



Multicultural Education in the Zionist State – The Mizrahi Challenge

YOSSI DAHAN¹ and GAL LEVY²

¹Open University, Israel; ²London School of Economics and Political Science, U.K.

Abstract. In this paper, we explore a specific variant of multicultural education in Israel that developed within the dominant Jewish cultural identity, that is the claim of Jews from Islamic countries (*Mizrahi* Jews) for educational autonomy. This demand arose against the backdrop of an aggressive nationalist ideology – Zionism – that claimed to represent *all* Jews, and yet was too ambivalent toward its non-European Jewish subjects. The *Mizrahi* Jews' dual identity, as Jews and as products of the Arab culture, conflated with the state's problematic self-conception as both Jewish and democratic. This phenomenon, apparently, is evidenced by the two types of multicultural responses that developed within the *Mizrahi* sector: a critical multiculturalism with a social-democratic character on the one hand, and an autonomist multiculturalism with fundamentalist features on the other.

Key words: ethnic relations, integration, fundamentalism, Oriental Jews, identity, equality, multiculturalism, Zionism

Introduction

Israel is considered a successful case of nation building because it achieved the creation of a nation-state in a relatively short time, out of various immigrant communities with distinctive languages, customs, values and historical memories.¹ The success of the Israeli “melting pot” policy has been attributed to the existence of a powerful state consisting of a highly centralized institutional apparatus that executed the dictates of a powerful national (Zionist) ideology, and a seemingly well-planned policy of immigration and absorption.

The state educational system has been one main instrument for creating the new Israeli national identity. Its task was to establish the social and educational processes that would facilitate the emergence of a homogenous culture. In the eyes of the Zionist founders of the state, the national identity was exclusively a Jewish identity. Yet today, fifty years after the establishment of the state, and following a seemingly successful enterprise of social engineering, it appears that even the narrow concept of an Israeli-Jewish identity is seriously challenged.

In this article, we propose to explore the rise of multiculturalism in the Israeli educational system against the founders' great effort to create an unproblematic homogenized Jewish-Zionist national identity. We argue that this development, which seems to contradict the logic of the Zionist nation-building process, was

generated by the existence of social mechanisms that instituted and encouraged social, cultural and educational segregation and differentiation – alongside the major processes and rhetoric of unification. We propose to demonstrate how the inferior social position to which the largest ethnic group in the Israeli society – Jews from Islamic countries – has been relegated has caused the emergence within this group of the most dramatic and interesting demand for multiculturalism.

As was the case in other modern nation-states, the claim for multiculturalism in the Israeli educational system developed as a reaction to and a protest against forms of oppression and exclusionary practices that undermined the socioeconomic position and cultural identity of excluded groups. This reaction to liberalism and modernity is usually demonstrated by communities that are identified as “minority groups”.² A similar demand in Israel was indeed put forth by the Arab-Palestinian minority.³ However, our focus here is a specific variant of multiculturalism that has developed among Jews from Islamic countries in the Israeli educational system within the context of a dominant Jewish cultural identity, as a result of those groups’ exclusion by the prevailing national ideology.

In most known cases, claims for multiculturalism arise from an inherent tension between the universal, egalitarian normative presupposition of the modern democratic state, on the one hand, and the dominance of a particular social-cultural group on the other. The Israeli case is especially interesting because the *Mizrahi* Jews’ struggle for recognition has emerged under the rule of a nationalist ideology – Zionism – that claimed to represent the common history, destiny, culture and language of *all* Jews.⁴ By emphasizing the unique experience of the Jewish people, Zionism excluded non-Jews, namely Arabs, thus creating an equation between the Israeli identity and the Zionist identity. However, this very equation entailed the marginalization of non-European Jews, who were not perceived as Zionist (or “modern”) enough, and hence came to be viewed as second-class citizens of the Zionist state.⁵

The ambivalence of the Zionist ideology toward its non-European subjects, caused by the latter’s dual identity as Jews and as products of the Arab culture, had grave consequences for the development of social relations in Israel. More specifically, this duality conflated with the state’s problematic self-conception as both Jewish and democratic. This phenomenon, as we wish to demonstrate here, is evidenced by the two types of multicultural responses that developed within the non-European Jewish segments of the population: a critical multiculturalism with a social-democratic character on the one hand, and an autonomist multiculturalism with fundamentalist features on the other.

The Pre-State Educational System

The pre-existing educational system from which Israel set out to create a state-run universal educational system was a difficult starting point. The pre-state Zionist educational system had developed under colonial rule, and was thus a predom-

inantly sectorial system. Under British rule, education had been divided into two separate sectors – an Arab sector comprised mainly of the public school system, and a Hebrew sector considered as a quasi-private educational system.⁶ Within each sector, education had been further divided along religious lines. The Zionist system included a religious and a secular school system. An ultra-Orthodox, anti-Zionist Jewish educational system existed as well. Secular Hebrew education itself was subdivided into two relatively autonomous branches, the “Labour” branch and the General educational branch.⁷

The Jewish school system in the pre-state period was thus a particularly ramified system. One can therefore wonder what were the common, unifying factors that enabled these various groups to function under a single authority, and eventually become instrumental in the making of the Israeli state educational system. In our view, three factors account for this phenomenon: first, the pre-state educational structure; second, the shared ideological Zionist thrust of the political elite; and third, the common cultural background of the mainly European Jewish settlers.

Under the conditions of British colonial power, educational authority over the Jewish population was practically relegated to the Zionist establishment. In order to retain their autonomy, the Jewish inhabitants and settlers were compelled to accept this authority.⁸ However, autonomy in the field of education had been given solely to the Jewish community that originated in Europe. The veteran *Sephardic* Jews – who had lived in Palestine for centuries – and those Jewish settlers who had come from Arab countries were denied the same privilege. Against this backdrop of diversity and segmentation, Israel as an independent state would have to face the need to both make education universal, and incorporate the massive waves of immigration from Arab countries.

The pre-state social structures, including the existence of an institutionalized educational system, provided the new state’s political elite with the means to absorb the influx of immigrants from Europe. However, the main absorption challenge in the eyes of the Zionist establishment was the integration of massive immigration from Islamic countries, whose cultural background the dominant culture viewed as alien, inferior and threatening. A particularly crucial issue was to determine how those Jews from Arab countries would be “modernized”. Nationhood implied modernity. In this context, “modernizing” the immigrants meant that they had to be secularized and adapted into an economy undergoing a process of industrialization. Education clearly played a critical role in these transition processes.

From Autonomy to *Mamlakhtiut*

The ideological and practical concept that epitomized the state’s effort to establish itself as the ultimate sovereign authority in education, as in other spheres of social relations, was the concept of *mamlakhtiut*.⁹ In education, this ideology required the abolition of the pre-state, sectorial educational system, and its replacement by state-sponsored education.

However, the transition to a state-controlled educational system has not been successful. At first, this policy was met with fierce resistance on the part of veteran Jewish settlers' institutions, which were reluctant to lose their autonomy and control over education. With the acceleration of immigration, especially from Islamic countries, the resistance escalated into an all-out confrontation between religious and secular political parties.¹⁰ A political crisis ensued, which led to the dissolution of the ruling coalition. Following the next general elections in 1951, a new unique coalition was formed.¹¹ The new government finally agreed on an educational reform that would abolish the previous 'stream' system and replace it with a state educational system. Nevertheless, the 1953 State Educational Law, which should have embodied the reform and establish equal and universal education, instituted instead a new version of the same segmented and divided system that had hitherto prevailed. The "new" educational system had separate Arab and Hebrew institutions, and the Hebrew institutions were again divided into religious and secular branches, with enclaves of autonomy for ultra-Orthodox Jews and for the *kibbutzim*. Thus, almost all the educational divisions were now institutionalized by the state.

The early 1950s were years of massive Jewish immigration from Arab countries. The absorption process intended for those immigrants would greatly determine their future position in society.¹² Under the prevailing policy of "cultural assimilation", the public school system had a pivotal role in "turning the immigrants into Israeli citizens", i.e., in making them members of a Jewish national collectivity.¹³ The school's central role in socializing new immigrants was further emphasized because of the prevalent perception among politicians and educational experts that those children's home environment was culturally inadequate and therefore unfit to fulfill this task.¹⁴

The hegemonic Zionist rhetoric of the "ingathering of the exiles" and of a "Jewish melting pot" highlighted the importance of integration as part of the nation-building process. Yet, the educational system promoted segregational policies and practices. The policy of population dispersal compelled the new immigrants from Arab countries to settle in peripheral areas, in development towns situated far away from urban centers.¹⁵ As a result of this process, the children of the new immigrants attended segregated schools that enrolled a widely homogeneous children population. Nor was geography the only vehicle of segregation. Immigrant children who lived in central areas populated by veteran residents were also enrolled in different, segregated schools. Segregation even existed within schools, where children from different ethnic origins were assigned to different classes and study groups. This process eventually created a system characterized by two distinctive educational settings – one for the veteran, mostly *Ashkenazi* population, and the other for the newcomers, mostly *Mizrahi* children – with a differential allocation of educational resources. While the former enjoyed more established and better-equipped schools, the latter were relegated to ill-equipped and ill-staffed facilities.¹⁶ A prime illustration of the discrimination was the tracking process

in post-elementary education, which channeled most children of *Mizrahi* origin to vocational schools, while *Ashkenazi* children were directed to academic high schools.¹⁷

How could an educational system based on segregation and segmentation be established amidst the prevailing rhetoric of egalitarianism and national solidarity? More importantly, how could its establishment be justified? This question is all the more puzzling when one considers the stratification of the labour market that developed since the inception of the state, in which both the *Mizrahi* immigrants and the Palestinians became proletarianized. How then, could the practice of educational segregation be established and maintained against the backdrop of the prevalent socialist, solidaristic and nationalist ethos?¹⁸

The political and academic establishment gave this paradox a “scientific” justification, based upon the allegedly objective fact of a cultural gap. The rationale was that cultural differences between the two populations necessitated the implementation of different educational methods, and thus justified the creation of two distinctive educational paths that corresponded to the cultural background and intellectual skills of the respective groups.¹⁹ Thus, the realization of egalitarianism had to be postponed until after the “non-modern” immigrants would acquire the knowledge and skills that should enable them to enjoy an equal educational and economic status. Supposedly, educational segregation was the vehicle for achieving this aim. These processes were therefore justified as policies whose main objective was to advance the very interests of *Mizrahi* children. In parallel, some veteran parents expressed blunt objections to the possibility that their children may attend mixed schools where *Mizrahi* children would be enrolled as well.²⁰

Hence public school, which in other immigrant states plays an important role in instilling in children a sense of equality and belonging²¹, failed to fulfill this role in Israel. Conversely, the Israeli school system alienated Arab and *Mizrahi* children by relegating them to lower-level schools and special classes, in which the lesser quality of education thwarted and undermined their sense of self-respect. In other words, the principle of “equal opportunities”²² – which was supposed to establish a belief in the ideals of fairness and justice – was in essence not deemed applicable to those children.

David Miller distinguishes between two different approaches in which the educational apparatus is instrumental in shaping a national identity. One aims at creating an exclusive, homogeneous identity by ignoring or even attempting to erase cultural components that are alien to the dominant group. The other is an inclusive process that allows the individual to embrace the national identity while retaining his or her own cultural identity.²³

Clearly, the Israeli approach belongs to the former category. The Israeli state adopted a distinctively aggressive policy of cultural homogenization since its inception. Accordingly, the new immigrants were required to abandon most, if not all, of the main elements of their previous cultural identity, and to conform to a fictitious ideal-type that constituted the “new Israeli”.²⁴ This policy equally targeted all

new immigrants, but the process was far more intense and had much more severe implications when it was directed toward immigrants from Arab countries.²⁵

In the Eurocentric eyes of the absorbing Zionist establishment, immigrants from Arab countries were looked upon as representatives of a single, inferior and even “primitive” Oriental (*Mizrahi*) culture.²⁶ Thus, the prime concern of the political elite was to “modernized” those immigrants – that is, to teach them the values of a “civilized modern culture”. In this respect, the Zionist movement shared the Eurocentric dogma of other colonial movements, whose claim was that natives of Third-World alien cultures should undergo a process of acculturation for their own betterment. The *Mizrahi* immigrants’ cultural background was also viewed as a national liability because of the resemblance it bore to the “enemy culture”, namely the Arab culture. Emphasizing a Jewish national identity, and instilling Zionist patriotic values, thus required delineating a clear boundary between the two national collectives. Erasing the Arab roots of the *Mizrahi* immigrants’ cultural identity was considered a necessary step in the constitution of a uniform and homogeneous national Jewish collective.

Another factor that contributed to the exclusion of the *Mizrahim*’s Arab culture was their socioeconomic position. As both the Palestinians and the *Mizrahim* were becoming proletarianized, the need for a clear differentiation between the two groups increased. The *Histadrut*, the Zionist workers Federation, played a significant role in the differentiation process²⁷. Yet the role of the educational system in making the distinction apparent was not less important. The schools were indeed supposed to impart to the children of the emerging *Mizrahi* working class a strong sense of nationalism based on the Jewish heritage and cultural history. At that point, the educational system faced a conflict. On the one hand, the national project was one of the homogenization and inclusion of all Jews under one national identity. On the other, the segregative character of the school system resulted in a growing scholastic and educational gaps between Jews from different origins, and a deepening social and economic gap between *Ashkenazim* and *Mizrahim*.

Segregation Within Integration

Social and educational segregation and growing inequalities within the Jewish population, in addition to the feeling that the nationalist project was in danger, were the main factors that engendered a new policy of desegregation in the educational system. In 1968, the *Knesset* (the Israeli parliament) and the government approved an educational reform plan of which school integration was a main component. The reform included the creation of junior high schools in which children from various neighborhoods and different socioeconomic backgrounds were supposed to integrate.²⁸ This plan was the most articulated attempt ever initiated by the state to implement the principles of the “melting pot” policy. Its goals were to reduce the educational and scholastic gaps between *Ashkenazi* and *Mizrahi* children, and bring about social integration. The latter objective won the reform overwhelming

acceptance, since it matched the Zionist vision of a unified Jewish nation. Those who initiated the integration plan thus believed that the reform would also forestall or deflate feelings of frustration and deprivation amongst social groups at the bottom of the social ladder.²⁹

Remarkably, the reform failed to be implemented throughout the educational system. A decade after its initiation, the minister of education appointed a special committee to determine why only less than half of the Jewish pupils attended reformed schools.³⁰ Despite the rhetoric of ethnic integration and equal opportunities for the disadvantaged, practices of exclusion and segregation had thus remained prevalent under the new policy. A 1976 study showed that practices aimed at reducing student heterogeneity in the classroom were common in the new junior high schools.³¹ Paradoxically, desegregation had intensified ethnic identification, while failing to foster feelings of self-respect, self-esteem and equal standing among underprivileged pupils. Beneath the declared educational policy of social integration, a new form of segregation had thus crystallized yet again: segregation within integration, whose result was to intensify the ethnic isolation of *Mizrahi* students, and exacerbate their feeling of exclusion.³²

Although the integration plan was presented as the main achievement of the 1968 reform, it is clear that the plan not only failed to fulfill its objectives, but also aimed at serving the interests and needs of the dominant strata. Students who did benefit from the reform were those who followed the academic track – mainly *Ashkenazi* children from well-off socioeconomic backgrounds – and were thus better prepared for higher education.³³

The segregationist tendency became even sharper in the 1980s and 1990s. In that period, Israel engaged in a process of liberalization, which encompassed various spheres of social relations, among them education.³⁴ The new spirit was individualistic and anti-collectivist in nature, and emphasized the limitation of state intervention and the advantages of the market – its competitiveness and efficiency. Decentralization, deregulation and budget cuts were the main themes of the new, “neo-liberal” economic order. One immediate implication of liberalization was a series of budget cuts in education, which caused a reduction in instructional hours allocated to schools. As a result, parents from middle-class and affluent backgrounds organized to hire teachers and use school facilities, in order to provide their children with additional teaching. In so doing, they established an informal educational system (“gray education”) that developed alongside the formal system and mobilized its resources.³⁵ Liberalization policies and the subjection of education to the rules of the market thus contributed to deepen even more sharply the educational ethnic gap.

In the early 1990s, the ministry of education appointed two committees to examine the possibility of transforming the state-controlled school system into a decentralized system consisting of self-managed and self-financed autonomous schools.³⁶ A new type of school subsequently emerged: the “magnet” school. These schools remained within the public system but presented two unique charac-

teristics: they were allowed to recruit students from outside a designated registration area, and their educational curriculum centered around one main field.³⁷ Magnet schools required considerable resources, most of which were provided by public funds, supplemented by tuition fees. Unsurprisingly, these schools mainly attracted middle- and upper-middle-class students whose parents could afford the tuition fees, and who were better equipped to pass the admission exams based on intelligence tests. Those schools virtually became quasi-private institutions of learning that allowed privileged students to get away from “integrated” schools.³⁸

During the same period, the ministry of education seriously considered the implementation of a “parental-choice policy” in various cities. Eventually, the policy was applied in Tel Aviv, Israel’s largest city.³⁹

In this context, and in view of the persistent educational gap between *Ashkenazi* and *Mizrahi* students, two responses emerged: *Kedma*, an alternative academic high school, and the educational network of *Shas*, an ultra-Orthodox *Sephardic* political party.

The Mizrahi Challenge

These two movements – *Kedma* and *Shas* – were established in response to the discrimination against *Mizrahi* Jews in Israeli society, and attested to the failure of the integration plan and of the state’s effort to create a homogenous national identity. The peace process between Israel, the Arab countries and the Palestinians also contributed to the emergence of these two social movements. The peace negotiations reduced the perceived security threat, a fact that not only allowed domestic issues to take on a new significance, but also undermined the symbolic dimension of national unity as a cohesive ideology within the Jewish society.⁴⁰ Another factor that contributed to the rise of those movements was the massive immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. Those new immigrants unhesitatingly and promptly established autonomous cultural institutions in order to preserve their heritage, which led to widespread recognition in the Israeli society of the need for multiculturalism.

Kedma is essentially an educational movement aimed at establishing academic high schools in underprivileged neighborhoods and development towns. *Shas* is a political party that seeks to garner political power by establishing itself as a mass-based popular movement⁴¹ with its own, autonomous educational system.

***Kedma* – a Radical-Multicultural Challenge**

The *Kedma* Association was founded in 1993 and advocated three principles: fair equality of opportunity, multicultural education, and democratic empowerment of both students and the community. *Kedma* believed that equality of opportunity and democratic empowerment would be achieved only if academic high schools were established within the community. In the association’s view, multicultural

education required new methods of learning, and changing the main themes in the standard national curriculum.⁴²

In the field of education, equal opportunities would be created through a variety of steps. First, all students from the *Kedma* school would take and pass the matriculation exams. It is important to stress that in integrated and vocational schools, the ratio of *Mizrahi* students who took those exams – let alone passed them – was extremely low. Second, those schools would have an open admission policy, and absorb students regardless of previous educational achievements or socioeconomic background. In fact, many of the students who attended those schools would otherwise have been sent to special education schools.⁴³ Third, those schools would provide a tutorial system that would give students individual guidance and help bolster their self-esteem.

Multicultural education, another *Kedma* principle, became a main, if not a prime, theme of the curriculum, giving the *Kedma* schools a unique character in this respect in Israel. The founders of *Kedma* believed that a main cause of the marginalization of the *Mizrahi* population had been the exclusion of different facets of *Mizrahi* culture and history from the Israeli public sphere, including education.⁴⁴ Thus *Kedma* sought to modify the curriculum in history and literature in order to legitimize their own culture in the eyes of those children and teach subjects that were relevant to their own life experience.

Two curricular projects form the cornerstone of the *Kedma* educational alternative. One is the “My History” project – a culture and literature program that includes the study of *Mizrahi* writers and poets, and participation in educational activities on the students’ cultures of origin. The other project is intended to bridge the gap between the standard history curriculum and the children’s own personal history by filling the “blanks” in standard textbooks that glorify the history of the Zionist national movement and minimize the contribution of *Mizrahi* Jews.⁴⁵

Most *Mizrahi* cultures rely on oral tradition, and written historical sources on those cultures are scarce. Therefore, the project is based on the students’ own investigations, and especially on interviews with members of their own families. By emphasizing the students’ family history, the four-year-long study program allows the students to place their personal ancestral history in the context of the Israeli historiography. An outcome of the project is to cause *Mizrahi* children to re-examine the role of *Mizrahim* in the Zionist nation- and state-building projects, against their marginalization in the Zionist historiography. Concomitantly, the schools provide teaching on the broad concepts of nationalism, colonialism and on critical thinking. This enables students to place their experience not only in the Israeli-Zionist context, but also in the historical context of the 20th century and its great phenomena. The ultimate goal is to reduce among students the feeling of alienation and disconnectedness from both their immediate community and the outside world at large.⁴⁶

The multicultural curriculum thus constitutes a response to the Zionist curriculum that sought to create a single, homogeneous identity by excluding the

cultural, historical and socioeconomic experience of the *Mizrahi* population. The mono-cultural Zionist education relied on a hierarchical cultural order in which the *Mizrahim* appeared at the bottom of the ladder. It is also true that *Mizrahi* Jewry became involved in the Zionist project at a late stage, and only after the Zionist establishment had realized that European Jewry was not numerous enough for the Zionist project to be accomplished. The Zionist establishment then “recruited” *Mizrahi* Jews as manpower for the Zionist project rather than as an integral part of it.⁴⁷ The Zionist educational agenda entirely neglected the complex relations between Zionism and *Mizrahim*, and set out to shape an unproblematic new Israeli identity. That agenda was perceived by *Kedma* as oppressive. In contrast, *Kedma*’s educational agenda aims to foster a complex, hyphenated sense of Israeli-*Mizrahi* identity instead of a one-dimensional Israeli identity.

Kedma’s third operating principle, democratic empowerment, lied in the creation of academic high schools in low-income neighborhoods themselves, and illustrated *Kedma*’s belief that education should not sever students from their immediate environment. This view opposed the state integration policy, which had sought to bridge the ethnic gap in education by bussing *Mizrahi* children to schools located in more affluent neighborhoods. In contrast, *Kedma* emphasized the need to improve the educational environment in the children’s own community.⁴⁸

Kedma’s concept of empowerment involved not only the students, but also the parents and teachers. In seeking to improve the neighborhood’s educational environment, *Kedma* considered the equal participation of all of those groups as a crucial component of the educational institution. In the school’s meetings, parents and students are active participants whose voices are heard. In each of the two *Kedma* schools, in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, parents and students did in fact assume an important role in the school’s struggle against local authorities, which were hostile to the project. This too was an innovation, after decades of parental passivity in the vocational and integrated schools that *Mizrahi* children had attended. Integration policies had encouraged non-participation on the part of the parents, by disconnecting children from their home environment and minimizing the influence of their cultural background. The home and neighborhood had been perceived as impediments to educational, economic and cultural achievement.⁴⁹

***Shas* – a Fundamentalist Challenge**

The *Shas* political party was founded in 1984 and has been gaining in strength ever since. It now is the third largest party in the Israeli parliament, where it holds 17 out of 120 seats. *Shas* is an ultra-Orthodox *Mizrahi* party, and primarily emerged as a split movement from an ultra-Orthodox *Ashkenazi* party. At first, it was a response to the ostracizing of *Mizrahi* Jews within the ultra-Orthodox movement. Nevertheless, its constituents are not only ultra-Orthodox *Mizrahim*, but also moderately religious *Mizrahim* from disadvantaged socioeconomic strata.⁵⁰

Shas's main slogan has been the revival of the glory of the *Sephardic* community, a concept which appeals to a large number of non-Orthodox *Mizrahim* as a symbol of restoration to cultural, social and political equality in the Israeli society. Yet *Shas*'s spiritual leader, former *Sephardic* Chief Rabbi of Israel Ovadia Yossef, also views one of *Shas*'s main missions as the promotion of a "society of *Sephardic* Torah learners". Rabbi Ovadia Yossef conceived *Shas* as a spiritual revolution that would breed a new ultra-Orthodox *Sephardic* community – a community that in fact bears no resemblance to the cultural background and heritage of *Mizrahi* Jews. *Shas* thus effected a clever political manipulation of *Sephardic* identity to create a new, "imagined" *Sephardic* identity that "borrowed" many features and symbols from the *Ashkenazi* ultra-Orthodox. Most *Shas* recruits have been and remain unaware of the manipulation.

One of the primary and most impressive missions that *Shas* took upon itself was the establishment of separate and independent educational institutions. Its school network has been growing steadily since its inception.⁵¹ *Shas* schools are mainly located in low-income neighborhoods and development towns, whose population is predominantly *Mizrahi* and disadvantaged.⁵² Like *Kedma*, *Shas* schools offer an alternative to the formal, state-controlled educational system, which has failed these populations. In recent years, there has been a sizeable decline in state school enrollment, and an increase in the number of students attending *Shas* schools. The *Shas* educational system is currently the fastest growing school system in Israel.⁵³

The uniqueness of the *Shas* educational system is its highly politicized character. Many teachers and staff in the school network are both *Mizrahim* and *Shas* political activists. Some even hold political positions in the movement.⁵⁴ Despite *Shas*'s ultra-Orthodox denomination, pupils in *Shas* schools do not all come from ultra-Orthodox homes. It can be assumed that in fact most of them do not.⁵⁵ The *Shas* network actually comprises different schools for ultra-Orthodox children and for children from secular and traditional backgrounds.⁵⁶

Shas's non-selective approach in its educational system evidently reflects the network's political goals. *Shas* seeks to attract new recruits by gaining the political support of those families whose children are enrolled in *Shas* schools. *Shas*'s dual school system⁵⁷ is also aimed at broadening its constituencies. The availability of both ultra-Orthodox and less religious schools is meant to attract population segments ranging from the ultra-Orthodox to the secular.⁵⁸ *Shas*'s political goals also determine the contents of the network's educational messages. *Shas* utilizes the ethnic divisiveness that prevails in the Israeli society in order to strengthen the representation of a distinctive ultra-Orthodox, *Mizrahi* collective through its autonomous educational system. It then proceeds to designate itself as that community's sole and true representative.

A 1994 study of *Shas*'s dual school system reveals that, depending on the type of school reviewed, 60 to 75 percent of instructional hours are dedicated to religious studies.⁵⁹ The study also contends that "the degree of substantial [religious] learning is low", and relies mainly on reciting rather than studying.⁶⁰ In

addition, teachers seem to pay little attention to students' understanding of the studied material.⁶¹

In the boys' schools, teaching is not primarily aimed at enhancing knowledge and skills among children. Instead, it concentrates on socializing them into a religious, observant society. In essence, those pupils are not expected to become Torah scholars, and the goal of the study program is to make them adhere to the dictates of religious rules and to basic religious beliefs. In fact, it seems that *Shas* uses these children as agents of conversion to be recruited, along with their families, in a religious community that is defined, controlled and represented by *Shas*. *Shas* schools do not promote educational achievement *per se*, and their teaching does not prepare children for future educational and occupational mobility, or for membership in a modern democratic society.⁶²

In summary, while *Shas* as a political movement advocates the promotion of a *Sephardic* "society of learners", it appears that its school network fails to offer *Mizrahi* children better educational opportunities – whether religious or secular.⁶³

Kedma versus Shas

These two movements thus have in common their opposition to the mono-cultural approach that was implemented by the state educational system and based on cultural assimilation – a tenet of Zionist ideology. The state-sponsored system had sought to erase the *Mizrahi* identity and engender a modern Israeli identity that was in fact modeled on the *Ashkenazi* identity.

They also share a common rejection of the inferior social status that Israeli society has ascribed to *Mizrahim*. They both view the Zionist state as an essentially *Ashkenazi* enterprise, whose founders resigned themselves to call on Jews from Arab countries as a last resort, only after the scale of destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust had become clear.⁶⁴ To both movements, this is an historical fact that, coupled with the subsequent implementation of discriminatory policies by the state, is at the root of the *Mizrahim's* low socioeconomic status in Israeli society.

Both movements also attach special significance to the educational system, which they hold responsible for the *Mizrahim's* failure to integrate into society. They have both sought to advance their political agenda through education and, in this respect, they share an understanding that education is inseparable from the political realm. In their view, the *Mizrahim's* educational predicament, and more specifically the educational gap between *Mizrahim* and *Ashkenazim*, should be viewed as a political rather than a merely educational problem. In the conventional modernist conception, that characterized the Zionist perception of the 'ethnic problem', the educational predicament of *Mizrahi* children was perceived as inherent to their inferior cultural background, or stemming from inappropriate educational treatment. Conversely, the political perspective views this predicament as a result of broader social, economic and political processes. Education, therefore, is seen as

a means to bring about social change. However, the nature of the change is what differentiates and separates the two projects.

A categorization borrowed from Bhikhu Parekh enables us to observe that these two educational projects represent two different conceptions of multiculturalism. *Kedma* embodies a type of *critical (or interactive) multiculturalism*. This type “refers to a society in which cultural groups are concerned not so much to lead autonomous lives as to create a collective culture that reflects and affirms their distinct perspectives.”⁶⁵ Here, the main idea for the subordinate cultures is to gain influence and effect a change in the dominant culture, so that the oppression and discrimination of the subordinate cultures is eradicated. As a result, the dominant culture is transformed into a more inclusive culture. *Kedma* views multiculturalism as an end in itself, a necessary component in a democratic and pluralistic society. *Kedma*’s demands are directed to the hegemonic culture and the movement calls on the society at large to live up to its professed ideals. The principles advocated by *Kedma* – equality of opportunities, multiculturalism, and democratic empowerment – all stem from the ideals of social-democracy. Unsurprisingly, many of *Kedma*’s founders were active, long before the foundation of the association, in several initiatives against policies that they regarded as undermining educational equality. Thus, they opposed policies such as parental choice, educational tracking, or the excessive referral of children from poor background to special education schools.

In contrast, *Shas*’s educational project partly meets the criteria of “autonomist multiculturalism”. Parekh defines *autonomist multiculturalism* as “a vision of society in which major cultural groups seek equality with the dominant culture. [...] Their primary concern is to maintain their ways of life, which they think they have as much a right to do as the dominant cultural group, and to enjoy the maximum possible degree of self-government.”⁶⁶ Here, multiculturalism is a means for the group to gain independence and control over its own cultural apparatus. This requires that such autonomy be recognized by the dominant culture, and that the economic and social means for the preservation and development of the group’s culture be procured. As seen above, *Shas*’s leading goal has been to establish a separate and independent educational system, beyond the reach and control of the state, which could be used to propagate the movement’s idiosyncratic values. These values clearly oppose the ideals of a democratic and pluralistic society.

Shas, however, does not see autonomy as a goal in itself. Its approach to multiculturalism is in fact instrumental and transitory. It is in this respect that *Shas*’s multiculturalism differs from Parekh’s “autonomist” model. *Shas* does not aim to separate itself from the rest of the (Jewish) society, but seeks to dominate the latter, thereby reproducing in fact the mono-culturalist conception that it defies. This, we think, is attributed to *Shas*’s fundamentalist ambitions, i.e., the creation of an educational, cultural and political alternative to the Zionist order.⁶⁷

Both projects encountered opposition, albeit of a different kind. These two socio-educational movements were regarded as a threat to the Zionist nation-building process, and to the established educational system. Particularly, they both

contradicted the assumptions embedded in the integration program which viewed the “*Mizrachi* problem” as an outdated, soon-to-be resolved conflict.⁶⁸ However, *Shas*’s educational project relied on the existing separation between religious and non-religious education, and particularly the existence of an independent ultra-Orthodox educational system. The movement’s demand to establish its own educational system alongside the existing *Ashkenazi* ultra-Orthodox system could not be – and was not – dismissed as incompatible with the existing educational arrangements.

In contrast, *Kedma*’s educational project was more problematic. The mere demand to establish academic high schools in poor neighborhoods and development towns exposed the discriminatory and oppressive nature of the state-controlled educational system, and its failed policy of integration. While *Shas* had no interest in determining the contents of educational programs in the general system, *Kedma*’s demands were directed at the very system. Because of its political strength⁶⁹, *Shas* was able to gain full autonomy in establishing its educational system, including full financial support provided by the state’s budget. *Kedma*, by contrast, had to struggle for its schools to be recognized, even after it received initial support from the ministry of education.⁷⁰ In fact, the Tel Aviv *Kedma* school had to close down five years after it was founded, partly because of an enduring conflict between the school and the municipal authorities.⁷¹

Kedma also encountered opposition because of its ideological stance. A case in point, which illustrates *Kedma*’s universalistic moral and political agenda, is the unique and controversial manner in which *Kedma* chose to commemorate the Holocaust Remembrance Day in its Tel Aviv school. Instead of the traditional focus on the Jewish tragedy in the Israeli educational system, the school sought to emphasize the suffering of all victims of racism and xenophobia, and include other examples of genocide in the commemoration. The ceremony caused a public outcry and was condemned by Members of Knesset and other public figures. It even divided the *Kedma* community itself, and some parents were reluctant to let their children take part in what could be perceived as a provocative political statement.⁷²

Shortly after giving initial support to the *Kedma* concept, representatives of the establishment (the head of the educational department at the Tel Aviv municipality and ministry of education officials) began to view *Kedma* as a subversive project that had to be stopped.⁷³ Public perception of the school became more negative, and enrollment decreased.⁷⁴ The *Kedma* school in Jerusalem followed a different path. Municipal authorities objected to the foundation of the school, and delayed the allocation of permanent premises. But cooperative relations developed between the school’s staff and the community – in particular the parents, and this enabled the school to survive difficulties and maintain a reasonable rate of enrollment.⁷⁵

Shas’s educational system, on the other hand, has no enrollment problem. *Shas* practices an aggressive recruitment policy among pupils from non-religious schools and background.⁷⁶ Against the backdrop of a neo-liberal economy, that caused a reduction in the state’s social and educational expenditures, *Shas* offered

poor families, mainly of *mizrahi* origin, bussing, extended school day and meals for symbolic fees. Not less important, it offered those families a place where their values and traditions were regarded respectfully.

Shas's educational system has also raised opposition from various segments of society – especially from the *Ashkenazi* middle and upper-middle class. Education was one of the main issues debated in the campaign for the 1999 general election.⁷⁷ The subject was brought to public awareness because of the widespread view that *Shas*'s political success stems from its educational system, now seen as a rival to the national educational system – both secular and religious. Thus, *Shas*'s political gain and the perceived threat posed by its rise to the Zionist secular establishment placed the movement at the center of the public debate. In the recent campaign, the *Shas* educational system was portrayed as corrupt and dangerous.⁷⁸

Conclusion

In summary, the *Mizrahi* experience in the Israeli educational system illustrates the dialectics between an ideology of homogenization and a practice of segregation. Official policies of homogenization developed into *de facto* educational segregation, which in turn engendered new policies of integration, followed by further segregation and discrimination. Eventually, segregated groups responded by reclaiming their own, particularistic ethnic identity, demanding a share in the collective culture.

As is the case with most national movements, Zionism sought to create a homogenous national identity. To that end, the state in its early days invested huge efforts in the creation of a uniform educational system based on the principles of *mamlakhtiut*, the state's ideology of citizenship. However, this concept was never truly universal, first because it excluded Arab citizenry, and second because its implementation resulted in a divided and segregative public school system. The main victims were the *Mizrahim*, stigmatized by the system as non-modern and hence in need of special educational measures, such as the relegation to special classes, special schools and vocational education.

The 1968 integration plan was an actual recognition of the crystallization of two distinct social collectives in Israeli society, and a manifestation of the role of the educational system in reinforcing the boundary between them. The plan sought to merge the *Ashkenazi* "first Israel" and the *Mizrahi* "second Israel" into one nation. Its failure nonetheless was not confined to the educational realm. The plan served in fact to reinforce the development of those two social groups as distinct and separate cultural entities. It can thus be assumed that integration had failed because it had attempted to assimilate the segregated *Mizrahim* in the hegemonic *Ashkenazi* culture.

The subsequent developments in educational policies were shaped by the changing social and economic climate of the early 1980s, when liberalization and privatization were introduced. The educational system was then decentralized and

deregulated. These policies, justified as a means to foster equal opportunities and coupled with a competitive educational system, reinforced the socioeconomic and ethnic divide in the society. On the other hand, the emerging neo-liberal discourse facilitated the development of autonomous *mizrahi* alternatives that, in the name of a pluralistic and more democratic social order, sought to cater to the preferences of *mizrahi* customers in the evolving educational market.

The emergence of those educational and social movements marks the decline of the nationalist Zionist ideology. These movements provide alternative responses to the contradictions of the Zionist ideology, and specifically to the tension between its egalitarian rhetoric and segregative practice. *Shas* represents a fundamentalist approach to the Jewish exclusivity of the Zionist ideology, and rejects the secular aspects of Zionism that were emphasized by the movement's *Ashkenazi* founders. *Kedma* opposes the mono-culturalist ideology and the socioeconomic practices of both the Zionist establishment and the *Shas* movement, and offers a social-democratic, multiculturalist vision of the Israeli society. Its demand for an Israeli-*Mizrahi* identity can thus be seen as an intermediary step in building a more secular and more democratic Israeli society.

Notes

¹ Gellner presents the Israeli case as a distinctive example of Diaspora nationalism. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1983, Ch. 7.

² Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

³ In this paper, however, we do not address the Arab claim for multiculturalism. It is important to note, though, that politically the issue of Arab education cannot be separated from that of Hebrew education. Yet, the Arab minority's claim for autonomy in education is not unique compared to similar demands in multi-ethnic and multi-national states. For further discussion of Arab education, see Sami K. Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel*, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1978; Majid Al-Haj, *Education, Empowerment, and Control: The Case of the Arabs in Israel*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.

⁴ Throughout this paper, we shall refer to Jews from Arab and Oriental countries as *Mizrahi* (plural: *Mizrahim*) Jews, and to Jews from Europe and America (but mostly from Central and Eastern) as *Ashkenazi* (plural: *Ashkenazim*) Jews. These terms reflect the common social and political discourse in Israel and are meant to emphasize our understanding of these collectivities in a non-essentialist manner. Accordingly, the existence of these social groupings and their political significance are derived from the particular encounter between those immigrants from various countries within the Israeli polity. See also, Gal Levy and Zeev Emmerich, 'From "Natural Workers" to "Sephardic Ultra-Religious": The Politics of Ethnicity between Labeling and Identification', forthcoming in *Shas – The First Fifteen Years*, Yoav Peled (ed.) (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute Press).

⁵ In general terms, the Zionist movement was intolerant of groups that advocated conceptions of nationalism which did not recognize and emphasize the primacy of Jewish nationhood. In this respect, the hegemonic national ideology rejected civic and democratic conceptions of nationalism, or types of nationalism that were based on other definitions of the national collective, namely those that rejected the emphasis on Jewish ethnic and cultural traits.

⁶ Humphrey Bowman, *Middle East Window*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942, pp. 252–4; Noah Nardi, *Education in Palestine, 1920–1945*, Washington, DC: Zionist Organization of America, 1945, p. 23.

⁷ See, Nardi, *op. cit.*

⁸ Indeed, the one group that rejected this authority, the *Ashkenazi* ultra-Orthodox community, appealed to the British government to obtain the authority to run its own educational system. See Menachem Friedman, *Society and Religion: The Non-Zionist Orthodox in Eretz-Israel, 1918–1936*, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1977.

⁹ *Mamlakhtit* literally means “kingdomship”, in reference to ancient Hebrew sovereignty. Figuratively, it means *étatisme*, but also the unification of society and the de-politicization of the various functions of the state. See Eliezer Don-Yehia “Co-operation and Conflict between Political Camps: The Religious Camp and the Labour Movement and the Crisis in Education in Israel”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 461. For a critical account of this concept, see Yagil Levy, *Trial and Error: Israel’s Route from War to De-escalation*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997, pp. 36–39.

¹⁰ This conflict was mainly motivated by the will of each of the political parties to gain control over the new immigrants by enrolling immigrant children in their educational institutions. See Don-Yehia *op. cit.*; Zvi Zameret, *Across A Narrow Bridge: Shaping the Education System During the Great Aliya*, Sede Boker: The Ben-Gurion Research Center – The Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1997.

¹¹ This coalition included the dominant social-democratic *Mapai* party, the liberal Genreal Zionist party and the Zionist-Religious parties. The need for such a coalition stemmed not only from the education crisis but also and more importantly from economic developments that enabled those opposing parties to resolve the legitimacy crisis that the ruling political elite had faced; Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 29. See also Shlomo Swirski, *Education in Israel: Schooling for Inequality*, Tel-Aviv: Breirot Publishers, 1990, pp. 40.

¹² The Jewish population of Palestine in 1948 was 716,700. Between 1948 and 1953, some 719,500 immigrants arrived to Israel – 351,800 of whom came from Asian and African countries. Deborah Hacothen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: The Great Wave of Immigration to Israel and its Absorption, 1948–1953*, Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1994, pp. 323–324.

¹³ See also Uri Ram, “Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood: the Case of Ben Zion Dinur.” *History and Memory*, 7, 1995, pp. 91–124.

¹⁴ See for example Moshe Smilansky and David Nevo, *The Gifted Disadvantaged: A Ten Year Longitudinal Study of Compensatory Education in Israel*, London, New York & Paris: Gordon and Breach, 1979.

¹⁵ In fact, those immigrants were the only population segment that actually accomplished the aims of this policy. Although government plans had not specified who would settle in peripheral areas, immigrants from Arab countries populated those areas for the most part, aside from a small number of Kibbutzim. See Oren Yifatchel, “The Internal Frontier: Territorial Control and Ethnic Relations in Israel”, in O. Yiftachel and A. Meir (eds.), *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel*, Boulder CO.: Westview Press, 1998.

¹⁶ Schooling conditions in the periphery were harsh throughout the first decade and even later. The inadequacy of the teachers’ training was felt primarily in the development towns, as documented in a 1966 report from the Ministry of Education on one development town, which states that, out of a total of 86 teachers in elementary education (there was no secondary school there at the time), 23 were unqualified solidier-teachers and another 24 had less than 2 years of experience (State of Israel Archive, G5599/104). See also Zameret, *op. cit.*, p. 54; Aharon F. Kleinberger, *Society, Schools and Progress in Israel*, Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1969, p. 60.

¹⁷ Abraham Yogev and Hanna Ayalon, “High School Attendance in a Sponsored Multi-Ethnic System: The Case of Israel” in E. Krausz, (ed.) *Education in a Comparative Context*, (Vol. IV of the series, Studies of Israeli Society), New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989,

p. 222. On the role of schooling in reproducing social inequalities, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, NY: Basic Books 1976.

¹⁸ The Arab-Israel conflict had certainly played a central role in justifying governmental neglect of social problems. Security concerns were systematically used as an excuse to avoid dealing with other burning issues. See for example Yonathan Shapiro and Lev L. Grinberg, *The Full Employment Crisis, 1957–1965: A Chapter on Israel Political Economy*, Discussion Paper No. 45, Tel-Aviv: Golda Meir Institute for Social and Labour Research, December 1988.

¹⁹ For an exploration of the various educational policies from the 1950s to the 1970s, with special reference to the definition of disadvantaged children, see Smilansky and Nevo, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Jeff Halper, Moshe Shokeid and Alex Weingrod, "Communities, Schools and Integration", in Y. Amir, S. Sharan, and R. Ben-Ari (eds.), *School Desegregation: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1984.

²¹ See Shlomo Swirski, *Seeds of Inequality*, Tel-Aviv: Breirot Publications, 1995, pp. 72–75.

²² At first, this principle was understood as meaning "equality in inputs". A new conception of "equality in outputs" was developed by the ministry of education only in the late 1950s. It was then argued that educational resources should be allocated differentially to the various groups in accordance with their specific cultural characteristics, and supposedly, provide the "backward" groups with more opportunities. See Smilansky and Nevo, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–55.

²³ David Miller, *On Nationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, pp. 119–154.

²⁴ See Ram, *op. cit.*, 1995, on the role of Dinur as an historian of Jewish nationalism and as minister of education in promoting the role of the Israeli school in this respect. For a curricular analysis, see Ruth Firer, *The Agents of Zionist Education*, Haifa: Sifriat Ha-poalim, 1985; for the curriculum in History Studies in reference to the *Mizrahi* Jews, see Avner Ben-Amos, "An Impossible Pluralism? European Jews and Oriental Jews in the Israeli History Curriculum", *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1994, pp. 41–51.

²⁵ For a discussion of the Zionist attitude regarding the memory of the exile and the implications of the Eurocentric perspective on the denial and repression of the history of Oriental Jews in Israel, see Amnon Raz-Karkozkin, "Exile within Sovereignty: Toward a Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture", *Teoria U-bikoret (Theory and Criticism: An Israeli Forum)*, No. 4, 1993 (part I) and No. 5, 1994 (part II).

²⁶ See, for example, Karl Frankenstein, "On the Problem of Ethnic Differences" *Megamot*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1951, pp. 261–76; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *The Oriental Jews in Israel: a report on a preliminary study in culture contacts*, New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1950. For a critical account of the Zionist, Orientalist approach towards *Mizrahi* Jews, see Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the standpoint of its Jewish Victims", *Social Text*, Vol. 7, No. 1–2, 1988.

²⁷ See Lev L. Grinberg, *Split Corporatism in Israel*, NY: SUNY Press, 1991. On the emergence of the *Ashkenazi* middle class, see Henry Rosenfeld and Shulamit Carmi, "The Privatization of Public Means, the State-made Middle Class, and the Realization of Family Values in Israel", in *Kinship and Modernization: Mediterranean Society*, Rome: American Universities Field Staff, 1976.

²⁸ It is important to emphasize that the reform was primarily intended to restructure the school system. This change aimed at improving the schooling process in preparing children for higher education. The notion of integration was a byproduct of this process. See Swirski, *op. cit.*, 1990, pp. 143–51; David Levi, *The dynamics of Agenda Building: Case Study – Reform in Israel Educational System*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Haifa, 1987, p. 102. It must also be noted that, in contrast to other places where desegregation was adopted, this plan did not encompass the entire Israeli school system but only the higher levels of education. See Harold B. Gerard, "Introduction", in Y. Amir, S. Sharan and R. Ben-Ari (eds.), *School Desegregation: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1984, p. xii. As a result, the encounter between *Mizrahi* and *Ashkenazi* children in mixed educational institutions occurred at a relatively late stage. Some critics have argued that integration at that point was "too little too late". Swirski, *op. cit.*, 1990, p. 144.

²⁹ On the educational and social goals of the reform, see Nachum Blass and Benjamin Amir, "Integration in Education: The Development of a Policy", and Yehuda Amir, Shlomo Sharan and Rachel Ben-Ari "Why Integration", both published in Y. Amir, S. Sharan, and R. Ben-Ari (eds.), *School Desegregation: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1984.

³⁰ Swirski, *op. cit.* 1990, p. 151.

³¹ Among such practices, the authors mention encouraging "weak" students to drop out, instituting tracking and selection processes in order to create homogeneous classes, and the formation of study groups within classes. Also, there was an increase in the number of students who were referred to special education schools. Michael Chen, Drora Kfir and Arie Lewy, "Coping with a Heterogeneous School Population in the Junior High School", *Megamot*, Vol. 22, 1976, pp. 385. Ethnic composition of the study body in comprehensive schools was divided, with *Mizrahi* students attending mainly vocational classes, while *Ashkenazi* students were predominant in academic classes. For an analysis of educational gaps in Israel, see Yitzhak Haberfeld and Yinon Cohen, *Schooling and Income gaps between Western and Eastern Jews in Israel, 1975–1992*, Discussion paper No. 80, Golda Meir Institute for Social and Labour Research, Tel-Aviv University, August 1995.

³² See Idit Al-Hanani, "On the Nature of Feelings of Ethnic Discrimination in Two Development Towns", *Megamot*, Vol. 28, No. 1, June 1983, pp. 97–99. On integration in state religious schools and its effect on inter-ethnic relations, see Joseph Schwarzwald, "Integration as a Situational Contingent: Secular versus Religious Public Education", in Y. Amir, S. Sharan, and R. Ben-Ari (eds.), *School Desegregation: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Hillsdale, NJ & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1984. For further discussion of the problematic aspect of the integration plan, see also Gal Levy and Tamar Barkey, "A Progressive View of Yom Ha-Shoah: Ethnicity, Class and Education in Israel", *Politika – The Israeli Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 33–36 [for an English short version of this article, see Barkay and Levy "Kedma School", *News from Within*, Vol. XV, No. 6, June 1999, pp. 26–32].

³³ The outcomes of the integration plan are evidenced, for example, in the following figures from Tel-Aviv: in 1990, some 46.5% of the children who had begun at a specific junior high school continued in the same school until 12th grade. Of those who had left, 74% moved to lower levels, and 10% percent dropped out; most of them, from lower socio-economic background. Shmuel Dorfman, Flor Haymann, Rina Shapira, and Rona Shavit, "Local education Reform: The Case of Tel-Aviv-Jaffa", *Boston University Journal of Education*, Vol. 176, No. 2, 1994, p. 19.

³⁴ Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, "The Roots of Peacemaking: The Dynamics of Citizenship in Israel, 1948–93", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, August 1996, pp. 391–413. Also, Michael Shalev, "Have Globalization and Liberalization 'Normalized' Israel's Political Economy?", *Israel Affairs*, 5.3, 1999.

³⁵ In 1993/94, "gray education" existed in 63% of the schools, mostly in the more affluent areas where parents can privately subsidize additional education. See Erik Cohen and Einat Cohen, *Gray Education in Israel: Supplemental Curricula in Israel Schools in the 1990s*, Jerusalem: Institute for the Study of Educational Systems, 1996.

³⁶ One committee, headed by Arnon Gafni, the former General Director of the Ministry of Finance, recommended that schools be allowed to look for private funding sources such as sponsorships and advertising in order to maintain their own budgets. The other, headed by Wollansky head of planning at the Ministry of Education, examined the concept of autonomous schools, and recommended a strategy aimed at transforming schools into self-managed autonomous units. For a critical evaluation of the findings of these committees, see Yossi Dahan and Barbara Swirski, "The Recommendations of the Gafni Committee (October 1993) and the Wollansky Committee (August 1993) – The position of the Adva Center", Tel-Aviv: Adva Center, 1993.

³⁷ The Kashti Committee for the examination of Magnet schools, 1993.

³⁸ Cohen and Cohen, *op. cit.*, 1996. Rina Shapira, *Social-educational Uniqueness: Magnet Schools – Background, Development and Problems*, Discussion Paper No. 4.88, The School of Education, Tel-Aviv University, August 1988.

³⁹ Dorfman et al. *Op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Peled and Shafir, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ For an analysis of *Shas* as a social movement, see Aaron Willis, “*Shas* – The Sephardic Torah Guardians: Religious ‘movement’ and Political Power”, in A. Arian and M. Shamir (eds.), *The elections in Israel – 1992*, Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1995.

⁴² In order to understand the background to the establishment of *Kedma* schools in low-income neighborhoods, it must be stressed that *Mizrahi* neighborhoods had no academic high schools, and that a high percentage of students from those areas who were bussed to integrated schools failed to complete their studies, or to pass the matriculation exams. Many of these children had experienced failure and alienation in the existing school system. A report from the education department of the Tel Aviv municipality states that some 80% of the children who were bussed to integrated schools dropped out during their studies (see fn. 33 above).

⁴³ One of the ways in which the educational system seeks to remedy the low achievements of students at the elementary level is to assign the students to special education schools. A study reveals that assignment of students to those schools has been exceeding 30% (Joseph Bashi, *A Report on Kiryat-Malachi and Sderot*, Jerusalem: Van Leer, 1984; *A Report on Afula*, Mo’ach Eser – The 30 Localities Project, 1998).

⁴⁴ For a critical analysis of Israeli, and in particular Zionist, historiography, see also Gabriel Piterberg, “The Nation and its Raconteurs: Orientalism and Nationalist Historiography”, *Teoria U-bikoret (Theory and Criticism: An Israeli Forum)*, No. 6, Spring 1995, pp. 81–104.

⁴⁵ For a critique of history textbooks from this perspective, see Yehuda Shenhav, “The History Textbooks of the People of Israel”, *Mitzad Sheni*, No. 18, August 1999, pp. 22–25. Shenhav aptly suggests that those textbooks, entitled “History of the People of Israel”, ought in fact to be entitled “History of the European Zionist Movement”, or “History of European Jewry”. See also Ben-Amos, *op. cit.*, and Piterberg, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ See, Yossef Algazi, “The Chance to Succeed”, *Ha’aretz – Daily Newspaper*, 24.2.1995. This part is also based on personal interviews with Ms. Klara Yona, principal of *Kedma* School, Jerusalem (7.10.1997), Dr. Shlomo Swirski, chair and founder of *Kedma* Association (16.9.1997) and Sami S. Chetrit, ex-principal of *Kedma*, Tel-Aviv (16.7.1996).

⁴⁷ See Dvora Hacoen, *The Million Plan – Ben-Gurion’s Plan of Mass Immigration, 1942–43*, Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved, 1994.

⁴⁸ “Integration” had thus been a one-way process, since only children from poorer communities were required to move to schools outside their own neighborhoods. See Levy and Barkay, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–36.

⁴⁹ This bias was evident in another educational project, which predated the integration policy and had underprivileged children (80% of whom were *Mizrahim*) transferred to boarding schools where they would “enjoy a better educational environment” (Smilansky and Nevo, *op. cit.* pp. 97–119). This approach still exists today toward Ethiopian immigrant children, who are massively directed to boarding schools. In dealing with the education of these immigrants, absorption state agencies have virtually the same attitude as they did toward *Mizrahi* immigrants decades ago. In both cases, parents are viewed as a “lost” generation that has nothing to contribute to the children and is referred to as the “desert generation”.

⁵⁰ Yoav Peled, “Toward a Redefinition of Jewish Nationalism in Israel? The Enigma of *Shas*”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21:4, July 1998; Eliezer Don-Yehia, “Religiosity and Ethnicity in Israeli Politics: the Religious Parties and the Elections for the 12th *Knesset*”, *Medina, Mimshal Ve-yahsim Benleumi’im*, No. 32, Spring 1990, pp. 11–54. For several studies on *Shas*, see also Yoav Peled (ed.), *Shas – The First fifteen Years* (forthcoming) (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute Press).

⁵¹ For data on *Shas*’s educational network, see Shlomo Swirski, Etti Konur and Yaron Yecheskel,

Government Allocations to the Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Sector in Israel, Tel-Aviv: Adva Center, 1998; Varda Shifer, *The Haredi Education System: Allocation, Regulation and Control* (Jerusalem: The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies), 1998. According to recent publications, 13,000 children are enrolled in 140 schools in 1999, and the network anticipates a 27% increase in the number of students next year (*Yediot Ahronot*, 9.8.1999). A report issued by the Ne'eman Committee (set up to investigate the network's financial deficits) mentions a total number of 30 to 35,000 children attending *Shas's* schools (*Ha'aretz*, 22.7.1999).

⁵² Unsurprisingly, *Shas's* voters are mostly concentrated in those areas. In several development towns, *Shas* received most of the votes in the 1999 general election. Yet *Shas's* successful results in this election seem to cut across socioeconomic divisions, since the party also performed well in other cities. Michael Shalev, Yoav Peled, and Oren Yiftachel, *The Political Impact of Inequality: Social Cleavages and Voting in the 1999 Elections*, Discussion Paper No. 2-2000, The Pinhas Sapir Center for Development, Tel-Aviv University, February 2000.

⁵³ The Ne'eman Committee, headed by Prof. Ya'acov Ne'eman – then treasury minister – was formed with the consent of *Shas's* chairperson (*Haaretz*, 22.7.1999).

⁵⁴ Ironically, this teacher-political activist archetype is reminiscent of similar archetype in the pre-state Zionist educational system, and especially in the Labour movement.

⁵⁵ Only a minority of the *Mizrahi* population has been brought up in the ultra-Orthodox community. In fact, until the end of the 1970s, *Mizrahi* students were predominant in the religious state schools that were controlled by the Zionist-religious parties. See, Swirski, *op. cit.*, 1990, p. 40.

⁵⁶ In 1995, two thirds of *Shas* students attended ultra-Orthodox schools. In most cases, these students came from previously secular families who became ultra-Orthodox, sometimes under the influence of *Shas*. The other third were enrolled in the less religious schools. See Ezra Chen, *The Orientation and goals of Shas's Educational system, as reflected in daily context of "Talmud Torah" and a "Boys' School"*, unpublished MA thesis, Department of Sociology and Anthropology and School of Education, Tel-Aviv University, 1995, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Here we refer to the school system for boys and its sub-division into ultra-Orthodox and "regular" schools.

⁵⁸ Chen, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

⁶¹ See, *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶² *Shas* recently announced its intention to extend the teaching of general – as opposed to religious – subjects in its schools. This includes the introduction of computer skills. *Shas* activists also attend classes at the Israeli branch of an American college in order to achieve academic qualifications that will allow them to hold positions in the public sector (*Yediot Ahronot*, 18.1.1999).

⁶³ It must be noted that the *Shas* school system, because of its strictly observant character, is also divided into boys' and girls' schools. This separation of the sexes applies to teachers as well. Liberal and feminist critiques of fundamentalist movements claim that the latter tend to repress and marginalize women. But a recent study on the role of women in the *Shas* movement points to the reverse trend (Anat Feldman, *Shas's Feminism*, *Ha'aretz* 10.6.1999). The study shows that *Shas* has changed the status of *Mizrahi* women, who had been confined to the traditional female roles when the *Mizrahim* were controlled by the *Ashkenazi* orthodoxy. These women have joined the work force in the different social and economic systems controlled by *Shas*. Some were given the opportunity to study and acquire a variety of professional skills. Many are employed in *Shas's* educational system. Given the high dropout rate in development towns and poor neighborhoods and the high failure rate in the formal school system, some of the girls enrolled in the *Shas* system seem in fact to have benefited from the network both in terms of education and employment opportunities.

⁶⁴ Hacoen, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Bhikhu Parekh, "National Culture and Multiculturalism", in K. Thompson (ed.), *Media and Cultural Regulation*, London: Sage Publications and The Open University, 1997, p. 184.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁶⁷ *Shas* was not the first movement to challenge the Zionist national order from the perspective of Judaism. Some Zionist religious parties and the *ashkenazi* ultra-Orthodox parties were and still are in conflict with the Zionist, secular conception of Jewish nationalism. On the other hand, the question of how to relate to Judaism as a religion has not been resolved within secular Zionism itself. Our point here is that every conflict which involves a religious-secular schism can become deadlocked in a struggle for hegemony.

⁶⁸ In Israeli public discussions on ethnic relations, raising the issue of discrimination against the *Mizrahim* is disapproved and looked upon as a divisive act, traditionally referred to as "releasing the ethnic genie from the bottle".

⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that *Shas* acquired political power through its capacity to mobilize these resources and build social networks and institutions.

⁷⁰ Support for *Kedma* relied upon the new registration policy that was enacted in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. This policy reflected the ideology of privatization and liberalization of the 1980s as applied to the educational system. The introduction of parental choice was thus crucial to the development of *Kedma*, which became one expression of an overall policy of democratization. The policy offered parents from low-income background the option of academic education in their own neighborhood.

⁷¹ Another main reason for the closure of the school was ongoing infighting among *Kedma* founders.

⁷² For a detailed analysis of this incident and of its implications on the relation between universalism and particularism in the educational system and, specifically, in *Kedma*, see Levy and Barkay, *op. cit.*

⁷³ This stance was partly supported by a negative portrayal of *Kedma* in the media, especially in Tel Aviv's local newspapers.

⁷⁴ The declining enrollment at *Kedma* in Tel Aviv was one factor that determined the school's closure in 1999.

⁷⁵ Personal interview with Ms. Klara Yona, principal of the school.

⁷⁶ As illustrated by the decision of municipal officials in Ramat-Gan, one of Israel's largest cities, to prohibit *Shas* recruiters from soliciting children near school gates (*Yediot Ahronot*, 9.8.1999).

⁷⁷ This was also the case in the local elections of November 1998. Several political movements campaigned specifically against the expansion of *Shas*'s educational system.

⁷⁸ The publication of the Ne'eman committee report in July 1999 also fueled public resentment. The recently appointed minister of education, from the anti-religious Meretz party, used the report to impose the ministry's control and supervision on *Shas*'s educational institutions and network.

Address for correspondence: Yossi Dahan, Open University, 16 Klauzner Street, Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv 61392, Israel