Cultural Clash and Educational Diversity: immigrant teachers' efforts to rescue the education of immigrant children in Israel

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ABSTRACT Thousands of immigrants who arrived from the former USSR during the past decade have drastically changed the Israeli educational system. However, constituting about 12% of the potential labour force of educators, immigrant teachers represent less than 5% of the actual teaching staff; 69% of immigrant students in the 17-year-old age cohort do not possess a matriculation certificate. This article presents the results of research that studied probably the most prominent effort to rescue the education of immigrant children, namely the Mofet system, which was founded by a group of immigrant teachers in 1991. Today's Mofet runs more than 20 supplementary evening schools around the country and five day-schools. The development of the Mofet group for the advancement of education is one of the most significant examples of the consolidation trends among the Russian-speaking intelligentsia in Israel. However, the authors argue that though Mofet's success is directly linked to the general education system's failure to meet immigrants' needs, it does not express Russian immigrants' desire for socio-cultural segregation.

Introduction

There is no phenomenon that underscores the continued existence of Israel as an active immigrant-settler society more clearly than the last wave of immigration that arrived from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Thousands of immigrants have drastically changed the demographic characteristics of the Israeli population; this trend, however, did not automatically cause a transformation of societal institutions' diversity-management policy. In a 'culturally pluralistic' society, where people of different groups have different cultural patterns and perspectives, it is

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especially important to find ways to understand and learn from the incorporation of these differences into the system. In the words of Robert Gooding-Williams (1998, p. 31), 'a commitment to deliberative democracy in multicultural state entails a commitment to promoting the mutual understanding of differences through cross-cultural dialogue'.

Although thousands of immigrants that arrived from the former USSR during the past decade have drastically changed the Israeli educational system, the teachers' ability to understand what their immigrant students expect from them is still relatively low. However, the research results demonstrate that immigrant teachers are much more successful in guessing the expectations of immigrant students than their Israeli colleagues. Yet, constituting about 12% of the potential labour force of educators, immigrant teachers represent less than 5% of the actual teaching staff. It is hardly possible to ignore the evident link between the immigrant teachers' lack of involvement in the educational system and the immigrant students' downfall. Among those who take the matriculation exams, the immigrants' success is somewhat higher than that of their veteran Israeli peers in the 17-year-old age cohort. However, higher percentage of immigrants than veteran Israelis (in the Jewish population) do not possess a matriculation certificate: 69% vs. 55%. The reason for this paradox is that dropout rates are significantly higher among the immigrants than among the veteran Israeli students so that the immigrants' rates of participation in junior-high education are significantly lower than among their Israeli counterparts.

The paper presents the results of research, that studied probably the most prominent effort to rescue the education of immigrant children, namely – the Mofet system, which was founded by a group of immigrant teachers in 1991. Today's Mofet runs more than 20 supplementary evening schools around the country and five day-schools (the most famous of them is 'Shevah-Mofet' in Tel-Aviv, which has about 1300 students). The development of the Mofet group for the advancement of education (as well as the outgrowth of similar organisations, such as the Immigrant Scientists' Association of Israel, the Immigrant Engineers Union, and the networks of Russian-language newspapers, theatres and publishing houses) is one of the most significant examples of the consolidation trends among the Russian-speaking intelligentsia in Israel.

However, regarding the current situation in general, it should be mentioned that the preference for the Russian language and Russian community structures does not automatically support the ghettoisation hypothesis. The Russian-language media apparently reflect the whole spectrum of approaches, from ghettoisation to full integration within the host society. Our argument is that though Mofet's success is directly linked to the general education system's failure to meet immigrants' needs, it doesn't express Russian immigrants' desire for socio-cultural segregation. However, although the Israeli establishment has an increased recognition of each ethnic group's right to have their own educational arrangements, it seems that no

use of the Mofet schools' unique experience is made by the Israeli educational system.

Immigrant Teachers and Pupils in the Israeli Educational System

In culturally heterogeneous schools, in which the interaction between students and teachers is highly influenced by their culturally determined expectations from each other, the incorporation of these differences into the system becomes the matter of its survival. The interaction between students and their teachers occupies a central place in their daily lives. Peers and teachers are the basic role-partners in the student's role-set, and their social role is defined by students' expectations. The extent to which the students' role-partners fulfil their expectations influences greatly the students' emotional and social well-being. One can assume that the teacher's influence is especially strong when the immigrant students' well being and integration into the new society are concerned.

There is no consensus among researchers on the question whether the structure of students' expectations from their teachers is universal or contextual; in other words, the question is whether students in different societies perceive their teachers in similar or in different ways. Research that compared students' perceptions of schools and teachers in England and Hungary, for instance, has revealed a structure of factors that exists in the two countries almost without any alterations. This finding has led to the conclusion that students perceive their school context in very similar ways despite the differences in social and educational systems. Other researchers, however, have found that students who grow up in different societies will have different expectations from their teachers. In the United States, the way in which students perceive the interpersonal behaviour of teachers has been found to be different among students from different cultural groups, and this difference does not disappear with time spent in the United States (Levy et al, 1997).

And yet, in various studies of students' conceptions of teachers, conducted throughout the world, two aspects of the 'good teacher' concept have emerged that are important to students at all ages: the instrumental aspect and the interpersonal one. The first one refers to instructional competence: the teacher is expected to explain well, to have full mastery of content, to be firm, organised and able to control the class. The second one refers to the teacher's relations with students, within which Tatar & Horenczyk (1996) differentiate between two main components: 'helpfulness' and 'fairness'.

Veteran Israeli students have been found to care little about a systematic well-planned teaching style, whereas instructional effectiveness is very important to the Israelis of the Russian origin (Tatar & Horenczyk, 1996). The research recently conducted by Sever et al (1999) has revealed

that the major difference between the two groups lies in the domain of 'instructional competence'. The immigrant students' expectations that their teacher be competent in the instrumental aspect of his/her role (namely instruction and classroom control) are distinctly higher than those of their non-immigrant peers. The veteran Israeli students, on the other hand, have somewhat higher expectations in the interpersonal domains of the teacher's role.

The common belief is that immigrant students have higher expectations with respect to the personal support by their teachers than their Israeli born counterparts do. Nevertheless, Tatar & Horenczyk (1996), as well as Sever et al (1999) have found that the veteran Israeli students' expectations of personal support from teachers are higher, while their expectations concerning the teaching skills are lower than those of their peers who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union.

The teachers' ability to understand what their students expect from them is especially important when schools with a multicultural student population and a multicultural teaching staff are concerned. Israel, with its large proportion of immigrants, is a natural laboratory for exploring such issues. The research conducted by Sever & Michael (1999) compared students' expectations from their teachers and the expectations which the teachers attributed to their students. The actual expectations were obtained from the students; images were obtained from the teachers, who were asked to guess the students' expectations. Teachers' accuracy was examined by comparing their images of students' expectations to the actual expectations of the students. Intra-cultural accuracy was measured by comparing the images reported by the host and immigrant teachers to the actual expectations of students from their own cultural group. Comparing these images to the actual expectations of students from the other group yielded measures of inter-cultural accuracy. Questionnaires were filled out by students studying in 40 schools (grades 4–12), by veteran Israeli teachers from more than 50 schools and by immigrant teachers (who worked in the same schools as their Israeli-born colleagues did). Both teachers and students got the same series of 12 sayings, so that the former were requested to rank-order them as they thought that the students would, first bearing in mind the Israeli-born students and then the immigrant ones.

The research results evidently demonstrate that immigrant teachers are much more successful in guessing the expectations of immigrant students than their Israeli-born colleagues. In the veteran Israeli teachers' images the difference between the two groups in the domain of 'teaching competence' is not the major one. Moreover, their intuitions have proved to be opposite to the real situation: they attribute to the immigrant students a lower level of expectations in this domain than to their non-immigrant peers. The major difference between the veteran Israeli teachers' images of the two groups rests in the domain of 'personal support'; furthermore, in this case, too, the teachers' perception of this difference is contradictory to the actual state of

affairs: they attribute to immigrant students a much higher level of expectations of personal support from the teacher than to the non-immigrant ones (Sever & Michael, 1999). These findings should be taken as evidence of the importance of developing school-cultures that encourage a candid discussion of the meaning of multiculturalism as well as an ongoing dialogue between non-immigrant and immigrant staff in every school that caters to a demographically diverse student population. Such a dialogue should expose the staff to more than one image of students' expectations from their teachers, and to more than one concept of a 'good teacher'. In addition to improving the quality of the educational service the students are getting in multicultural schools, this might also lessen the wastage of human capital by enhancing the acknowledgement of the potential for unique contribution of immigrant teachers in such schools. The immigrant teachers are a valuable resource in multicultural schools: a systematic and meaningful dialogue with them may help host directors, counsellors and Israeli-born teachers improve their understanding of their immigrant students' expectations and reduce alienation between them.

However, with very few exceptions, the role and place of the immigrant teacher are an almost not researched territory. In Australia, Inglis & Philps (1995) report that although large numbers of teachers have migrated to the country, their proportion in the teaching labour force is below the percentage of immigrants in the population at large; while teachers from non-English-speaking countries are particularly underrepresented in the labour force. One of the reasons for this wastage of human capital is that 'the pool of available teachers considered employable by education authorities is strongly influenced by a qualitative assessment of the ideal or 'good' teacher' and the characteristics of the 'good teacher', while frequently presented as self-evident and universal, are in fact very culturally specific. Thus immigrant teachers are less likely to find employment as the local teachers are, so that their alternative employment is more likely to be in less skilled occupations (Inglis & Philps, 1995, p. 43). In Israel only one out of 10 immigrant teachers was employed in the teaching profession during their first years in the country. While they constitute about 12% of the potential labour force of teachers, the immigrant teachers constitute less than 5% of the actual teaching staff.

The immigration wave has added more than 200 000 new pupils to the education system. They come mostly from homes in which education is of central, towering importance. In fact, one of the reasons many of the immigrants give for having come to Israel is that they want better education opportunities for their children. But the difficulties they encounter in Israel's schools create friction – sometimes resulting in violence – with children of veteran Israelis. Thousands of immigrant children drop out. Living in limbo, they become victims of crime, drugs and alcohol.

Perhaps the bitterest irony is that a few – fortunately the numbers are still small – are being sent by their parents back to their country of origin to

complete their studies. The difficulties are prevalent at all age levels, but they are most acute in high schools. Immigrant teenagers have to cope with three traumas simultaneously: the crisis of adolescence, the culture shock and the problem of identity and status.

These make social adjustments and the pursuit of studies an overwhelming challenge, which no young person can be expected to meet without help. What new immigrant pupils are now deprived of is what the law provided before the mass immigration wave began: two hours of tutorial help a week for their first three years in this country. This is a meagre minimum, but it has been reduced to one hour a week, one hour in which the students are expected to study a new, and far-from-easy language and catch up in subjects such as Hebrew literature, Bible, Israeli history and civics. To make matters worse, summer preparatory classes were abolished in 1992. In most schools, even the few special supplementary classes for newcomers were cut, causing an increasing number of drop-outs.

The research recently conducted by Sever & Epstein (1999b) demonstrates a significant decline with time in the strength of new immigrant students' feeling of difficulties both in their interrelations with peers and in their families' absorption; the significant decline is found after three to four years in Israel. In the school domain, however, no impact of time in Israel has been found. After six years in Israel, the self-reported difficulties indices of immigrants from the CIS are indeed not significantly different from those of their veteran Israeli counterparts in the contextual domain (home and family) and in the domain of peers. This, however, is not true for the school domain: here their feeling of difficulties is still significantly stronger than that of the veteran Israelis, even after six years in Israel.

Another reason owing to which the current situation leaves little room for any optimistic forecast is that despite the fact that among those who take the exams, the immigrants' success is somewhat higher than that of their veteran Israeli peers, in the 17-year-old age cohort, a higher percentage of immigrants than veteran Israelis (in the Jewish population) do not possess a matriculation certificate: 69% vs. 55%. The reason for this paradoxical situation is that dropout rates are significantly higher among the immigrants than among the veteran Israeli students, so that the rates of immigrants' participation in junior-high education are significantly lower than among their Israeli-born peers.

New immigrant students face a formidable language barrier, problems of social integration, different educational methods and new subject matter. Coming on top of financial difficulties at home, and their parents' own absorption problems, the stress can easily become overwhelming. They are facing the dual pressures of integrating into the tight-knit adolescent society here and preparing for matriculation exams in a foreign language and culture. According to the ministry of education, more than 20% of immigrant teenagers at the high-school age (15- to 18-years-old) have dropped out of the educational system, compared with less than 10% of veteran Israelis.

Dropout rates are customarily attributed to parents' low level of education and/or parental attitudes that do not value schooling. Therefore one could assume that dropout rates would be especially low among immigrant students from the last wave of immigration from CIS, the reason being that this wave of immigration is characterised by schooling levels that are much higher than those of the veteran Israeli population. For instance, in Israel 27% of the adult population have 13 or more years of schooling, compared with 54% of the immigrants from CIS (Sever & Epstein, 1999a). Unfortunately, reality proves this assumption to be invalid.

In the literature the discussion of school dropout is usually accompanied by that of 'learning deficiencies, truancy' and 'potential involvement in crime'. For instance, in Gottlieb's (1987, p. 71) research on disattached youth, 44% of the sample had a criminal record; undoubtedly, there is a high correlation between new immigrant students' dropout from the educational system and their involvement in criminal activities. Unfortunately, immigrants' dropping out of school does not decline with the length of their residence in Israel (Sever & Epstein, 1999a). Since these students' parents are generally characterised by a distinctly high level of schooling and their special emphasis on education for the children, this gap between their values and expectations, on the one hand, and their children's actual achievements in the Israeli education system, on the other, made them look for alternative ways to improve the situation. In the words of Julia Mirsky, 'They looked around and found their children educational environment lacking, and then they took their children's future into their own hands' (cited in Kaplan, 1999, p. 19).

Going Against the Stream: immigrant teachers' educational initiatives

Probably the most prominent effort to rescue the education of immigrant children was made by the Mofet system. The network of Mofet schools was founded by Dr Ya'acov Mozganov and his colleagues in 1991. Most of them had taught at the elite schools in the former USSR, and based their teaching on educational principles aimed at unlocking gifted children's academic potential at a very early age (see Dunstan, 1978). Mozganov gathered together other top immigrant teachers and they began to offer supplementary after-school classes for Russian students.

An interesting discussion took place in 1996. Considering the aura of Jewish prominence in the sciences and mathematics, Israeli eighth graders were just a bit above the world average of 513 points in maths and the world average of 516 points in science in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Singapore topped both charts, with a phenomenal 643 and 607 points respectively. Israeli pupils averaged 522 points in maths, behind countries such as Austria, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Ireland, Switzerland, the Slovak Republic, Japan, South Korea and the Netherlands. In science, they

earned 524 points, behind Thailand, New Zealand, Germany, the USA, Sweden, and various Central European and Asian countries.

Responding to these results, Science Minister Binyamin Ze'ev Begin argued that while there was room for improvement, the result was nothing to be ashamed of (see Siegel, 1996). The Israel Union of New Immigrant Teachers strongly objected to his opinion: 'We intend with the help of scientists and experienced teachers to create pedagogic tools which could be useful not only for the children but maybe for the further development of education in Israel', Union head Yuri Frenkel said. 'Education is strategic. It is the future of the country. And if we want to think about the future seriously, we must teach the children seriously. Classes of 40 pupils are a crime against the future. The level of education, reportedly, is not high enough. Education must be developed. Of course this requires considerable investment. And here the experience of the best teachers must be used.'

'The Israeli educational framework leads to failure. A school's goal should be to discover, not to bury, a student's potential. Our intention is to raise the level of education in the entire country,' claimed Mikhail Rosenberg, a Mofet teacher from the prestigious maths-and-science High-School No. 2 at Moscow University. 'A large number of gifted students at the specialised schools were Jewish, and here in Israel they want to study at that same level,' he said.

Today's Mofet runs more than 20 supplementary afternoon and evening schools around the country and five day-schools (the most famous of them is 'Shevah-Mofet' in Tel-Aviv, which has about 1300 students; four junior-high schools have been opened in Jerusalem, Ariel, Haifa and Ashdod –all willing to expand into high schools). Mofet brings together highly trained teachers from the former Soviet Union's specialised maths-and-science schools with the gifted Russian-speaking children they are used to teaching. The Mofet system is based on pioneering Russian educational principles aimed at unlocking gifted children's academic potential at a very young age. Although the Mofet schools focus on maths, science and computer skills, Russian, Jewish and world culture are also emphasised to encourage fully-rounded creative development.

The alliance with Shevah, a rundown vocational high school in an area filled with car-repair shops and small factories, began more than seven years ago. At the beginning Mofet was allowed to run an after-school elective programme on the premises, which was rather different from the usual Israeli extra-curricular fare, with classes in classical ballet, saxophone, fencing and high-level computer programming. Rivka Tzuk, the former principal of Shevah, realised the commodity at hand and transformed the vocational school into an elite institution focusing on mathematics and exact sciences, hiring many tutors as full-time teachers. This alliance between the Shevah school and the Mofet system has resulted in the situation in which the Israeli born teachers, who originally constituted the Shevah staff, are engaged in teaching the humanitarian subjects, whereas mathematics, physics and

English are taught by Mofet teachers, who immigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union. Although in its first year, the Shevah-Mofet classes were conducted in Russian, it is important to mention that now all the lessons are conducted in Hebrew. Now immigrants comprise the absolute majority of the student body, while the intensive-studies programme has transformed the school 's faded reputation: today it is a commonly recognised fact that more than 90% of Mofet students receive the matriculation certificate. Mozganov and his teachers posit their system as an alternative for all Israeli children, not just Russian-speakers. Today, more than 85% of their students are Russian, but they claim this is because of a temporary language affinity, and they are making a concerted effort to increase their native-born student body for the next academic years.

In the words of Tamar Horowitz (1999, p. 36), 'the educational system felt that it possessed sufficient knowledge about the Russian immigration for the purpose of developing an absorption policy. In actual fact, it had at its disposal only scanty, unsystematic knowledge. Its perception of the immigrants was based on the image of the students emerging from the educational system pertaining under the old Communist regime'. There are two fields in which the intercultural misunderstanding becomes the main source of the teachers' distorted perception of their immigrant students. These fields are the students' learning strategies and their behavioural patterns. The misunderstanding, however, is unlikely to appear when the interaction between students and teachers from the same origin is concerned. It is because the Mofet teachers are themselves new immigrants from the former USSR that they are aware of these inevitable problems and, therefore, succeed in solving them much better than their Israeli colleagues. As a result, immigrant students and their parents find Mofet schools more attractive than the regular ones.

The difference between the learning strategies as were common in the former Soviet Union and those in Israel is that the Israeli schooling is relatively relaxed and gradual until students turn 15 and begin advancing intensively for the matriculation examinations. In Russia, however, studies are rigorous even at ages 11, 12, and 13. The way the Israeli school system is structured spells disaster for young people who come to the country in junior-high school age: feeling confident that they know more than their Israeli-born counterparts, these students stop following their peers' advancement in school studies. As a result, by the time such students realise that their peers have already left them behind, the gap is so wide that they have neither tools nor courage to bridge it. These students are promoted from grade to grade because the teachers want to go easy on them, and because they do come in at a higher level than the Israelis in subjects like mathematics. But this backfires –they are not prepared for the academic push in high school necessary to achieve the matriculation. Because they don't know the language, they are sometimes put back a grade or ignored in class. It is especially hard for the good students, who are so troubled by their lack

of academic success that they fall further and further behind, until they drop out. At Mofet, however, the junior high-school students study advanced subject matters and preserve their enthusiasm for learning (see Epstein, 2000): the teachers make their best to keep the tempo their pupils got used to before the immigration. As a result, it is already at the age of 15–16 that the students approach the matriculation examinations in physics and mathematics.

The difference between behavioural patterns of the immigrant adolescents and those of their Israeli peers is due to the fact that the Soviet-born teenagers have past through two circles of rapid social changes. The second one, which is at least to some extent obvious to the Israeli teachers, is that of emigration from the USSR and immigration to Israel; the first one, the consequences of which often remain unnoticed by the Israelis, took place before their emigration, in the epoch of the rapid and almost complete socioeconomic and political changes that were happening in the beginning of the 1990s in the large cities of Russia.

The fact that adolescent immigrants from the USSR were compelled to deal with socio-cultural changes prior to their emigration is crucial for the formation of the patterns of their social behaviour in Israel. These changes, which occurred in the USSR at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s, brought about dramatic alterations in the political, social and cultural structure of the republics of the disintegrating USSR, first and foremost in the reduction of the extent of their centralisation. In this period of extensive reforms, young people in particular succeeded in acquiring skills that had not been available to the previous generations and accumulated formative experiences which were different not only from those of their parents' generation but even from those of their age group's representatives who emigrated from the Soviet state 3–4 years before.

During the same period a unique mix of post-Soviet culture was created which included the rock music culture, flourishing in Moscow, Leningrad and Sverdlovsk and in other cities as an 'underground' (see Wilson & Bachkatov, 1988). 'The rock community was not defined merely by a love of rock music. It was the shared lifestyles and philosophies that really united it' (Easton, 1989, p. 46). One of the most striking features of the rock community was the distinction it made between itself and what it saw as 'official society'. This culture offered an aesthetic and moral alternative to both the collapsing system of socialist realism and the American consumer culture, which invaded the streets and squares of the capital and the peripheral cities. In Svetlana Boym's words, 'there is at least one feature of postmodern culture that is particularly relevant to the post-Soviet situation: the loss of the master narrative. Its disappearance could be not just liberating, but also frightening' (Boym, 1994, p. 224). The changing post-Soviet society created alternative cultural symbols and arenas: the squares and bazaars, the open-air discussion clubs and the kiosks displaying everything from the 'Manual of Theosophy' to the 'Secrets of Sex', from the complete works of

Tolstoy to cotton panties made in Turkey, offered a plethora of street entertainment. Street music ranged from prisoners' romances to Beatles imitations, from great performances by unemployed members of the orchestra to accordion tunes played by war veterans.

'These changes colored the individuation processes of adolescents in this society and the processes they underwent in immigration in a unique hue' (Mirski, 1991, p. 2). The young, who came of age during the social transformations and eagerly adopted their messages, discovered for themselves that the gaps between them and their parents' generation were very large and barely bridgeable. Generally, the parents did not express a desire to come closer to their children, but rather demanded of them to act according to the norms acceptable among them. As it has been stressed by Wilson & Bachkatov (1988, p. 172), in the time of perestroika 'loneliness – the absence of anyone near in whom to confide –was clearly a factor behind the number of youthful suicides. Suicides were the commonest cause of early death after heart disease, cancer and traffic accidents'. In order 'to survive' as an individual the child was not left any option but to rapidly develop avoidance mechanisms, to learn to do manipulations, to conceal and to live in two different arenas – one public and directed towards the parents and adult society and one private and secret within the age group and so, the things that one did not speak of them were not only political opinions or criticism of the regime –also wishes and dreams, also personal problems and fears. The patterns of family life in the USSR encouraged the creation of two life systems and remoteness between parents and children. During adolescence the process was greatly accelerated. The more the children matured, the more parts of their lives happened in secret and without the awareness of the parents, while a polite and conformist facade was maintained with the parents (Mirsky, 1991, pp. 4–5).

The young generation of the immigrants took upon themselves these relations with regard to family and the society around them upon arrival to Israel. In contrast to their Israeli colleagues, Mofet teachers who experienced the same radical changes as the younger immigrants did are more likely to be aware of the existence of these problematic attitudes and relations, and therefore understand their students' present and future orientations much better than their Israeli colleagues.

Education and Diversity-Management Strategies in a Multicultural Society: the case of Israel

A brief analysis of the attitude of the host society to the multicultural diversity, in general, and of the social context of Mofet activities, in particular, is essential for any kind of evaluation of the future perspectives of this enterprise. Charles Taylor's (1994, p. 64) famous argument is that 'the further demand we are looking at here is that we all recognise the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their

worth'. Although all humans belong to multiple cultures of more or less cohesive groups such as ethnic heritage, race, religion, local community, vocation, organisational affiliation, interest group, gender and age, and therefore, simultaneous belonging to various communities, each of them having its own repertoire of habits, skills and styles, infinitely broadens the boundaries of cultural units in multicultural society (Epstein, 1999), the recognition and acknowledgement of cultural diversity by the state institutions is not self-evident. Internal diversity can be managed in a number of different ways; the typology suggested by Sever & Epstein (1999a) presents six different types of diversity-management-strategies.

The first of these strategies is that of segregation; this is the 'hierarchical separation of groups; where a more powerful group keeps other group(s) separate and marginalized. At least one language of high status is used to exclude speakers of low status languages' (Heugh, 1997, p. 244). The South-African Apartheid is one extreme example.

The second strategy is widely known as assimilation, monoculturalism, and is expressed by the 'melting-pot metaphor'. In this approach '... the micro-cultures of a country must rid themselves of their basic cultural integrities and adopt the cultural value system of the dominant culture' (Mitchell & Salsbury, 1996, p. 347). This means 'the subordination of marginalised groups under a dominant group. It entails the apparent drawing together of groups into a whole. But the whole is hierarchically configured. So marginalised groups are always at the disadvantage of the culture, the language and the value system of the dominant group' (Heugh, 1997, p. 245).

There are also types of subtle assimilationism: transitional pluralism (this approach approves of the immigrants' holding on to their culture of origin and mother-tongue only as temporary crutches that sustain them during the first period of immigration; as soon as they master the dominant language, they are expected to give up these crutches and adopt the new culture and language; see Smolicz, 1981, pp. 2–3) and residual multiculturalism, or 'token multiculturalism', which means encouraging the maintenance of peripheral components of community cultures, such as folklore, food, ethnic customs etc. (in some cases, even adopting some of them; Arnold (1997), for instance, describes a 'culinary multiculturalism'). However, more central components, such as the language, are excluded from such acceptance. Hidalgo (1993) emphasises that we may think about culture as existing on at least three levels: the symbolic (values and beliefs), the behavioural (which refers to how we define our social roles, the language(s) we speak, the rituals we practice, and the forms of taken by our nonverbal communication), and the concrete (visible elements of culture). It is the last level that is usually interpreted as 'the culture' of ethnic groups. Multiculturalism is often associated with the bunch of cultures at their concrete level, yet foods, holidays and, games reveal little about how ethnic groups make meaning of the world. It seems to be hardly possible to create

the atmosphere of cooperation without the attempt to also understand also the behavioural and symbolic levels of other cultural backgrounds (Epstein, 1999).

The fifth type has been called separatist pluralism, which means a federation of dissimilar components. There is no hierarchical ordering of the components, all are equal in status and rights, and all are able to maintain and develop their own unique culture. However, they are not expected to interact and be influenced by each other.

The sixth type is that of an interactive multiculturalism, expressed by 'the stew metaphor' that implies that the strength of an organisation rests in the diversity of its people. 'The analogy to the stew is obvious: each of the ingredients offers something special to the total flavor while still retaining its individual identity' (Mitchell & Salsbury, 1996, p. 347). Interactive multiculturalism aims at a balance of shared and core values in a society that appreciates diversity; a society in which several cultures are in a state of vitality. These cultures are bound together by on-going processes of interaction and dialogue, through which they enrich each other and contribute to the core of shared values (see Smolicz, 1983).

The original Israeli or Hebrew identity and nationalism were invented and built as a part of a socio-political and monocultural system of control of the veteran pre-state Jewish community's political elites over the non-selective immigration that was flooding the country. This creation as a part of political-cultural domination and hegemony was perceived as a necessity that arose following the very fast, large in scope and depth, demographic and cultural changes which occurred in the collectivity. The Israeli identity contained some of the elements of the Jewish political and cultural communal identity in Palestine: its secularism, coercively applied Hebrew language and culture, and the aspiration to constitute a 'new muscular Jewish man' (both a warrior and a physical worker, in agriculture or construction) – the so-called 'pioneer'. In addition, a 'new species' was invented and glorified: the local version of the 'native', the Sabra. The traditional sociological research posed the question how to 'resocialise' the immigrants to be 'absorbed' into the Israeli society and how to 'Israelise' them as deeply and fast as possible. However, as it has been emphasised by Kimmerling (2000), the situation has changed, so that under the present circumstances the most proper question is the reverse: that is, how the immigrants are contributing to the changes presently occurring in the Israeli state and society.

Jakubowicz's (1989) description of Australian society's attitude towards immigrants and their cultures can serve as an example of a typical approach of thetwentieth-century liberal-democratic state towards cultural diversity. Initially, the state policy toward immigrants was that of assimilationism. It involved the development and implementation of strategies, which assumed the natural superiority of the dominant cultural practices of host society. This approach presumed that immigrants would become similar to the host

population in their speech, patterns of behaviour, lifestyle and expectations. In other words, the only legitimate cultural values and orientations were those of the statist culture, which was based on symbolic values and codes of the middle- and upper-middle class dominant population.

This apparently 'natural' process of individual adaptation to the dominant mores can be subverted, however, if the immigrants persist in their retention of historic 'ethnic cultural' practices. The experience of the first decades of immigration demonstrated the role that ethnic groups or organisations could play in mediating their survival in the new world. Despite the government's policy to break up immigrant communities, they formed and expanded. In such an environment, state officials moderated their belief in the natural wonder of assimilation as the immediate solvent for the cultural glue of immigrant clusters; they hoped that assimilation would win out in the long run through the 'next generation' – even if it were to be in the guise of integration.

The emergent policy of integrationism created a more sophisticated perspective, which recognised the importance of social groups as intermediaries between the individual and the wider society. While retaining their goal of the immigrants' assimilation, state agencies came to value ethnic groups – both informal networks of association and more formally constituted specific purpose organisations – for the support of the individual through the settlement process, which would include the controlling of a male resistance to social hierarchies and female desires for greater autonomy. If an immigrant would not or could not achieve this socially valued goal, then his/her children would be assimilated into the still culturally homogeneous society at large through a more concerted state action. The integration was remaining the main goal remained when the rhetoric began to change in the mid-1970s. There was resentment by many immigrants against the implications of domination and subordination submerged in the idea of their integration into the 'host' society. Over time this led to the replacement of the term with the perspectives developed out of sensitivity to the possibilities of the cultural pluralism.

However, the existence of a pluralistic cultural system is not automatically a multicultural situation, though, undoubtedly, it is a step towards it. Whereas such countries as Australia (see Jakubowicz, 1989) and Canada (see Moodley, 1983) have adopted the perspective described here as an 'interactive multiculturalism', Israel remains a state of 'multiple cultures without multiculturalism' (Kimmerling, 2000), or the state of 'separatist pluralism' in our terms. In Israel, the Knesset passed the reform law that sought to expedite the social integration of students of various ethnic groups on 2 July 1969 (see Gaziel, 1996, pp. 66–70), and only minor changes in the governmental diversity-management strategy took place during the past 30 years. The state and the veteran elites still held a monoculturalistic vision of society, so that the melting-pot mechanism is implicitly still working. The concept that 'the new immigrants should be absorbed according to the

assimilation model, on the one hand, and the ethnic additive model, on the other' still remains one of the basic assumptions of the Israeli educational system. 'The absorption policy treated the immigrants from Russia as if they constituted just one more ethnic group in the social fabric of Israel, their destiny to be the same as that of immigrants who had come to Israel 40–50 years previously. The system lacked the insight to recognise the fact that the immigrants arriving today cannot be similar to those who arrived four decades ago' (Horowitz, 1999, pp. 35–36). Although the Israeli establishment has an increased recognition of the Russian ethno-cultural group's right to have its own educational arrangements (i.e. the Mofet network), no use of these schools' unique experience is made by the Israeli educational system.

The development of the Mofet group for the advancement of education (as well as the outgrowth of resembling organizations, such as the Immigrant Scientists' Association of Israel, the Immigrant Engineers Union, and the networks of Russian-language newspapers, theatres and publishing houses) is one of the most significant examples of the consolidation trends among the Israeli ex-Soviet intelligentsia. Therefore, the sociological account of the consolidation trends among the teachers from the former Soviet Union in Israel should be an integral part of the broad analysis of the crystallisation and development of the Israeli Russian-speaking community.

In spite of all the differences between them, these numerous immigrants perceive themselves as belonging to one distinguishable category – the 'Russians', and this 'Russian-ness' is mainly due to how they have been classified and perceived within the Israeli society. As such, they have shaped themselves as a sub-society and thus contributed to the centrifugal tendencies of the Israeli state and its pluralistic-cultural character through the addition of new 'islands' to the civil society. Various initiatives have been encouraged, while the inclination to establish an autarky in many realms of the Israeli society has created ethnic and cultural boundaries around the 'Russian' identity. The opening of global frontiers, including the cultural and physical borders of the CIS; the creation of Russian communities (and not just the Jewish ones) in North America and the Western Europe; as well as the reciprocal ability to travel between these communities, have added a new and very wide circle to the international 'Russian-ism'. These trends contribute a lot to the crystallization of a separate Russian identity in Israel.

However, regarding the current situation in general, it should be mentioned that the preference for the Russian language does not automatically support the ghettoisation hypothesis. The Russian-language media apparently reflect the whole spectrum of approaches, from ghettoisation to full integration within the host society (Lissak & Leshem, 1995, pp. 28–32). Although the immigrants themselves acquire Hebrew rather fast, which improves their occupational perspectives and enriches their social life, the former Soviet Jewish intelligentsia's perception of Israeli dominant policy of 'language shift to Hebrew' is extremely negative, because

it reminds them of the Soviet policy of 'language shift to Russian' (Kheimets & Epstein, 2000).

Simultaneously, due to the successful suppressive Soviet language policy towards Yiddish and Hebrew, the contemporary cultural world of the Russian Jews has been mediated mostly in Russian. A certain unique type of self-identification which is neither purely Jewish nor purely Russian is predominate among the Russian Jewry (Nudelman, 1983); the self-identification of today's Russian Jewish intelligentsia is made up as a unique combination of Jewish ethnic and cultural legacy and the heritage of the Grand Russian Culture, which has been created by Jewish writers and poets as well. Therefore, Russian Jews tend to consider Russian a more important channel than Hebrew for the conveyance of their cultural values. In other words, Soviet Jewish intelligentsia is striving to retain a multilingual identity: while they do appreciate Hebrew and the cultural values it conveys, they share a strong feeling that their own cultural-linguistic identity is of a great value to them (Ben-Rafael et al, 1997; Kheimets & Epstein, 2000).

Having started at a position of marginality in the Israeli society, communal organisation largely at the informal level, and non-institutionalised community structure, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who arrived in Israel during the 1990s achieved significant consolidation at the centre of Israeli society within a period of less than 10 years. In the political and cultural realms the ex-Soviet Jewish intelligentsia is very quickly penetrating the centre of the Israeli society, where the rules of the game are set for the country's way of life, where its cultural core is shaped and constructed. This phenomenon has no parallel in the integration processes of any other immigrant group in the Israeli society (Leshem & Lissak, 1999, pp. 161–162).

By their very nature, and the human capital at their disposal, the Russian-speaking immigrants are very similar in their characteristics to the Israeli predominant middle class (Kimmerling, 2000), so that they have already begun to be rapidly absorbed into it. However, in order to keep belonging to the upper-middle class, the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are to provide their children with a proper education; in particular, they have to make sure that their children receive the matriculation certificate upon finishing the high school. If this does not happen, the adolescents' integration into the higher education institutions, which is the necessary condition for being associated with the upper-middle class, will be hampered.

However, in the 17-year-old age cohort, 69% of immigrant students do not possess a matriculation certificate, being thus 'blocked from further education' (see Sever & Epstein, 1999a). This category assembles three sub-categories of youngsters who are usually treated separately: the first one includes the 'overt dropouts', those who are not registered at any school; the second one consists of the 'latent dropouts', who are registered but do not participate in the schooling process; Noam et al (1998) have found that full-day absences from school (not due to illness) as frequently as once a week or

more are quite common among the immigrant students – the figures ranging from 16% in Netanya to 22% in Ofakim; and finally, those trapped in dead-end tracks that do not lead to a matriculation certificate belong to the third sub-category. What all three sub-categories have in common is that their representatives are blocked from further education in the future, so that a more prestigious labour market will be closed before them to a great extent.

Although the exact size of this category is not easy to establish, it is becoming evident that immigrants are highly over-represented in it. Contrary to a common belief that '"time" should be allowed "to do the job" and that level of adjustment increases linearly as a function of the length of time in the country' (Horowitz, 1999, p. 37), this over-representation is not a temporary phenomenon; the rate of those who are 'blocked from further education' among the immigrants is constantly increasing (see Sever & Epstein, 1999a). For this reason Mofet schools, which can guarantee to their graduates matriculation certificates are becoming very popular; their success being directly linked to the general education system's failure to meet the immigrants' needs. As it has been discovered by Horowitz (1999, p. 68), 'in the nineties, the situation of the immigrants is better in schools with a high proportion of immigrants: resources are exploited more effectively; the encounter with larger, more varied groups of immigrants avoids stereotyping; teachers devote more effort to motivate the students in their quest to succeed'. Paradoxically, sometimes characterised as non-integrative (due to the high proportion of new immigrants among their students), Mofet schools (contrary to the regular state educational system) succeed to provide their graduates with the 'entrance ticket' to full integration into the Israeli society and its labour market. Therefore, it is not the new immigrants' ethno-cultural separatism, but their willingness that their children will become the equal members of the Israeli society that makes them seek for a better schooling in such seemingly isolated educational networks.

The Mofet schools primarily serve those who show promise in areas such as maths, sciences, and physics – who are overwhelmingly male. A similar system needs to be set up that offers the same kind of intensive, advanced immersion in literature, humanities and the social sciences at younger ages, for students whose talents lie in this direction – and which will attract more girls than the current Mofet schools. Whether these promising outposts of academic excellence will continue to expand and survive into future generations depends on one key factor: whether or not both the full-time schools and the after-school tutoring programmes founded and maintained by the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are able to attract the attention of the general Israeli populations, and impress them enough to join in.

That is a most important question, and it depends on the cultural openness of the Israeli culture. Right now, the Israeli establishment has an increased openness for each ethnic group to have their street corner, even in

education. But at the same time there is very little interest or willingness by Israelis to taste what the other groups have to offer.

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