled with answers to this question, but to begin exploring them would require a discussion of the history of Jewish persecution in Europe and in the Arab lands and of the importance Zionists attributed to the revival of Jewish civilization in the Jewish state. In short, it would require writing a *Zionist* civics text—and this the Education Ministry seems to have been unwilling to do. Indeed, the book does not offer a single sentence explaining why one might want to establish a Jewish state—or any other national state, for that matter.

Instead, the Education Ministry’s textbook takes a different, somewhat surprising approach. It explains to the student that attempts to build a world based on the idea of national states “have failed.” In fact:

The aspiration to establish nation-states ... escalates the social, economic, and political tensions between national minorities and the national groups comprising the majority.... Moreover, these tensions frequently turn into violent struggles....

Before you know it, the authors have launched into a tirade on the evils of the nation-state, rapidly touching on the suffering this idea has brought to Iraq, Lebanon, Georgia, Chechnya, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Basque Spain, India, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Congo, and Rwanda. The book then concludes:

In these places, blood-soaked civil wars have taken place between different nationalities that were for decades citizens in the same country. Citizens who studied and worked together, and in many cases had become family relations, turned overnight into sworn enemies, because of their struggle to win control over the nation-state.

With this bloody premonition, the Education Ministry ends its discussion of the general theory of nation-states and turns to the specific case of Israel, the Jewish state. And here, too, the new civics textbook remains detached from Zionism. The chapter dealing with the idea of the Jewish state is titled “The State of Israel: Different Approaches,” and, instead of elaborating on the views of Ben-Gurion and the other members of the Zionist mainstream who founded the state, it argues that “in Israeli society there are different approaches regarding how the state of Israel is defined.” The book then presents no fewer than six competing conceptions of what Israel’s political constitution should be, including four asserting that Israel should be a Jewish state, a fifth claiming that Israel should be a “state of the Jews” (i.e., a neutral state with a Jewish majority), and a sixth arguing, for the first time in an Education Ministry textbook, that Israel should not be a Jewish nation-state at all but rather a non-Jewish “state of all its citizens.” And, for those students who haven’t yet figured out where all this is going, the next chapter, “The Question of the Identity of Israel’s Citizens,” explains that, actually, “each person defines his own identity for himself.” That is, one can choose whether one is religiously Jewish or nationally Jewish or just plain Israeli. The character of the state of Israel is ultimately just a matter of the identities that its citizens choose for themselves.

There is nothing in these chapters to help the average Israeli high schooler “understand the fact” that Israel is a Jewish state. No references to authoritative political tradition, profound historical motives, or settled constitutional law are invoked to make it clear that the Jewish character of Israel is a fact with some solidity and permanence to it and that other perspectives are, within the context of the Jewish state, less legitimate. On the contrary, in this stew of vague “approaches” and ambiguous personal “identities,” one is left with the impression that the Jewish state is anything but a given fact—indeed, that it is one faddish identity among many and could easily dissipate with tomorrow’s cultural breezes.

**T**HE NEW ISRAELI curriculum is the work of Israeli academics who have to a large extent secured intellectual independence from Zionist ideology. But, as one examines the books and teachers’ manuals and programs of study being produced under their aegis, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the educational system they are creating is just as ideological as the old Zionist one. It’s just that the ideology has changed. If yesterday one was not supposed to talk too much about injustices committed by Jews, today it is the *justice* of the Zionist movement that one is not supposed to talk too much about. Today, it is Jewish heroism and suffering that are often downplayed, sidestepped, even suppressed.

*Suppressed?* Those who doubt that the “post-Zionist” perspective is an ideology capable of suppressing historical facts that don’t fit within its worldview need only look up the Holocaust in the new ninth-grade history book. While the old books devoted seven pages to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and other acts of Jewish resistance, the new text makes no mention of such resistance. And, whereas the old books allotted four pages to the failure of the Allies to act against the Nazi extermination program, this subject too has disappeared. These items were important to the old narrative because they raised the question of whether the Jews could truly rely on anyone but themselves. But, seen from the new perspective, these subjects just aren’t important, and they’re gone.

Also spirited out are the grisly photographs traditionally used to give students a graphic taste of what the destruction of Europe’s Jews really meant. Instead, there are new photos that, had they appeared in a *German* high school history textbook, would have the Jewish world up in arms: the photograph captioned “A concentration camp” shows three or four apparently healthy men walking around; the one captioned “The Auschwitz camp” shows nothing worse than the backs of hundreds of people in striped clothes walking in formation; the one captioned “Jewish women released from a concentration camp” shows a group of seemingly well-fed, smiling matrons. The Jews digging their own graves at gunpoint, the mounds of bodies, the gas chambers, the living skeletons after the war? These

pictures appeared in the old books, but now they are gone.

Why? Here’s a guess: Israeli intellectuals have for years protested that school trips to Auschwitz, and even Holocaust memorial ceremonies in schools, produce students who are too nationalistic. So it seems that the pictures in the old books have been edited out because they disrupt the tone of the “universal” narrative. They hit Israeli youngsters too hard and inculcate latent Zionist tendencies. They make them more willing to believe that the Jews had implacable enemies. And they encourage them to think simplistically about the right of the Jews to a nation-state of their own, a Jewish state. In other words, it seems that these pictures, too, have been suppressed because they don’t fit the *post-Zionist* historical narrative.

Until now, Israelis have paid little attention to the school-book revolution. The Golan Heights, the PLO, and related topics remain virtually the entire policy agenda of both the Labor and the Likud parties. But the old Zionist curriculum wasn’t just any old piece of policy. As Ben-Gurion understood, the cultural common ground it represented held the disparate groups within Israeli Jewry together. It was an important part of what makes Israeli Jews a single people.

Ehud Barak has gone to great lengths to send the signal that—perhaps unlike his recent predecessors—he considers it vitally important to heal the rifts within an increasingly fragmented Israeli Jewry. The debate over the new school-books being sent home with Israel’s children give him an opportunity to do just that. ■



## Without a Map

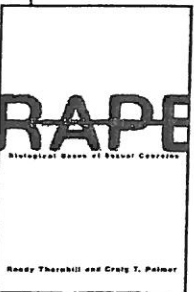
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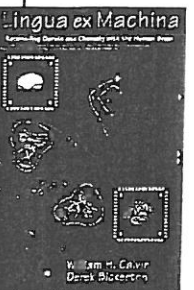
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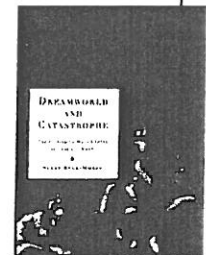
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