

Along with the Star of David

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Published on Haaretz op-ed page, Thursday May 26 2005

The season of the national narrative, the Jewish Israeli one, which begins at Pesach, continues with Holocaust Memorial Day and Memorial Day and climaxes with Independence Day, is scheduled in accordance with the Hebrew calendar.

This year, Independence Day fell three days before May 15, the date on which the Palestinians have taken to marking Nakba Day. The proximity of the dates emphasized the tension between the view that regards the establishment of the State of Israel as a worthy, moral action that repaired the historical injustices done to the Jews, and the approach that identifies the events of 1948 as a deep moral failure because of the dispossession of the Palestinians, many of whom became refugees.

Palestinian citizens of Israel, those who are technically citizens but in their consciousness will never be able to identify with the values and messages with which the state has imbued its symbols and ceremonies, have been living this tension ever since the establishment of the state.

Recently, recognition of the existence of these Advertisement contradictions seems to have reached the awareness of mainstream Jewish Israel. More Israelis understand that as long as the symbols of the state aren't relevant or at the very least neutral in the eyes of all its citizens, the idea of civic equality remains a farce. Yair Sheleg's proposal (Haaretz, May 11) to add an "Israeli citizen day" to the calendar, devoted to coexistence, democracy and equality, presumably derived from that understanding.

The calendar does indeed have room for such an addition. But the Sheleg proposal to set Citizens Day on March 30 - Land Day - is not good. Instead of neutering Land Day and its significance, as marked by Palestinians since 1976, a countermove should be initiated that would establish Land Day and Nakba Day in the law and define them as state recognized holidays.

There is a successful precedent for this. In early 2000, the Knesset passed a law turning May 9, the Soviet anniversary of the victory over the Nazis, into a state recognized holiday. Something similar for Land Day would be a significant symbolic step toward the integration of Arab citizens. The fear that this would harm "the Jewish character of the state" - a vague mantra that is always raised to warn about the unknown and whose power is derived for the most part from the fact that nobody has seriously examined what it really means - is fundamentally baseless.

However, the state calendar is not the only symbolic sphere where a change could be made. Why not seriously consider changes to the state's symbols that would enable them to encompass all citizens? It is important to ease the discomfort of Arab citizens. Even those for whom Arab sensitivities are not a top priority should support this. One does not need to be a post-Zionist to understand that the uniform normative narrative that Zionism has been telling itself all these years is no longer valid, and maybe never was. When the illusion of a uniform Israeli identity is breached, the symbols of the state are also in danger: Internal tensions could expose them as clichés that only represent some of the people, maybe only a ruling, indifferent and patronizing sect.

Everyone knows that the graphics of the state's symbols, the lyrics of the songs and the texts of the ceremonies were not handed down in Herzl's last will and testament or in Ben-Gurion's memoirs. They were slowly formulated and drafted, tried out and improved and could be improved and changed in the future. Nonetheless, most Israelis still treat the symbols as if they were holy, and the suggestion to consider them critically seems to be a nearly impossible mission.

But the thought is inevitable, and it will reach the national agenda the minute Israel decides to take the idea of citizenship and the principle of equality seriously. Former Supreme Court justice Miriam Ben-Porat has already proposed changing the national anthem to enable Arab citizens to identify with it.

The flag could also bear a variety of symbols. The Union Jack is comprised of three crosses, for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and the proportion of Irishmen and Scotsmen in the British population is similar to that of Arabs in Israel. Alongside the Star of David and the menorah, alongside the olive leaves and the blue stripes, there is room for other shapes and colors.