

**“Abraham and Moses were Entrepreneurs”:
The making of the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen in Israeli education
Sari R. Alfi-Nissan***

* Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA), University of Oxford, UK.

Email: Sari.alfi-nissan@area.ox.ac.uk

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9947-8038>

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Abstract

Education is a key site for nation-building and fostering citizenship across the globe. Historically, Israel’s state education system has promoted ethno-national Zionist values. In the past two decades, Israel has undergone processes of neoliberalisation with the entrepreneurial ethos gaining prominence, emphasising future orientation, personal autonomy, and individualisation in service of the neoliberal state. How is the global entrepreneurial discourse, which encourages autonomous and individualistic citizens, assimilated and translated within a state education system aiming to establish ethno-national citizenship? Drawing on qualitative data including in-depth interviews with state education policymakers and educators, observations of schools’ educational spaces, and content analysis of ministerial official publications, the findings reveal a hybrid entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen reflected in current educational discourse, merging neoliberalism and ethno-nationalism, combining future orientation with Jewish-Israeli narratives. This research contributes to citizenship studies by showing how entrepreneurial and national ideals of citizenship can be mutually reinforcing, rather than merely coexisting. The study demonstrates how in Israeli state education a hybrid model of citizenship integrates global neoliberal discourses of individualism with national narratives of collective ethno-national belonging.

Key Words: Nation-building, Entrepreneurialism, Nationalism, Neoliberalism, Israel, Education

Introduction

The state of Israel self-identifies as both a Jewish and a democratic state. The Jewish-Israeli identity has a long-lasting co-dependency with the state and the articulation of Israeli citizenship (Yadgar 2011; 2020). Judaism can be defined as a religion, ethnicity and nationality. Jewish-Israeli ethno-nationalism “perceives the ‘nation’ not in terms of citizenry, but in terms of ethnicity that is often based on a notion of shared ancestry” (Pinson and Agbaria 2021, 737). The definition of the state as “the nation state of the Jewish people”,

stands in tension with some democratic principles of equality for all citizens, regardless of religion or ethnicity, particularly for twenty-three percent of its population¹ who are not Jewish of whom most are Arab Muslims (Jamal and Kensicki 2020).

Education has long been a main site for nation-building and fostering citizenship across the globe. Therefore, “education has been examined both as a factor contributing to nation/state-building and as a function of it” (Kazamias 2009, 16). This article examines the intersections of entrepreneurial and ethno-national ideals and ideologies embedded in Israeli state education. Israel’s state education has stated since its very establishment that its purpose is to promote ethno-national and Zionist values (Dror 2007). At the same time, following global trends, Israel has undergone prevailing neoliberalisation processes in recent decades. These processes come about in economic, social, cultural as well as educational settings (Maman and Rosenhek 2019), giving rise to the entrepreneurial ethos in education (Alfi-Nissan and Pagis 2023; Alfi-Nissan et al. 2025), which may appear in tension with the ethno-national aims of state schooling.

The entrepreneurial ethos in education has been regarded as a global ideal reflected in many educational settings in neoliberal states (Brunila 2012; Spohrer et al. 2018). It emphasises a self-governing citizen, while stressing accountability and employability (Brunila and Siivonen 2023). The ideal of the entrepreneurial citizen is often linked in scholarly literature to neoliberal ideologies, which emphasise individualism and personal responsibility, thereby contributing to the weakening of social solidarity (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019; Sa’ar 2016). Neoliberalism, often perceived as a global phenomenon advocating for individualised, free-market culture (Caliskan and Lounsbury 2022), has been mostly understood as opposed to nationalism (Joppke 2021) as it promotes privatisation and globalisation (Mertanen et al. 2022) and diminishes collectivism (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019).

Nonetheless, current trends see the rise of nationalist and isolationist ideologies around the globe (Joppke 2021). In Israel, these political currents have intensified over the past decades under right-wing leadership, with an influence evident in educational policies and curricula (Agbaria 2018). At the same time, following global trends, an entrepreneurial ethos that promotes personal autonomy has also developed in Israeli educational discourse. Rather than viewing these forces as contradictory, this study examines how they are

¹ According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (Israel) press release of December 31, 2024, Israel’s population was approximately 10.03 million, of whom twenty-one percent were classified as “Arab” and 2.1 percent as “foreign”.

interwoven. While the rise of entrepreneurial citizenship is linked to neoliberal ideals of autonomy and economic productivity (Al Sader et al. 2019; Lonergan 2018), ethno-national citizenship is rooted in ethnic and religious origins, shared collective memory and social solidarity (Shafir and Peled 2002). However, in current Israel, locally referred to as the “Start-Up Nation”, entrepreneurialism is articulated through ethno-national perspectives (Preminger 2020). Yet, the convergence of entrepreneurial and ethno-national citizenship within the Israeli state education system remains underexplored. Therefore, I ask: How is the global discourse of entrepreneurialism, which encourages the construction of an autonomous, individualistic, and entrepreneurial citizen, assimilated and translated within a state education system that seeks to establish ethno-national citizenship?

I followed the discourse of entrepreneurialism in Israeli state education in a qualitative inquiry which included in-depth interviews with state education policymakers and educators, schools’ physical sites observations and content analysis of ministerial official publications. The analysis revealed an entanglement of entrepreneurial and ethno-national discourses as a central theme. Contrary to the notion that neoliberalism and nationalism are mutually exclusive, the current research builds on previous scholarship on neoliberal-nationalism (Harmes 2012; Joppke 2021) to reveal a hybrid ideal of the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen, intertwining neoliberal and ethno-national values. This ideal is promoted by policymakers and educators and echoes within the Israeli state education landscape through discursive practices that interweave the entrepreneurial ethos with a nationalistic-militaristic ethos, while recruiting Jewish-Israeli ethno-national narratives and symbols into the neoliberal vocabulary.

I first outline the ideal of the enterprising citizen and the ethos of entrepreneurialism in education. Next, I discuss the “Start-Up Nation” ethos and its intersections and tensions with ethno-national citizenship in Israel. The qualitative methodology is further presented, followed by findings that reveal three main themes of these intersections: merging personal success with national pride, linking entrepreneurial ideals to the military service, and connecting entrepreneurialism to the very essence of Jewish-Israeli Zionist identity. Finally, I discuss how the hybrid entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal recruits ethno-national values to reinforce entrepreneurialism, while neoliberal narratives are harnessed to strengthen an ethno-national identity.

The ideal of the enterprising citizen and the ethos of entrepreneurialism in education

Citizenship has traditionally been linked to nationality, with the ideal citizen belonging to a unified community defined by a common language and state sovereignty (Garrido and Sabaté-Dalmau 2020). Entrepreneurial citizenship, as a contemporary global ideal, denotes a model of citizenship deriving from governmental efforts to cultivate enterprising citizens and from individuals employing entrepreneurial skills to achieve personal goals and generate societal value (Al Sader et al. 2019). This form of citizenship is linked to the neoliberal ideal of a self-governing and economically productive citizen (Lonergan 2018).

In the labour market, the goal of the entrepreneur is to generate profit by identifying new products and markets. However, entrepreneurial citizenship is not only related to the labour market, as it promotes entrepreneurial subjectivities (Freeman 2015). The discourse of entrepreneurialism refers to both language and practice which foster the ideal of a future-oriented, calculated, autonomous, ambitious, hardworking, employable, and accountable citizen (Brunila and Siivonen 2023). In recent years, this discourse has become vivid in educational settings in various countries.

The discourse of entrepreneurialism is described as an integral component of contemporary neoliberalism and as a mechanism for constructing a subjectivity suited to the neoliberal economy (Bradbury 2019). Nonetheless, the ideal of the entrepreneurial self is not a new concept. At the beginning of the last century, Weber (1976 [1930]) claimed that the modern self is shaped against an ideal type of a capitalist entrepreneur, an enterprising, “self-made” and hardworking individual. This ideal has become dominant in recent decades globally (Caliskan and Lounsbury 2022).

The literature on the entrepreneurial discourse in education tends to draw on Foucault’s terms of subjectivity and governmentality while addressing it as part of the “neoliberal vocabulary of enterprise” (Rose 1998, 164). From this perspective, research on entrepreneurial education has explored how the entrepreneurial discourse shapes subjectivities to promote the neoliberal economy, fostering neoliberal citizenship through “inner entrepreneurialism” (Brunila 2012), an “entrepreneurial self” (Bröckling 2015; Peters 2001) and “entrepreneurial subjectivity” (Scharff 2016). Thus, the discourse of entrepreneurialism is perceived as encouraging a neoliberal ideal of citizenship as “neoliberal societies move from national government to public-private governance and entrepreneurial citizenship” (Bockman 2013, 15).

Neoliberalism and the ideal of the self-reliant, adaptable, and entrepreneurial citizen are associated with the weakening of social solidarity (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019).

Accordingly, the entrepreneurial discourse in education is viewed as part of a broader cultural shift towards privatisation and neoliberalisation within various state education systems. Pupils are encouraged to be future-oriented, with an emphasis on accountability and employability, reflecting neoliberal ideology within education across the US (Bialostok and Aronson 2016), the UK (Morrin 2018; Peters 2001; Spohrer et al. 2018), and the Nordic countries (Brunila 2012; Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019). In the UK, the entrepreneurial ethos is perceived as fostering a child dedicated to “self-improving” (Bradbury 2019). In Sweden, the discourse of entrepreneurialism is viewed as part of a shift from the “common good” to the “private good” (Dahlstedt and Fejes 2019). In Finnish education, it has been associated with promoting a “diminished self” (Brunila 2012) and “precision governance” (Mertanen et al. 2022).

Following Ong (2007), who claims that neoliberalism needs to be examined in context, this study discusses the local cultural-political context of the articulation of the entrepreneurial discourse in the unique context of Israeli national education which has had dominant ethno-national, religious and militaristic discourses from pre-state education to the present day (Alfi-Nissan et al. 2025). The current research explores how the discourse of entrepreneurialism is locally translated and examines the interrelation between entrepreneurial, neoliberal, and individualistic ideals and ethno-national, collectivist, religious, and militaristic ideals. By doing so, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how the ideal Israeli citizen is portrayed in the current state education discourse.

The ethos of the “Start-Up Nation” and entrepreneurial citizenship in Israel

Israel self identifies as a Jewish and democratic state. The Nation State Law of 2018 legally merging ethno-nationality with citizenship has increased this inherent tension in determining a hierarchy of citizenship based on ethnicity (Levy and Massalha 2022). Shafir and Peled (2002) explain how state-society relations and social hierarchy in Israel are influenced by three citizenship discourses: ethno-republican, ethno-national, and liberal. While it can be claimed that “Israeli citizenship always has been ethnicized”, these recent years of right-wing government have profoundly created a “differential citizenship and constitutionally reconstruct it in hierarchical, legal terms, downplaying the discourse of equality, as found in the Declaration of Independence” (Jamal and Kensicki 2020, 3).

Judaism is unique in the sense that it can be defined as a religion, ethnicity and nationality (Yadgar 2011; 2020). Thus, Zionism within the Israeli-Jewish context can be defined as ethno-nationalism as it “perceives the ‘nation’ not in terms of citizenry, but in

terms of ethnicity that is often based on a notion of shared ancestry.” Thus, “membership in the nation-state is conditioned by belonging to a specific ethnic community that is perceived as entitled to have absolute authority over the state’s affairs” (Pinson and Agbaria 2021, 737). The Jewish-Israeli identity has been “distinctively dependent on the state for its self-understanding and vitality” (Yadgar 2011, 468). At the same time, “the supposedly secular nation-state inherently depends on Orthodox interpreters of Jewish law for the very definition and preservation of the state’s Jewish identity” (Yadgar 2020, 2).

Education has long been a main site for nation-building and fostering citizenship. Therefore, “education has been examined both as a factor contributing to nation/state-building and as a function of it” (Kazamias 2009, 16). In Israel, the education system has consistently served as a key vehicle that both mirrors and advances the state’s Zionist ideology. Since the pre-state era, the Zionist movement promoted ethno-national values as a central component in educational curricula and discourse. With the foundation of the state of Israel and the formation of the state education system, the ethno-national ethos was institutionalised in formal school curricula, carrying militaristic, and Jewish religious narratives (Dror 2007; Feniger et al. 2022). These themes remain central in contemporary educational policies and discourse (Agbaria 2018; Pinson and Agbaria 2021). In Israel, militarisation and nationalisation “have overlapped since its independence” (Grassiani and Gazit 2025), and militaristic values and symbols have long been deeply embedded in Israeli state education. The blurring of civic and military spheres, and the normalisation of militarism in education, are “perceived inherent components of everyday life and civil society in Israel, which stand above any social conflict” (Hoffman 2022, 237).

The Hebrew term defining “state” education is *mamlakhti*. The term derives from the word *Mamlakhtiyut* which is a form of “Zionist republicanism” (Bareli and Kedar 2011, x), that historically “implied that matters of the state ought to be separated from all other ideological concerns and this meant the formation of [...] a state apparatus, that would be the executive arm of the Jewish nation” (Levy 2022, 10). Ethno-national citizenship, based on shared origins and historical ties, has been embedded and institutionalised in Israel primarily through the Law of Return, which grants Jews immediate citizenship and frames migration as a return to the national homeland (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008). The State Education Law of 1953 established a centralised Israeli education system that prioritised ethno-national and Zionist values. Its 2000 amendment introduced also individualistic and democratic aims, reflecting broader social and global influences (Ichilov et al. 2005).

The Israeli education system of today promotes ethno-national values, alongside centralised pedagogical policy and standardised tests (Feniger et al. 2022). Yet, in parallel to what could be defined as ethno-national indoctrination (Agbaria 2018), Israel and the Israeli education system have been going through processes of neoliberalisation, privatisation and marketisation (Maman and Rosenhek 2019), also reflecting in educational discourse and curricula. Consequently, the entrepreneurial ethos has become dominant within the national education system (Alfi-Nissan and Pagis 2023; Sagie and Yemini 2019). The literature addresses the neoliberalisation of Israel (Maron and Shalev 2017) and Americanisation of Israeli culture (Azaryahu 2000), alongside the dominance of neoliberal discourses in official governmental policies (Helman 2019). Plotkin Amrami and Kiper (2020, 5) have shown the rise of the “therapeutic citizenship” in Israeli contemporary culture which “put into use a model of an ideal subject who fits within the boundaries of national belonging [...] and based on criteria for neo-liberal notions of happiness.” This type of citizenship is associated with post-Zionism and a cultural shift of individualisation.

These described shifts (neoliberalisation, Americanisation, privatisation, individualisation, etc.) can be understood as a move from ethno-national citizenship to neoliberal citizenship. Indeed, the ideal of the entrepreneurial citizen is highly dominant in Israeli society of today. Entrepreneurial citizenship in Israel has been characterised as an aspect of neoliberal subjectivities that perpetuate gender, geographical, ethnic, and socio-economic inequalities (Helman 2019; Sa’ar 2016). Since ethno-nationalism is acknowledged as a central aspect of Israeli citizenship, neoliberal discourses are seen as an “exception to the dominant ethno-national logic” in Israeli society (Sa’ar 2016, 209). This perspective on entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism asserts that these concepts are distinct from ethno-nationalism, suggesting that ethno-nationalism and neoliberalism operate separately yet simultaneously.

Neoliberalism and nationalism have been seen as relying on opposing processes of “subjectification and subjectivation” (Müller 2011, 396). I draw on the scholarship of neoliberal-nationalism, which challenge this dichotomous view by examining how neoliberal policies support nationalist goals (Harmes 2012; Joppke 2021). This idea is distinct from traditional views that see neoliberalism and nationalism as opposing forces. Joppke (2021) has shown how neoliberalism can be used to reinforce national identity, particularly in the context of immigration and citizenship policies. This intersection of nationalism and neoliberalism is also vivid in Israel. In current Israeli everyday discourse, Israel is referred to as the “Start-Up Nation”. This term, introduced by Senor and Singer (2011) in their book

under this title, relates to Israel's robust high-tech industry and its exceptionally high ratio of start-ups per capita. Nonetheless, this term also reflects an ethno-national view of entrepreneurialism as Israel's hi-tech industry has strong ties with the IDF and is "a Jewish industry, marketed as such and linked to the mythical Jewish genius" (Preminger 2020, 255).

In scholarship on Israeli educational discourse, neoliberalism and ethno-nationalism are often examined separately, focusing on practices aligned with entrepreneurial citizenship and neoliberal logics (e.g., Sagie and Yemini 2019), or on ethno-national citizenship (e.g., Pinson and Agbaria 2021). However, studies of Israeli educational policy have also argued that the national ethos serves as a legitimating framework for advancing neoliberal objectives (Yonah et al. 2008), and that neoliberal policies have been locally adapted to promote neo-conservatism and religionisation (Sabbagh 2019). Additionally, it has been suggested that both neoliberal agendas and ethno-national ideology marginalise pupils within the Arab education sector in Israel (Agbaria 2018). Building on this literature, the present study explores how entrepreneurial and ethno-national ideals of citizenship intersect not only at the policy level but also within broader Israeli educational discourse; among policymakers, educators, and within educational spaces, by examining the intersections between the future-oriented, accountable neoliberal ideal and the militaristic, national, and past-focused dimensions of ethno-nationalism.

Methodology

This article is based on qualitative research conducted between January 2017 and April 2023 in the Israeli state education system. Israel has a public, free, mandatory K-12 state education system, in which most pupils enrol, while the Ministry of Education defines its curricula. However, within this national system lies great variability. One major variable is defined by the language used in schools, intersecting with ethno-nationality and geography, dividing schools into Hebrew- and Arabic-language state schools. Hebrew state schools are further classified as State, and State-Religious. The graduates of these two streams face compulsory military service once they graduate. There are also Jewish ultra-orthodox schools, mostly partially funded by the state and loosely supervised. Arabic state schools are defined as State-Arab, which mostly include Muslim pupils, alongside a private system of church-based schools.

This research focused on the Ministry of Education which oversees all educational streams in the Israeli state education system, and the field of the Hebrew (Jewish, non-religious) state school system (*mamlakhti*), as the dominant stream of schooling in Israel,

including more than half of the student population (Feniger et al. 2022). The choice to focus on this stream also reflects the aim of this study to explore the articulation of the entrepreneurial discourse within an education system that simultaneously seeks to establish ethno-national citizenship. The Hebrew/Jewish stream was selected because it is considered central to the national project and exemplifies the ideal type of the 'Israeli' citizen. Other streams operate within distinct sociopolitical contexts and are therefore beyond the scope of this study.

The research included various methodological tools, as well as varied sites of inquiry and points of view of social actors, including 28 in-depth interviews with Israeli policymakers and educators (24 female, 4 male), 12 schools' physical sites observations, and content analysis of official publications by the Minister of Education of Israel, 40 schools' websites, and official ministerial educational programmes.

The study was conducted through three main spiral stages of data collection and analysis. The first focused on the Ministry of Education, the second on educational staff, and the third on educational spaces. To understand how the entrepreneurial ethos is shaped by Israel's Ministry of Education, I analysed publications by the Minister of Education Naftali Bennett during his tenure (2015–2019) addressing entrepreneurialism, including interviews, speeches, and his official social media. Naftali Bennett exemplifies how the entrepreneurial discourse is adapted within the Israeli context. As a high-tech entrepreneur who achieved a successful "exit" and leader of a right-wing religious-nationalist party, he embodies the fusion of neoliberal and ethno-national ideologies. His statements as Minister of Education offer a unique lens into how these ideologies are articulated through the Ministry of Education.

To examine whether and how the discourse reflected in Bennett's public texts characterises and reflects the perspectives of educational policymakers in Israel over time, I conducted in-depth interviews with six Israeli ministerial education policymakers (representing all four main divisions of the Ministry) and one municipal education policymaker in one of Israel's largest cities. Identified through snowball sampling, these individuals held senior Ministry roles before Bennett's tenure and were central to shaping values and entrepreneurship education. Given frequent policy shifts under changing ministers, their long-term perspective offered insight into how entrepreneurship is interpreted in the Israeli education system. This sampling demonstrated that the use of entrepreneurial discourse and its merging with ethno-national discourses is not unique to Bennett but rather reflects broader trends in Israeli educational policy over time. Content analysis of official

programmes preceded the interviews, during which participants also reflected on the programmes' content, formulation, and implementation.

The second stage included twenty-one in-depth interviews with educators. I first conducted ethnographic research in "Narkisim", an Israeli primary school in a large city in the Tel Aviv area, including six in-depth interviews with the school headteacher and five first-and second-grade teachers and observations of the school's educational spaces. In addition, the research included interviews with seven school headteachers (three from other primary schools, one from a junior high school, and three from high schools), and eight teachers (two from other primary schools, one from a junior high school, and five from high schools). As the school in the preliminary ethnographic research was from the Tel-Aviv area and located in a neighbourhood of middle-upper socio-economic status, the snowball sampling of the second round of interviewees was also drawn from the social-geographical periphery of Israel and included seven educators from low or middle-low SES schools, five from middle-class, and three more from upper-middle class. All interviews took between one and two-and-a-half hours and were structured as a conversation with a purpose, asking open-ended questions and requesting examples. The questions addressed future trajectories for today's pupils, as well as questions regarding the ideal school graduate and person, from the point of view of the participants.

The third stage of data collection and analysis included observations of the physical sites of eleven additional schools (four primary schools, two junior high schools, and five high schools), all located in central Israel. Most of these schools (8 out of 11) were defined either by the Ministry of Education and/or by key actors in the field as "innovative" and/or "entrepreneurial". This purposive sampling was guided by my research question to examine schools that explicitly identify with or are publicly associated with the entrepreneurial discourse. The observations were conducted with the authorisation of the headteacher or during school visits that are open to the public, and most (8 of 12) included walking interviews with headteachers, teachers, or the school architect, who voluntarily guided me through the school and offered contextual insights during the tour. The observations took between one to three hours and included photography of the school facilities and walls, as well as field notes. The analysis focused on semiotic analysis of the educational spaces, examining linguistic, graphic, and symbolic elements on school walls in each school observed (Alfi-Nissan 2025). The research also included content analysis of 40 primary state schools' websites and Facebook pages, following attributions of entrepreneurialism. The focus on primary schools allowed for an examination of how the entrepreneurial discourse is

introduced at an early stage of state education, well before military service or entry into the job market become relevant concerns. As the schools' physical sites observations were mostly of schools in central Israel, the selection criteria for the schools' websites were geographical region, socio-economic status and size of the city. Specifically, 8 were from northern Israel, 14 from the Tel Aviv area, and 18 from the south and Jerusalem area. Fourteen schools were in large cities, 15 in medium-sized cities, and 11 in small towns. These criteria allowed to examine the vast implementation of the entrepreneurial discourse within the Israeli education system and its translations.

The sampling in stages two and three relied on snowball and purposive approaches, which may introduce biases related to accessibility, location, and participants' willingness to participate. This purposive approach prioritised capturing variation relevant to the research questions rather than statistical representativeness. While this strategy allowed for in-depth engagement with diverse social actors and schools, it does not claim to represent the full range of experiences or educational settings across Israel. Consequently, findings should be interpreted as illustrative of trends and discourses within the state school system rather than statistically generalisable.

Despite these limitations, the combination of interviews, observations, and content analysis across multiple sites enabled triangulation of methods, sources and theories (Flick 2004), enhancing the understanding of how the entrepreneurial ethos is articulated within Israel's state education system. The method of inquiry was abductive in nature (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The abductive "inferential creative process" (ibid, 170) allowed a constant interplay between theory and fieldwork. This approach allowed for revisions, re-questioning, and surprises. The data were analysed in an interpretive thematic analysis through analytical categorisation. First, the data from each source was coded, and then additional coding was added to cross-reference data between the various sources. The first stage of thematic analysis of the discourse of entrepreneurialism revealed the hybridity of ethno-national and entrepreneurial narratives. Further analysis revealed three main themes of this hybridity: merging personal success with national pride, linking entrepreneurial ideals to the military service, and connecting entrepreneurialism to the very essence of Jewish-Israeli Zionist identity.

The research received the Bar-Ilan University IRB approval and followed ethical guidelines for qualitative research. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and gave their voluntary, informed consent prior to the interviews, which were recorded and transcribed with their permission. The collected data and analysis were in

Hebrew and excerpts were translated into English by the author for the purpose of this article. All the names of participants and schools are pseudonymous.

Findings

Findings reveal a hybrid ideal of the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen reflected in and promoted by Israeli state education. The study illustrates how the local educational discourse reflects the intersections between neoliberalism and nationalism, culminating in the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen, by merging the future orientated, individualistic and global entrepreneurial ethos with local Jewish-Israeli Zionist narratives and symbols. The findings will demonstrate how this ideal is presented, translated and embedded through three main themes: merging personal success with national pride, linking entrepreneurial ideals to the military service, and connecting entrepreneurialism to the very essence of Jewish-Israeli Zionist identity.

“Teachers, do you want to help your pupils establish the new Waze?”: Individual economic success as national pride

Naftali Bennett, Minister of Education (2015-2019) and former Prime Minister (2021-2022), has frequently linked “investment” with “success”, viewing effort as a necessary condition for success in the job market where “anyone” can achieve their goals. For example, in a TV news interview, before the beginning of the 2016-2017 academic year, the Minister of Education conveyed his message to Israeli pupils:

I want to take this opportunity to address the parents and pupils of Israel, and especially to offer one piece of advice to the pupils: We often think that ‘a star is born,’ that success is all about talent. But the key to success isn’t talent. It’s effort and perseverance. So, work hard. You see a successful basketball player? He worked hard. A musician? Worked hard. A scientist? Worked hard. You will work hard too – and that’s how you’ll succeed (Channel 2 News, September 2016).

This message reflects a neoliberal “achievement ideology” that overlooks existing social and economic disparities, as persistence, resilience and effort are seen as the key to success, manifested in achieving professional goals (Slater 2022, 8). At the same time, Bennett merged neoliberal ideology with “national pride”. For instance, in his social media he wrote frequently about athletes’ achievements which were always explained as based on individualised explanations of “hard work” and “persistence”, while including a hashtag of “Israeli Pride” or “Pride to the people of Israel” to these posts. For instance, referring to Linoy Ashram winning a gold medal in the Olympics, Bennet stated: “You are a true

champion. The people of Israel are proud of you and your achievements. Determination and perseverance are the key. There is no ‘a star is born’ – there is a star who works hard” (Instagram post by Naftali Bennett, 15 September 2018).

Linking entrepreneurialism with nationalism, at Bennett’s appointment to office speech as the Minister of Education he said:

I strongly believe in entrepreneurship. I wasn’t a bad student, but I was a more successful entrepreneur than a student. In Israel of 2015, pupils need to learn content, but also to create content. To innovate. To think. To understand that, like in Waze [navigation app], there is more than one way to reach the destination. Our past was in entrepreneurship, and our future is in entrepreneurship. Times change, technology changes, goals change, but entrepreneurship remains (Minister of Education speech, 19 May 2015, The Ministry of Education website).

The Minister of Education attributes a timeless quality to entrepreneurship, as both the collective past and future are seen as rooted in entrepreneurship. The reference to the high-tech company Waze is frequent in his messages, both when addressing entrepreneurship and when evoking “national pride”. The attribution to Waze was not only common in the minister’s public speaking but in the messages of the Israeli Ministry of Education for the past decade. Since the company has made a successful “exit”, and was sold in 2013 to Google, it has become a symbol for “Israeli success”. The mention of Waze in educational settings perpetuates the celebrated ethno-national-neoliberal myth of the Israeli “exit” (Mashiah 2024), describing young Jewish-Israeli men, mostly former military officers, who carry “merely an idea and some seed money” and ultimately sell their small company to a global company and get rich (Sa’ar 2016, 56). In the current Israeli educational discourse this myth is a frequent promoter of the Entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal. For example, in a campaign titled “Teachers do you want to help your pupils establish the new Waze?”, teachers are encouraged to be mentors for their pupils in their way to achieve the idealised goal of initiating a start-up company and making an “exit”. This campaign was part of the first year (2018) of the Youth Startup Championship (“StartCup”), a national initiative launched by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry promoted participation in this programme by presenting it as a technology entrepreneurship exposure workshop designed to “get the wheels turning” (Ministry of Education website) for young individuals. Likewise, in a booklet written by the Ministry of Education for Israel’s 70th Independence Day (2018) a lesson plan for 5th and 6th grade pupils is presented under the title “From Theory to Practice”: “We will conclude with a video featuring the words of the inventor of Waze, delivered at the 2015 Independence Day

torch-lighting ceremony, with his powerful message that what matters is the journey and the effort, the learning, and not giving up” (Ministry of Education website, retrieved May 2020).

Although Waze was formed as a private company, it is frequently presented in various educational contexts as an example for an “Israeli invention”. This may also be due to the entanglement between Israel’s high-tech sector and the state, as it “originated within the context of Israel’s corporatist economy”, with the state serving as “the main catalyst in the emergence of Israel’s high-tech sector” (Maggor and Frenkel 2022, 423, 432). This form of hybridity of national pride and individual economic success appeared also in the semiotic analysis of educational spaces. For example, in “Kalanit” primary school, located in a middle-class neighbourhood in central Israel (observation conducted in 2023), the stairs of the school were decorated with the sign “Israeli inventions”. On each step, a different invention was mentioned, along with its year of invention. For instance, “the flash drive 2000”, “Waze 2006”, “Beresheet spacecraft 2019”, all of which are privately owned companies by Israeli entrepreneurs. Similarly, in various school websites, these types of inventions are regarded “Israeli”, for instance in a school in Jerusalem a Facebook post from 2019 stated: “What do a small watermelon, the game of Taki, drip irrigation, the flash drive, Waze, and the Iron Dome have in common? These are just some of the inventions developed by the Israeli mind.”

Another example of the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal which links national pride with entrepreneurial citizenship arises at schools’ celebrations of Israel’s Independence Day. For instance, in “Narkisim” school where an ethnographic study was conducted in 2017-2018, Jasmin, a homeroom teacher for first and second grades described in her interview how she dedicated several lessons to “the value of independence”:

Through the [discussion of the] independence of the state, we talk about the entire issue of being independent, what we do, how we feel, where we can be more independent, and we integrate it according to the Ministry of Education’s programme. Similarly, Esti, a homeroom teacher in the same school, explained that in preparation for Independence Day, she distributes “My Independence Scroll” to her second-grade pupils. The pupils are asked to note “the new things they have started doing independently this year.” These types of activities related to Israel’s Independence Day have been found to be highly common in various sites. While these activities appear to be age-appropriate efforts to help young children grasp the meaning of independence, the framing of Independence Day as a moment for cultivating personal autonomy and self-improvement is a relatively recent development in the Israeli educational discourse. Earlier pedagogical practices around the

holiday focused on the Zionist ethos, militarism, and nationalism (Ben-Amos et al., 1999). The contemporary emphasis on personal independence and future-oriented goal-setting reflects the increasing influence of neoliberal and entrepreneurial values on educational discourse. Thus, Israel's national Independence Day becomes a vehicle for promoting entrepreneurial citizenship².

“The good ones go to cyber”: Militaristic entrepreneurialism

During his tenure as Minister of Education, Bennett, together with Israeli high-tech professionals, led a campaign to increase the percentage of students studying advanced mathematics. Similar to other global STEM initiatives linking education to national economic growth, the programme's slogan was: “Give Yourself - Give the Country” (Jerusalem District of the Ministry of Education Facebook, 30 August 2015). Presenting the programme Bennett stated:

The expression “equal opportunity” is transforming today from a slogan to a reality: the days in which a child wanted to study advanced maths, but couldn't do so because of where he lives, are over. A student from Ofakim [a low SES Jewish town in Israel's periphery] has no less potential than a child from Savyon [a high SES Jewish town in Israel's centre]. He just needs us not to stop him. The threat to mathematics education is a strategic threat, and a strategic threat requires a national plan. [...]

When I was in the military and in [the] high-tech [industry], there was a perception of “either-or”, either we do something for ourselves at the expense of the country, or we do something for the country at our own expense. But here it's both. In the national maths programme, the child will be strengthening his own future and also contribute to the future of the State of Israel (Ministry of Education website, official press release, 30 August 2015).

Bennett claims that the national programme enables having an equal opportunity to learn advanced maths, a choice that was advertised as a ticket into the future job market, although it has been proven that such opportunities are affected significantly by geography, ethnicity, gender, social, and economic factors (Heilbrunn 2022). Bennett here addresses specifically Jewish students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. However, by merging Bennett's

² Similarly, Jewish holidays are celebrated in current Israeli state education through neoliberal discourses of self-fulfilment and self-help, celebrating, for instance, “the light within me” in Hanukah and “my freedom” in Passover (Alfi-Nissan et al 2025).

personal narrative in high-tech with frequent use of military service references, it can also be seen how Arab citizens of Israel³ are implicitly excluded from the national entrepreneurial success story. Furthermore, as an ethno-national disadvantaged minority, reflected in intersections of SES, geographies, language, and education, this community, representing more than a fifth of the Israeli population, is not mentioned in the minister's forecast of the end of inequality. While academic attainment among this marginalised minority has increased in recent years, particularly in the life sciences, participation in the high-tech industry remains extremely low, around five percent, and is constrained by longstanding structural barriers, including the close link between military service and the high-tech sector (Abu Nasra and Oliver 2024).

The entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal within the Israeli state education system is constantly strengthened by the link between military service and the high-tech industry in Israel. The phrase “the ‘good ones’ go to cyber”⁴ has been a central theme in Israeli discourse during 2021-2023, debating the current ideal of serving in the elite intelligence technology and cyber units in mandatory military service. In the Israeli context, the mandatory military service is a major milestone to employability. The reference to the intelligence units as a springboard to employability is dominant throughout the data. As Riki, a senior executive in the Ministry of Education said in her interview: “What happens with a child that finishes twelve years of schooling, good matriculation certificate, star student? I’m talking about the best possible scenario. He gets to the academia, the academia tells him: Listen, someone from 8200 [an elite intelligence technology unit in the Israeli army], I’ll take him, he is much more prepared than you” (Interview, 2000).

Indeed, all the schools in this research implemented at least one technology-focused programme, such as a scientific and technological programme referred to by the military term Academic Reserve (*atuda*), advertised as based on military elite programmes and as a springboard to joining them. In addition, majoring in Arabic in Hebrew mamlakhti high schools is promoted as a pathway to joining the intelligence troops. For example, Varda, a

³ I use this term while recognising the various definitions in use within this community and within the literature such as Arab-Palestinian, Arab/Palestinian, or Arab-Israeli (Budge et al. 2023), and acknowledging that no term is entirely neutral or fully inclusive.

⁴ The phrase “the ‘good ones’ go to cyber” (*hatovim lacyber*) paraphrases the earlier slogan “the best to be pilots” (*hatovim latais*) which historically signified the prestige of combat and pilot roles.

high school teacher in a low SES city in northern Israel, explained in her interview: “Our [strongest/best] subject to major in [in our school] is Computer Science and Physics. There’s [also] Biotechnology, which is an excellent, scientific major. There are students who study Arabic and are directed towards 8200 Unit, to intelligence units in the army” (Interview, 2022). Similarly, in a high school in central Israel, a new track called “Persian and Iran Studies” was introduced during an open-day observation in 2022, featuring a promotional image from the Israeli series “Teheran”, portraying the main character, a woman who works as a technological hacking expert and spy for Israel’s national intelligence agency in Iran. The promotion of Arabic and Persian studies reflects their instrumental positioning within militaristic entrepreneurialism, as they are framed as strategic assets for entering elite intelligence and cyber units. These high-tech military roles are closely linked to future employability in the Israeli high-tech industry, aligning linguistic knowledge with both national security and market-oriented individual advancement, rather than with, for instance, multicultural aims. In this sense, the promotion of Arabic and Persian studies also illustrates how entrepreneurial militarism operates through neoliberal logic, positioning language acquisition as a marketable skill connecting military intelligence service with employability in the high-tech industry.

The link between the military and high-tech entrepreneurialism is not only brought forward to youth in the days before their mandatory military service but rather infiltrates the educational discourse from the early years of schooling. Content analysis of 40 websites and Facebook pages of state primary schools showed that entrepreneurship is seen as a dominant and important value intertwined with militaristic values. For example, the “Squadron Club”, a voluntary extracurricular leadership programme operating in dozens of primary and middle schools across Israel in partnership with the Israeli Air Force and the Ramon Foundation, is described as a “unique and prestigious project for personal empowerment.” Children selected for the programme receive individual and group coaching and meet with air force pilots and high-tech professionals. In the Facebook page of a low SES state school in southern Israel which took part in this project the objectives and practices of the project were described:

When we go to Tel Aviv, it’s to get inspired (not for shopping). We started our day at a high-tech company in the Azrieli Towers in Sarona. We heard about an employee who got a negative response in his interview, but he was determined and persistent, and today he works at the company. We saw their beautiful offices, heard about how hard people work in high-tech to fulfil their dreams. Of course, we shared our goals, determination, and dreams. (School Facebook page, published December 2017).

The quote, which addresses pupils from the social and geographical periphery of Jewish society in Israel, reflects the neoliberal narrative that “anyone who wants can achieve anything”, providing they are determined to pursue their dream. While in the activity described the children met high-tech employees, the other main theme of the project is meeting Israeli Air Force pilots. The underlying concept of the programme is that “every person is capable and deserving of achieving and succeeding if they choose to” (the programme’s website), disregarding that both being a high-tech entrepreneur and an Airforce pilot in Israel are outcomes of perpetuating inequalities reflected in the military service and the job market (Preminger 2020).

Linking entrepreneurial ideals to the military service was also reflected in the educational spaces observed. For instance, at “Dolev” high school in central Israel, a large poster titled “Israeli Pride” displayed various inventions, most of which were military-related. For example, the Uzi gun and the Merkava tank were presented, each accompanied by a large image and descriptive text. The Iron Dome and the Hetz missile were also featured, similarly presented with photographs and explanatory captions. Amid these military inventions, Waze was also included, with the company logo and a brief description. This serves as an example for how the merging of personal success with national pride and the theme of linking entrepreneurial ideals with military service are intertwined to reinforce the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen.

“Being a light unto the nations in entrepreneurship”: Rebranding the Zionist narrative

The entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen is also promoted by rebranding Jewish-Israeli narratives and symbols. At the 2017 Israel’s Independence Day, Bennett as the Minister of Education said:

From the dawn of our existence, the heroes of our people were people of action. Entrepreneurs. Our forefather Abraham realised that idolatry was a disaster. He got up and acted: he left his homeland and Made Aliyah⁵ [immigrated] to the Land of Israel; he spread the belief in one God and in moral life. Moses Rabbenu [our teacher] realised that slavery is a disaster for the people [of Israel]. He took action: not always easily, he went to Pharaoh and acted to free the people [of Israel] from slavery to freedom. Theodor Herzl transformed the theoretical desire of generations into action.

⁵ The word *a'la* in Hebrew literally means “rose” yet used in Zionist discourse to describe immigration of Jews to Israel.

He acted. He established a Zionist congress; he ran all over the world in order to promote the Zionist idea.

At the end of his speech the Minister of Education turned to the pupils in the audience and said:

The mission of the Jewish people is *Tikkun Olam*⁶ [to mend the world]. The world was created flawed, and the responsibility to fix it was placed upon us. The state of Israel must be a light unto the nations in entrepreneurship [...] As Israel's Minister of Education of the State of Israel, I tell you: there is one grade that doesn't appear on your report card, but it's the one that will make you succeed in life. Be entrepreneurs. Rise up and take action (Minister of Education speech, The 2017 Israel Prize Award Ceremony).

Bennett, who belongs to a religious community, secularises the biblical narratives by shifting the focus from divine power to the human initiative, framing Abraham and Moses as exemplars of the entrepreneurial Jewish man and aligning their legacy with the Zionist project⁷. By reinterpreting religious and national narratives, he promotes the idea that entrepreneurship is deeply woven into Jewish and Zionist history, and that Zionism has been entrepreneurial from its very beginnings.

Bennett is in many ways an exemplar of the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen, yet he nonetheless represents a growing ideological trend amongst policymakers in the Israeli education system. For example, Miri has been working as a senior executive in the Ministry of Education for over two decades, long before Bennett took office and his policies were implemented. Miri has expressed in her interview a deep concern about the future of Israeli pupils. She seeks to create programmes that prepare the next generation for the future job market. In her interview she explained why it is important that pupils today will possess entrepreneurial traits:

It's no longer a time in which one develops a great initiative and then rests. It's thinking right-away: what's the next initiative. Children who enter first grade today

⁶ The Hebrew term originally referred to Jewish rabbinic thought and has since evolved to encompass ethical responsibilities for improving society and the world (Rosenthal 2005).

⁷ This perspective resonates how "secularization in Zionism meant the nationalization of religious-messianic conceptions, not their replacement. Accordingly, one can summarize the secular perception as follows: God does not exist, but he promised us the Land" (Raz-Krakotzkin 2021, 38).

will be employed in seventeen workplaces, will have three different careers, every two and a half to three years. I want to prepare them [...] Once you'll be a veterinarian and once a pilot, and then you'll be a graphic designer. What toolbox am I giving you? Agility. Both quick and flexible [thought]. Knowing that this area is changing, and I need to quickly adapt to the next one.

For Miri, agility is not just an important personal trait or skill, as Miri sees these entrepreneurial qualities as Israeli-Jewish in nature:

The Israeli Jewish perception is that there's always someone rising up to kill us. So why are we so entrepreneurial [...] and have seven hundred Nobel prizes? Because we need to survive. That is the story of the Jewish people: two thousand years of exile, we came back here, who knows what will happen? [...] That's a force that drives you to do things that are groundbreaking, innovative, creative, revolutionary and solution-oriented. Start-Up Nation. The Start-Up Nation is something in the DNA. [...] It can be Israeli, and it can be Jewish – it doesn't matter. This spark, something in the genome, I think, that something is given to us, we're already thinking about the next thing, its next update, the thing that will provide a solution (Interview, 2020).

Miri links entrepreneurial traits of resilience and innovation to the perception of perpetual threat and the need for survival traced to the Jewish collective memory. The ethno-national narrative of the “Start-Up Nation” is further explained by Miri as composed of inherent characteristics of Jewishness. Her emphasis on entrepreneurialism and innovation reflects neoliberal values where success is measured by one's ability to adapt, innovate, and compete in the global market, while her interchangeable use of “Israeli” and “Jewish” highlights the continued interplay between ethno-national and national identities in Israel.

Merging Zionist and entrepreneurial ideals was also prominent in the observations of educational spaces. Steve Jobs was quoted on school walls in various schools, alongside other entrepreneurs, such as Richard Branson, and American leaders, such as Benjamin Franklin. These quotes were displayed alongside ethno-national Zionist themes. For example, in “Dolev” high school in central Israel, a wall addressing “great speakers” portrayed Steve Jobs's name, photo, and description, next to those of Benjamin Netanyahu, Itzhak Rabin, Golda Meir and Zeev Jabotinsky. At the same school, a wall in the entrance hall represented “the wars of Israel”. Under this title appear nine round plaques with pictures from each war, labelled with their respective names, and next to it, memorial plaques with pictures of school graduates who died during their mandatory military service, a feature that has appeared in

every Jewish-Israeli educational space for decades (educational space observations, 2021, 2023).

In “Rakefet” junior high in a high-SES neighbourhood in the Sharon district, where an observation of the educational space was conducted, the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen was promoted through the merging of Jewish-Israeli narratives and symbols with entrepreneurialism. In this school, there were two main programmes: “Young Entrepreneurs”, designed to simulate for the pupils the experience of working in a high-tech company, and “All Israel Are Friends”, which promotes Zionist and civic-democratic education. These two programmes were presented in the school space, with various texts and posters. Additionally, one of the walls featured a large poster that Adi, the headteacher, explained was intended to advertise the “Young Entrepreneurs” programme. However, its connection to the Jewish narratives promoted by the school was clearly evident. The poster depicted an oversized iPhone against a background drawing of a large tree and flowers. A sprout blossomed from the iPhone, and above it was written in large letters (in Hebrew): “Marvel at the wonder of creation”. The word “creation” (*bri’a*) in Hebrew is associated with the biblical Book of Genesis, while in this poster the iPhone was portrayed as the source of nature’s creation (educational space observation, 2019).

Merging entrepreneurialism with Zionist narratives was also dominant in various educational spaces of primary schools. The entrance to “Arazim” primary school in the Tel-Aviv district, symbolically highlights the hybrid ideal citizen. On the walls on one side of the entrance, colourful frames displayed a variety of “empowering” words: “Invent”, “Get Excited”, “Research”, “Dream.” On the other side, there were a painting of the Israeli flag, the inscription “State of Israel”, and pictures and quotes of Herzl (“If you will it, it is no dream”), David Ben-Gurion (“As long as a person lives, they can change”), and Chaim Weizmann, presented as “a chemist and Zionist leader” (educational space observation, 2019). Similarly, at the entrance of “Narkisim” primary school a quote by John F. Kennedy is displayed next to a quote by Israel’s Former President Shimon Peres encouraging individual success: “Within each of you lies great potential that no one else will realize for you. If you invest in self-fulfilment, you will discover treasures hidden deep within your personality.” At another entrance of the same school, there were the words of the Hebrew poet Shaul Tchernichovsky, “A man is nothing but the landscape of his homeland”, alongside the poetry of Hannah Szenes, a symbol of sacrifice for the Zionist collective (educational space observation, 2018). At “Daphne” primary school, an “innovative” school located in a low SES neighbourhood in centra Israel, the educational space was described by the teachers in

an open to the public tour as “inspired by high-tech companies”, while the school’s curriculum of project based-learning tied entrepreneurship with Judaism. For example, the annual project for second-grade pupils was “The Creation of the World” in the Book of Genesis, while for third-grade pupils, the project “Cracking the Hero Code” portrayed biblical characters as heroes (educational space observation, 2020). These examples illustrate how entrepreneurialism is embedded in the very fabric of Jewish-Israeli Zionist identity across various sites in Israel’s state education.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study contributes to citizenship studies by demonstrating how a hybrid ideal of citizenship is promoted within a state education system, combining both entrepreneurial and ethno-national ideals. While entrepreneurial citizenship is often associated with neoliberal individualism and economic self-reliance, and ethno-national citizenship with collective identity, the Israeli context reveals a hybrid model in which these ideals not only coexist but are deeply intertwined, reinforcing one another.

The research revealed the hybrid ideal of the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen as both reflected in and promoted by Israeli state education. This ideal challenges both the dichotomic perspective of neoliberalism and ethno-nationalism, and the linear understanding of “neoliberalisation”, as I argue that within the Israeli educational discourse, ethno-national ideals are recruited to reinforce the entrepreneurial ethos, while neoliberal values and narratives are harnessed to strengthen an ethno-national identity. The ideal of the entrepreneurial-Zionist citizen is embedded in Israeli state education through a dynamic interplay of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ policy enactment (e.g., Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012); not only by ministerial policymakers but also by educators who actively interpret, mediate, and reshape these policies. It is presented, translated and embedded through three main themes: merging personal success with national pride, linking entrepreneurial ideals to military service, and connecting entrepreneurialism to the very essence of Jewish-Israeli Zionist identity.

These discursive mechanisms work simultaneously and interweave entrepreneurialism and ethno-nationalism in Israeli educational discourse to create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the myth of the “Start-Up Nation”. Following Preminger (2020, 247), I claim that the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen in Israeli state education “provides a discursive ‘cover’ for the tension between the economic integration and political exclusion of an ethnic minority”, helping to “camouflage ethno-national inequalities.” While Preminger’s

(2020, 246) analysis of Arab participation in Israel's hi-tech sector reveals how meritocratic and entrepreneurial discourses operate within a seemingly "ethnicity-blind" sphere to reinforce ethno-national dominance, this study demonstrates that in the field of state education, the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen primarily interweaves Zionist and neoliberal themes, while also contributing to the "camouflaging" of both ethno-national exclusion and the social and economic inequalities produced by neoliberal governance.

The main argument of this study is that Israeli state education interweaves neoliberal and Zionist discourses to produce the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen. A further consequence of this dynamic is a dual mechanism of exclusion which reinforces both ethno-national and neoliberal ideologies, ultimately marginalising minorities and perpetuating gender, geographic, and ethnic inequalities. The marginalised positioning of Arab citizens of Israel underscores how "neoliberalism is liable to exacerbate existing ethnic and national inequalities in education" (Sabbagh 2019, 68). Furthermore, the ideal of citizenship promoted within the state education system obscures inequalities within Jewish-Israeli society itself, as the social and geographic periphery of Israel, which includes a higher proportion of new immigrants and Mizrahi Jews (Yiftachel 2000; Cohen and Prashizky 2024), is also disadvantaged in terms of access to entrepreneurial opportunities.

In the context of gender, while the traditional Zionist image of "the fighter" is transformed into a militarised entrepreneurial ideal, the "close connection between masculinity, military service, and citizenship", which has regulated "gendered power relations and establishes the male hierarchy in Israeli society" for decades (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008, 328), remains evident within the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal. These points raise additional questions about the broader implications of the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen for social inclusion and inequality, since the nationwide embedding of this discourse reinforces and normalises these mechanisms of exclusion.

Neoliberalism must be analysed within its specific context (Ong 2007). Historically, the Israeli education system has been shaped by prominent ethno-national, religious, and militaristic discourses, from the pre-state period (Dror 2007; Alfi-Nissan et al. 2025) to the present day (Agbaria 2018; Pinson and Agbaria 2021). As Levy and Massalha (2022, 79) have stated, "although any modern nation state has been, and still is, engaged in various practices of nation building, the case of Israel differs in that defining and crystalizing the Jewish collective identity, rather than a shared Israeli identity, remains its main concern." As education and politics are deeply interconnected (Agbaria 2018), the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen reflects power relations within Israel's socio-political context. Getzoff (2020)

shows how the book “Start-Up Nation” promotes a “neoliberal Zionist governmentality”, where entrepreneurialism serves the ethno-national ethos rather than market competition. On the other hand, Harvey (2007, 84) argues that while nationalism is “profoundly antagonistic to the neoliberal agenda”, neoliberal states utilise nationalism to strengthen neoliberalism. Merging these perspectives, this study shows how the current Israeli educational discourse reflects the reciprocal entanglement of neoliberalism and (ethno)nationalism in shaping citizenship. Their convergence, alongside militarism and religiosity, aligns with a global neoconservative trend (Bockman 2013), affirming that “neoliberalism is more than just a right-wing ideology or Americanization”, as it takes diverse and often “contradictory forms” (ibid, 15).

This context-specific inquiry, while illuminating local configurations of global discourses, has limitations. In the Israeli context, this research does not address the State-Arab, State-Religious, or ultra-orthodox streams within the state education system. Additionally, this paper focuses on the discourse from the educators’ perspective and does not examine the interpretations of pupils in Israel as active social agents. Additionally, the research is temporally bounded, as it was conducted between 2017 and 2023. The year 2023 began in Israel with protests against the judicial overhaul, sparking debates about Jewish-Israeli identity. The demonstrations against the right-wing government used the slogan “Save Our Start-Up Nation”, while many elite reserve troops threatened to stop serving. Following the October 7 attacks and the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, this threat subsided, and nationalism rose among various social groups in Jewish-Israeli society. These past two years have been profound in the Israeli discourse of citizenship, raising questions about what it means to be Jewish and Israeli. The question of whether and how the Israeli “identity crisis” (e.g., Yadgar 2020) has further escalated following these events, and their influence on the entrepreneurial-Zionist ideal citizen, has yet to be examined.

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The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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