



Education for patriotism and the Arab-Israeli sector

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ABSTRACT

Education for patriotism, that is, love of and loyalty to a shared homeland, can be an educational solution for restoration and cohesiveness, and for the construction of social solidarity between and within groups of Israeli citizens. In this article I examine the degree to which prevailing education for patriotism in Israel reflects education in families in non-Zionist groups, and if this education has the ability to create the necessary connection and solidarity. I show that formal and informal education for patriotism contradicts the education characteristic in the homes of the Israeli-Arab students. Therefore, they do not have the ability to build a bridge of solidarity. In the conclusion, I offer a general outline for a new Israeli reflection on the concept of an inclusive civil patriotism and education for patriotism that attempts to change a typical patriotic language from an oppositional language into a language of solidarity and inclusiveness.

1. Introduction

In a seminal speech delivered in the Herzliya conference in June 2015, the Israeli president, Reuven Rivlin, described the new order of the Israeli reality:

A reality in which Israeli society is comprised of four population sectors, or ... four principal ‘tribes’, essentially different from each other, and growing closer in size... [C]hildren born in the State of Israel are sent to one of four separate education systems. To a system whose purpose is to educate the child and form their worldview into a different ethos or culture, religious belief or even national identity... [N]ot only do they not meet each other, but they are educated toward a totally different outlook regarding the basic values and desired character of the State of Israel... [T]he basic systems that form people’s consciousness are tribal and separate, and will most likely remain so... We are dealing here with a cultural and religious identity gap and sometimes an abyss between the mainstreams of each of the camps; between four different and rich engines of identity... [T]he mutual ignorance and lack of a common language between these four populations... merely increase the tension, fear, hostility and the competitiveness between them (Rivlin, 2015).

Education for patriotism, that is, love of and loyalty to a shared homeland (Primoratz, 2009), can be an educational solution for restoration and cohesiveness, and for the construction of social solidarity between and within groups of Israeli citizens. This article examines the degree to which contemporary education for patriotism in Israel reflects education in families in the Palestinian-Arab sector, and if this

education has the ability to create the necessary connection and solidarity.

Questions concerning the essentiality of education for patriotism, its character and its ways of implementation, have continually arisen in recent years among philosophers of education (Haynes, 2009; Kodelja, 2011; Papastephanou, 2013; Tonkiss, 2013; Zembylas, 2014). This discussion has occurred simultaneously with the weakening of the traditional nation-states, and in parallel to waves of immigration to Europe that has led to a rise in multi-culturalism in western countries (Council of Europe, 2008). The discussion on the need for education for patriotism is not only relevant for western countries, which have many nationalities, and are heterogeneous in terms of ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds, that lack a degree of a shared civic affinity and vision (Merry, 2012). The discussion is also especially needed in the State of Israel: in the country, social cohesiveness has become undermined to the point that there is fear concerning the existence of joint action of the different factions for the “common good” (Gavison and Medan, 2003). This need is emphasised in the words of the Israeli president: “We must ask ourselves honestly, what is common to all these population sectors?” (Rivlin, 2015).

The Israeli education system is divided into four major sectors: general state education system (mainly for Jewish secular Zionist students); state Jewish religious education system (mainly for national-religious Zionist students); the Arab state education system (for non-Zionist Israeli-Palestinians); and the Jewish Ultra-Orthodox system (mostly independent, serving non-Zionist students). Projections of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2014) show that in 2019 almost 50% of Israeli first graders belong to non-Zionist sectors.

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So, the factions have different educational systems; the country is embroiled in an ongoing violent conflict with its neighbours, one-fifth of its population sees itself as a partner of the nation of its enemies; and many of its Jewish citizens (the Ultra-Orthodox) – a growing number of the population – do not see themselves as Zionists and as obligated to this patriotic loyalty.

During the first years of statehood, the educational curriculum was acknowledged as being an important layer in the actualization of the “melting pot” policy (whose goal was the creation of a unified uni-cultural nation), and as being necessary for the unification of the Jewish people in its country and land (Dinburg, 1952). As a result, education for patriotism became a foundation stone for the governmental educational law, legislated in 1953, that determined: “the goal of the official state education is to establish the education... on love of the homeland and loyalty to the State of Israel and the Jewish people.” This article, therefore, deals with a central educational, relevant and current question that concerns connections between love and loyalty and the student, his/her family, culture and country.

I will provide the basis for the assertion that, in Israel, formal and informal education exists for patriotism of the “strong” kind, as it will be characterized below, which contradicts the education characteristic in the homes of many Arab students. Therefore, they do not have the ability to build a bridge of solidarity.¹

2. Methodology

Scholars in the field of philosophy of education do not have a clear and an agreed upon understanding of their methodology, but surely they do not share the same methodologies used in the social sciences (See, for example, Ruitenberg, 2009; Suissa, 2006). This research is mainly a philosophical and theoretical one. As such, while explicating the many facets of the concept of patriotism, and in offering a new and different direction towards education for civil inclusive patriotism, it does not follow a strict social sciences' methodology. The research method I use here:

... [M]ay be somewhat similar to that of the mathematician who replaces one formal system with another, and though this remains of a tautological nature, it may help to ‘solve’ a particular problem. In some cases this may mean that ... a ‘new way of looking at things’ is offered ... The expertise of the philosopher lies not so much in method ... as in being knowledgeable about the discussions of the past, about the issues that were at stake and the way these were dealt with. ... in our work as philosophers of education, relevance and progress can only come about if we unravel what is involved in particular cases of educational practice. This would involve refraining from being habitually critical, and consequently would mean coming up with suggestions. In this way, we would present ourselves as true participants in the debate (Smeyers, 2011, p. 299).

Keeping it in mind, I problematize the concepts of “patriotism” and “education for patriotism” that, up until now, have appeared in the public and educational discourse in Israel as obvious and given terms. I undertake an analysis of central philosophical texts that focus on these concepts. I will clarify their ethnic-pragmatic importance versus their ethical-deontological implications and I will describe the dictated character of education for patriotism in Israel and the perception of non-Zionist patriotism. I will also present the discrepancies and contradictions and examine the contemplative texts that focus on patriotism and education for patriotism. I will clarify the range of appearances of the concepts and will highlight their problematics. I will call for a critical reading and study of the educational curriculum that is

¹ The author acknowledges that writing on such a controversial political-educational issue may be subject to cultural and personal influences. Yet, he did his best in keeping academic integrity.

relevant for the present study. Furthermore, I will discuss the patriotic character that arises from them and I will characterize the Israeli patriotic-educational language. I will analyze studies, policy papers and declarations made by public figures from non-hegemonic groups and communities. Through this work, I will point to the narrow common ground that exists between formal/state education for patriotism and common perspectives in Arab-Israeli society. In the conclusion, I offer a general outline for a new Israeli reflection on the concept of an inclusive civil patriotism and education for patriotism that extends and supports the common ground, one that attempts to change a typical patriotic language from an oppositional language into a language of solidarity and inclusiveness.

3. Patriotism

3.1. “Patriotism” – a short explication

The source of the concept “patriot” comes from the Greek word “pater,” whose literal meaning is a person who is loyal to his/her fathers. This leads to the word “patria” – the place in which one’s fathers and generations of family members lived, including one’s people and land. The essence of the definition has not changed since then and, in contemporary definitions, the concept of patriotism appears as the love of a person to his/her land, identification with it and a special concern for its well-being and peace for its people. It also appears as a connection of loyalty that is directed at the land or the specific country (Kleinig et al., 2015). Therefore, patriotism relates to an emotional tie of love that obligates the feelings of loyalty, belonging and deep psychological affinity toward the nation and toward the homeland – the natural or adopted one (Callan, 2006; Macintyre, 2003; Merry, 2009).

For the patriotic person, the land serves as an important part of his/her self-identity (Keller, 2013), both in his/her own eyes and in the eyes of others. An additional characteristic of patriotism is that it is given to change and development (Kleinig et al., 2015). Therefore, even if its origin is in a natural feeling, it is given to processing, to development and cultivation, which are expressed through the educational act. In spite of the emphasis on the emotional aspect, patriotism does not remain an abstract issue and it contains a rational translation that leads to concrete activities (Merry, 2009). The character of the concrete actions is determined by the perception of patriotism of the people who undertake the activities and in accordance with the specific situation of the country that is loved by the patriots.

3.2. A typology of patriotism

In the literature, there are different typologies for the concept of patriotism. In social psychology, there is an accepted distinction between “blind patriotism” and “constructive patriotism.” The first kind has the traits of complete loyalty and intolerance for criticism, while the latter relates to connection to the country that is characterized by criticism, making changes in the leadership possible (Schatz et al., 1999). In my opinion, the dichotomous division between the “good” – the constructivists to the “bad” places those who support division alongside the “good” and does not advance understanding of the concept.

Therefore, I choose a different division and accept the spirit of John White’s (2001) proposal that sees patriotism as a good degree between the pole of chauvinism, which asserts that my country and my people are better than others, and the pole of cosmopolitan patriotism that rejects preference based on the background of closeness to any given group. I place patriotic attitudes on a patriotic continuum from patriotism, which I will term “strong,” to different kinds of “moderate” patriotism. The points along the proposed continuum are differentiated from one another mostly by the importance they allocate to the community of patriots and to the morality that they show, in comparison to their relation to universal morality and to all peoples. That is, the

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