



***Mandatory Separation: Religion, Education, and Mass Politics in Palestine***, by Suzanne Schneider. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018. 280 pages. \$85.00 cloth, \$25.95 paper, e-book available.

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In *Mandatory Separation: Religion, Education, and Mass Politics in Palestine*, Suzanne Schneider astutely identifies an underexplored set of questions regarding the nature, political aims, and internal contradictions of British Mandate education policy. In a survey of British education policy vis-à-vis both Jewish and Palestinian communities, Schneider investigates how Mandate officials intervened in reshaping Islamic tradition and regulating Jewish tradition as these related to public school education to promote their colonial designs in Palestine. For these colonial administrators, the post-Enlightenment project

of repackaging religion as a set of moral values relegated to the private sphere was a means of curbing the potential for mass political organizing among their subjects. In what the author refers to as a “politics of denial,” (p. 9) British administrators used education to prevent mass mobilization while simultaneously claiming that education should be apolitical.

The British policy was premised on neutralizing the potential for expressions of nationalism among both Arab Palestinian and Jewish communities, and it also recognized the Zionist Executive as the sole representative of Palestine’s Jewish communities. Schneider carefully outlines how the British applied their education policy unevenly in the same vein as Sherene Seikaly does with respect to business, economy, and taxation in her *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford University Press, 2015). Particularly in the case of the Zionist Executive, colonial authorities could only make requests of their Department of Education to follow colonial policy. This enabled Zionist settlement schools with public school funding while, paradoxically, serving an exclusionary purpose. Meanwhile, colonial officials heavily micromanaged the public school education of Arab Palestinians. Islamic education was designed to nurture apolitical subjects.

Schneider’s text highlights what she calls the “dual society model” (pp. 5–6) in studies of Mandate Palestine, and critiques the model for validating Zionist historiography, corroborating Zionist narratives of self-sufficiency on the land, and ignoring the disproportionate support Zionists received from the British government while also exaggerating the supposed anti-imperialist nature of Zionist settlements. In reality, Jewish public schools, which were central to fashioning Zionism

as a model of nationalism, benefited from funding and were enabled by the exceptional autonomy they enjoyed.

Noting the assumption within the historiographical paradigm of modernization theory that as people approached modernity, so too would they necessarily approach secularism, Schneider challenges that paradigm by identifying ways in which iterations of Islamic and Jewish modernism of the Nahda and Haskalah, respectively, disprove applications of this theory. Colonial officials believed that promoting religious traditionalism would hold their subjects back from becoming modern. For Muslim educators like Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, the founder of al-Najah School, in contrast, Islam was a civilizational force that bolstered expressions of modern nationhood. Similarly, in Zionist settlements, Jewish identity was adapted to foster Jewish nationalism. While rituals were largely shunned by “secular” ideologues, the Hebrew Bible was a central tool for Zionist education, important not only for language instruction, but accepted as a source of history that mapped Jewish belonging to the land. Schneider’s notion of the “politics of denial” is precisely that: while claiming to reform Islamic tradition to have it catch up with the modern world, officials were actually attempting to shape tradition to keep peasants in rural areas and stifle mass politics. With this, Schneider adds further nuance to a dynamic described by Weldon C. Matthews in *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation* (I.B.Tauris Publishers, 2006) that outlined the British installment of the Supreme Muslim Council as a means of undermining the nationalist Istiqlal Party, as well as suppressing notions of pan-Islamic anticolonial solidarities.

According to the logic of modernization theory, Palestinians attempted to modernize as a response to the success of kibbutzim. Schneider again challenges this logic with her analysis of Arab Palestinian schooling. Drawing from Gerson Shafir’s sociological model and Zachary Lockman’s relational approach, she notes how these alternative models demonstrate that the New Yishuv could not have survived on the land without the labor and lessons learned from Palestinian peasants, and similarly reexamines Arab Palestinian education. Placing the efforts of nationalist educators like Darwaza and Khalil al-Sakakini in the context of the Nahda, she argues, demonstrates that these teachers were not only responding to Zionist settlement and British colonialism, but were also participating in regional discourses on education and nationhood. Inspired by the writings of the Islamic modernist Muhammad Abduh for rationalist interpretation of Islamic traditions and the calls of the Egyptian novelist Taha Hussein to abandon the Ottoman *kuttab* schooling model, Arab Palestinian educators sought modernity through the reform of education, religious education included.

Innovative in Schneider’s text is the identification of children’s education as a site of contestation between colonial notions of tradition as a tool for imposing political quietism and complacency, and local iterations of religion as a vehicle for nationalistic ambitions. Adding to an important body of literature, *Mandatory Separation* offers new ways of understanding questions of economy, education, and settler colonialism in the study of British Mandate Palestine.

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