Multiculturalism in deeply divided societies: the Israeli case

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Abstract

With the start of the new millennium, internal conflicts are becoming more and more salient. One of the main sources for such conflicts are social and economic inequalities and in particular the increasing disparities between majority and minority groups. Even societies that had been successful in dealing with external conflicts and making a transition from war to peace have realized that this does not automatically resolve internal conflicts. At the contrary, the resolution of external conflicts may even sharpen internal ones. Therefore, pluralistic societies are increasingly facing the question of how to deal with internal issues of social inequalities and cultural diversity and, at the same time, to build a shared civility among its different national, ethnic, religious and social groups. These challenges have brought to the rise of multiculturalism as both an indicator for social structure and as a conception.

This paper deals with the state of multiculturalism in Israel in the context of Jewish–Arab relations. First we present a theoretical framework about the different approaches towards multiculturalism and the conditions for introducing multicultural education. The central part of this paper concentrates on the case of Israel. In this part we present the social structure of Israeli society and the characteristics of the official culture. We mainly focus on the Jewish–Arab division in Israel as the most salient division. Jewish–Arab relations are analyzed in connection with the broader socio-political context within Israeli society, on the one hand, and the Israel–Palestinian conflict, on the other. The impact of these factors on the education system are examined over time, as reflected in school curriculum in history. © 2002 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.
1. Theoretical framework

The “campaign” for multiculturalism has mainly developed in Western-democratic societies, where the central question has been: How is it possible to respond to the demands by minority groups for equality and the preservation of their cultural uniqueness, while giving primacy to the national interest and “national unity”?

This kind of policy question is associated mainly with countries that take in immigrants and that are seeking to find some balance between responding to the needs of immigrant groups to preserve their cultural uniqueness and the maintenance of reasonable social and political stability. Such an approach, though, overlooks the needs of indigenous groups or those groups that became involuntary minorities as a result of war or other conflicts. Also, the interests of the state and those of the minorities do not necessarily go hand in hand.

The aforementioned points have evoked continuing disputes between students of multiculturalism. In this sense, criticism of multiculturalism comes from both conservatives and the radical left. Conservatives argued that the rapid growth of diversity endangers the coherence and unity of society. On this basis, cultural diversity has been described as “the enemy from within” (Cummins & Sayers, 1996, p. 4).

Criticism of multiculturalism has been come also from the radical left. McCarthy (1988, p. 268) described multicultural education as “a body of thought which originates in the liberal pluralist approaches to education and society”. His main argument is that multicultural education attempts to “absorb Black radical demands for the restructuring of school knowledge and pedagogical practices”, shifting the attention to “sensitizing White teachers and school administrators to minority ‘differences’”. Consequently, “by focusing on sensitivity training and on individual differences, multicultural proponents typically skirt the very problem which multicultural education seeks to address: White Racism” (McCarthy, 1988, p. 269; cited by Sleeter, 1992, p. 3).

Olneck shares McCarthy’s attitude that multiculturalism in the United States is constructed around individual differences, “advances a political and fragmented model of culture, and presumes an attitudinal explanation of ethnic conflict”, instead of recognizing in some serious manner the identities and claims of groups qua groups (Olneck, 1990, p. 147). Olneck concludes that “both intercultural and multicultural education symbolically represent authoritative meanings having to do with components, organization, dynamics, and identity of American society”. As a result, these symbolic presentations function as instruments of legitimization and social control (Olneck, 1990, p. 66; see also Olneck, 1989). In addition, the experience of some countries (such as Britain) shows that the manner in which multicultural policies are implemented has created a dependency of minority groups, not only on the dominant group, but also on its own leaders, functionaries and organizations, leading to the development of patronage relationships (Vertovec, 1996).
While emphasizing the importance of criticism of multiculturalism, Sleeter argues that both critics and advocates often build their views by assuming that multicultural education is a fairly homogenous set of practices. In her words: “The field is often treated as static and homogeneous rather than dynamic and growing, with its own internal debates. This is important to recognize, because there is much within the field that radical educators should be working with rather than against” (Sleeter, 1992, p. 4).

Hence it might be useful to present the differences between various current approaches in the field of multiculturalism.

2. Approaches to multiculturalism

McLaren distinguishes four forms of multiculturalism: conservative, liberal, left-liberal, and critical-resistance multiculturalism. Conservative multiculturalism has been spearheaded mainly by members of the dominant white group in the United States, with the aim of controlling other ethnic groups and maintaining the status quo. This type of multiculturalism is a cover for an ideology of assimilation dominated by Whites, in which other ethnic groups are reduced to “add-ons” to the dominant culture (McLaren, 1995, p. 37).

Liberal multiculturalism recognizes the existence of inequality in the United States, but holds that this situation is the result of a lack of social and educational opportunities, not of cultural deprivation of disadvantaged blacks and Latinos. Hence the situation can be modified or reformed (McLaren, 1995, p. 40).

Left-liberal multiculturalism recognizes cultural differences and places an emphasis on equality. However, it tends to see the situation as divorced from social and historical constructions dominated by the majority. This type of multiculturalism treats difference “as an ‘essence’ that exists independently of history, culture, and power” (McLaren, 1995, pp. 40–41). The main emphasis here is on the personal, rather than the collective, level (McLaren, 1995).

Criticizing the conservative, liberal, and left-liberal form of multiculturalism, McLaren suggests the adoption of critical-resistance multiculturalism, based on both neo-Marxist and post-structural ideas (McLaren, 1995, p. 42). He emphasizes that the conservative and liberal emphasis on “sameness” and the left-liberal emphasis on difference are really a false opposition. Unlike these approaches, resistance multiculturalism refuses to see culture as “non-conflictual, harmonious and consensual” (McLaren, 1995).

One of the main principles of multiculturalism has been the emphasis on “diversity” and the right to be different. Here too, however, this principle is perceived differently by mainstream and critical multiculturalism. McLaren emphasized that cultural diversity as perceived by dominant groups is usually purged of its political and social content. It is a form of pluralism that attempts to overlook the crucial disputes in the wider society, mainly those that conflict with the interests of the dominant group. He reiterates that introducing simple cultural pluralism means “the celebration of difference”, “a simple-minded romanticism and
exoticization of the other”, with no investigation of the ways in which difference or diversity becomes constituted in oppressive asymmetrical power relations (McLaren, 1995, p. 19). In many educational circles in the United States, “curriculum for diversity” has become “fashionable” and “politically correct” (Grant, 1992, cited by Goodstein, 1994, p. 114).

Goodstein speaks about two kinds of cultural diversity: diversity as a “variety” and diversity as a “critical perspective”. The first adopts the literal definition of diversity as reflecting the existence of numerous cultures that contribute to the richness of the national or global community (Goodstein, 1994, p. 107). Scholars who adopt the critical view argue that curricula for cultural diversity should go beyond description and information about groups that have hitherto been ignored and excluded. According to this approach, students should be given the context for analyzing and interpreting these facts (Goodstein, 1994).

Mainstream multiculturalism, which merely highlights “otherness”, does not question the basic issue of the ideological hegemony of the dominant culture (Giroux, 1992, p. 18; cited by Schwartz, 1995). Furthermore, in this type of multiculturalism the term “diversity” and its contents are formulated by those who hold power. Thus disadvantaged groups, minorities, and women who are engaged in such discourse usually use a language without taking part in its formation (Giroux, 1997; Estrada & McLaren, 1993).

Critical multiculturalism does not view “diversity” per se as a goal. It argues, instead, that diversity should be framed “within a politics of cultural criticism and commitment to social justice” (Estrada & McLaren, 1993, p. 31). Hence “multiculturalism without a transformative political agenda can just be another form of accommodation to the larger society” (Estrada & McLaren, 1993).

What is the state of multiculturalism in Israel as reflected in the education system? What is the impact of being a deeply divided society on the Israeli Hebrew and Arab education systems?

3. The case of Israel

Israel may be an ideal example for the analysis of multiculturalism in deeply divided societies. Since it is a deeply divided country over national, ethnic, religious and other social rifts. The national division is, however, the deepest and the most salient. Jewish–Arab relations in Israel are the result of conflict and have developed under the shadow of this conflict. Palestinians in Israel are an indigenous minority, who formed the majority in Palestine (two thirds of the population) until 1947. After the 1948 war in which Arabs were defeated only 156,000 Palestinians remained in Israel and became Israeli citizens (Al-Haj & Rosenfeld, 1990). Today there are over one million Palestinian citizens in Israel, who form some 17% of the total population (SAI, 2000).

The status of Arabs in Israel, on the one hand, and Jewish–Arab relations, on the other, have been guided by three main factors: the democratic character of the state, the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state, and security considerations. When the three
principles come into conflict, the latter two gain the upper hand (Al-Haj & Yaniv, 1983; Rouhana, 1989; Smooha, 1990). The democratic character of Israel is stated in its Proclamation of Independence, basic laws, and institutions. Free, democratic, and proportional elections are conducted at both the local and national levels. This has given the Palestinians in Israel room for political organization and activity, through which they have sought to improve their status and bargain for the advancement of the Palestinian case. Their collective struggle for equality and peace has become an integral part of the citizenship and national components of their identity.

However, Israeli democracy is not always compatible with the ethno-national character of the state. Israel was founded by Jews to be the national home of the Jewish people. This vocation is reflected not only in the collective and formal identity of the state but also in its institutional structure, allocation of resources, spatial policies, and determination of national priorities (see Lustick, 1980; Smooha, 1990; Rouhana & Ghanem, 1998; Yiftachel, 1999).

The ongoing Arab–Israeli conflict has served to deepen the schism. The link between the Arabs in Israel and those in neighboring countries, and especially the Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel, Jewish Israelis tend to perceive the former as constituting a “hostile minority” and “security risk”. This perception has had a major influence on the relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel and on the official policy of surveillance and control (Lustick, 1980; Smooha, 1989; Al-Haj, 1996). In the shadow of the ongoing conflict, security has come to occupy the center of the political, social, and cultural experience and has legitimized the militaristic tendencies in Israel, at the expense of its civilian character. Also, it has legitimized the state’s control over the Palestinian minority (Carmi & Rosenfeld, 1992). Therefore, the principle of security considerations has also ethnocentric meaning, intimately associated with the Jewish-Zionist character of the state. As a matter of fact, this principle is aimed to serve the Jewish majority, whereas the Palestinian population is considered to be part of the “security risk”.

What has been the impact of this situation on school curriculum? In what follows we will concentrate on history curriculum since it may be the main subject reflecting the effect of the Israel–Arab conflict and the narrative that has been channeled by the state through education.

4. The history curriculum

The history curriculum in Arab and Jewish schools has gone through a number of stages since the founding of Israel. The first version was drawn up in the early 1950s, the second in the mid-1970s, and the third in the mid-1990s. In other words, roughly a generation separates each version from the next. Below we shall analyze the general objectives and operative goals of each version and examine the changes that have taken place in history curriculum over a period of about 50 years.

Until the end of the 1950s there was no special history curriculum in the Arab schools. As in other subjects, instruction depended on the teachers, each of whom
prepared a course book that contained all the material to be taught. Of course this book was subject to the supervision and control of the inspector, so that the latter could control the material (Bargout, 1991, p. 115).

Only in 1961 did the Ministry of Education begin to prepare Arabic version of history textbooks. In practice the books were translated from Hebrew to Arabic almost word for word. The only difference was the addition of a chapter on the history of the Arabs, which was nowhere to be found in Hebrew textbooks (Bargout, 1991, p. 116) (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jewish schools</th>
<th>Arab schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To present human culture as the fruit of the combined efforts of the Jewish people and other nations</td>
<td>1. To present human culture as the fruit of the combined efforts of all nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. To evaluate our part in the creation of this culture</td>
<td>A. To evaluate the part of the Jewish people, the Arab nation, and other nations in the creation of this culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. To reinforce recognition of human cooperation</td>
<td>B. The same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. To develop a desire for peace and goodwill</td>
<td>C. The same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To establish a Jewish national consciousness and strengthen the sense of the shared national vocation</td>
<td>2. No parallel section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. To plant in students’ heart a love of the Jewish people throughout the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. To strengthen their spiritual experience within the Jewish people as a whole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To inculcate a recognition of the importance of the State of Israel as a means to guarantee the biological and historical existence of the Jewish people</td>
<td>3. To inculcate a recognition of the importance of the State of Israel to the Jewish people through the generations and to establish a feeling of the shared destiny of the two peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. To develop individual responsibility for the development of the state</td>
<td>A. The same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. To create a willingness to serve the state in all ways</td>
<td>B. The same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To mold students’ character in the light of the endeavors of the great figures of the nation and the world</td>
<td>4. To mold students’ character in the light of the endeavors of the great figure of the world and particularly great Jews and Arabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To train and accustom students to examine social problems, draw conclusions from them, and attempt to solve them by means of independent critical thinking</td>
<td>5. The same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the objectives of the teaching of history in Jewish and Arab schools reveals consistency in everything associated with the goals mentioned above. Whereas in the Jewish schools the emphasis is on the Jewish national theme, the curricula for Arab students ignore the Arab national theme. Arab students learn “that human culture is the fruit of the combined endeavors of all peoples of the world”, whereas Jewish students learn that the Jewish people played a central role in shaping human culture. Values of Arab–Jewish coexistence, with the accent on the superiority of the Jews, are inculcated in Arab students by the repeated emphasis on the shared role played by Jews and Arabs in history and the shared destiny of the two peoples. Values of coexistence are not conveyed to Jewish students, for whom the Arabs as a people are included in the term “other nations”. What is more, Arab students are expected to understand the importance of the State of Israel to the Jewish people, and not to Jews and Arabs in the same degree.

The asymmetry between Arab schools and Jewish schools is also reflected in the allocation of teaching hours in the two streams for world history, Arab history, and Jewish history.

Table 2 shows that world history occupies about 60% of the curriculum in both Arab and Jewish schools. Other historical topics are divided quite asymmetrically. Whereas Jewish schools devote about 40% of their teaching hours in history to Jewish history, Arab schools devote only half this to Arab history. What is more, whereas Arab students devote about 20% of their history classes to Jewish and Zionist history, Jewish students are exposed in less than 2% of their history studies to parallel Arab topics (based on Al-Haj, 1996, pp. 104–106).

It should be indicated that over time the Arabs of Israel have experienced an accelerated process of politicization and their national identity and identification have been strengthened (Al-Haj, 1995). This tendency has not passed over Arab schools, and especially not the younger generation in high school. Functionaries of the Ministry of Education defined this tendency as worrisome and anti-Israeli (Zo Haderekh, 14 February 1971). A study by the sociologist Yohanan Peres confirmed these fears (Ha’aretz, 21 February 1971). His study found that the absence of any national content in the curricula for Arab schools was likely to be, at least in part, an agent responsible for the alienation that Arab youth felt toward the state (Ha’aretz, 21 February 1971).

Table 2
Percent of all history hours devoted to world history, Jewish history, and Arab history in Jewish and Arab high schools (curriculum drafted in the 1950s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Arab schools</th>
<th>Jewish schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World history</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish history</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab history</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Miari (1975).
In 1971 the Ministry of Education set up a special committee under the then-deputy minister, Aharon Yadlin, to draft objectives for Arab education. The committee submitted a document with general recommendations about education for Arabs. These recommendations were controversial and roundly criticized by Arab public figures and academics (Mari, 1978, p. 58). As a result, the Ministry of Education set up another committee, headed by Dr. Mati Peled, which for the first time included Arab representatives (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1975).

The report of the Peled committee proposed a significant change in two key areas: for the first time, distinct objectives were formulated for education for Arabs, Jews, and Druze. The proposed objectives of Arab education included a statement that both Jews and Arabs considered to be far-reaching. It ran as follows: “The objective of public education for the Arab sector in Israel is to ground education on the foundations of Arab culture; the achievements of science; the aspiration for peace between Israel and its neighbors; and love for the land that is shared by all its citizens and loyalty to the state of Israel” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1975, p. 14).

But this achievement evaporated when the Ministry of Education, in an updated document published on September 29, 1976, deleted the words “shared by all its citizens” and defined the objective as simply “love for the land” (Ministry of Education, 1977). By contrast, the Ministry approved the objectives drafted for Jewish schools without modification.

The picture that emerges is thus that, even after the revision of the objectives proposed by the Peled committee, Jewish students are to love of Israel as their homeland and the state of the Jewish people, while Arab students are to internalize the message that they are not full citizens but junior partners in Israeli society and must obey the rules set by the Jewish majority and consistent with the basic ideology of the state (Al-Haj, 1996).

The lack of balance and symmetry in the official objectives proposed for Arabs and Jews was criticized (Sarsour, 1981; Nakhleh, 1977; Mari, 1978; Amareh & Mari, 1999). The core of this criticism was that the proposed objectives included no recognition, overt or indirect, of the fact that the Arabs in Israel constitute a national minority and are an inseparable part of the Palestinian people. What is more, the goals emphasized the aspiration for peace only in Arab schools. The goals drafted for Jewish schools made no mention of the aspiration for peace or Jewish–Arab coexistence (Sarsour, 1981).

These facts were reflected in the second version of the history curriculum for Arab schools, which went into effect in the early 1980s. In its statement of objectives this curriculum made a distinction between information and values. In addition to study of the “historical facts”, information also includes the development of an analytical approach and the ability to analyze social phenomenon in the present and past (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1982, pp. 2–3).

With regard to values, the following objectives were defined:

1. To develop skills to judge historical events on the basis of general human values
2. To impress a spirit of tolerance and understanding of the feelings, tradition, and way of life of other people and other nations

3. To develop a feeling of identification with the Arab nation and its culture and with the State of Israel and all its inhabitants.

The main change in the new history curriculum for Arab schools was the reference to identification with the Arab nation as a central objective. But the new version, too, is vague, cautiously stated, and far from being parallel to the objectives set for the teaching of history in Jewish schools.

Identification with the Arab nation is not necessarily associated with an intensification of national consciousness. What is more, the Arab nation is mentioned in general terms, with no reference to the Palestinian people.

It should be noted that the revised high-school curriculum emphasizes Jewish–Arab coexistence, including an understanding and appreciation of the Jewish people’s contribution to human culture and advancement. The curriculum for Jewish schools does not at present incorporate parallel objectives. Only the curriculum for Arabs mentions the principle of cooperation and the joint efforts of Arabs and Jews in building a state for all its citizens (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1982, pp. 5–6).

The marginal nature of Arab history, in general, and of Palestinian history, in particular, is even more conspicuous if one analyzes the allocation of teaching hours by units. The curriculum includes 25 units, of which only four are required and included on the matriculation exams; all the rest are optional (Table 3).

In practice, there were no substantial modifications in the new history curriculum as compared to the old one. The section devoted to Jewish history in the required units even increased slightly, from 20.2% to 22.0%. Modern Palestinian history and the annals of the Arab national movement are optional units. Students who do not take the expanded history curriculum have no chance of studying anything related to the Arab–Israeli conflict and relations between Israel and the Palestinians. World history constitutes the lion’s share of the required units, because it is included in the units on the history of the 20th century and the contemporary Middle East.

Table 3
Required units in the history curriculum for Arab and Jewish schools, according to the curriculum drafted in the 1970s (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arab schools</th>
<th>Jewish schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab and Muslim history</td>
<td>Modern Jewish history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Jewish history</td>
<td>History of Zionism, history of the rebirth of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Middle Eastern history</td>
<td>The Arab–Israeli conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the 20th century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. The new history curriculum, late 1990s

The new history curriculum for junior high schools in the Jewish sector was published in 1998; an experimental history curriculum for senior high schools in the Arab sector was published in 1999.

Even though the two stages are not parallel, it is possible to remain faithful to the comparative perspective, because the analysis will focus on the overarching declared goals that guide the curricula, in which there is no significant difference between junior and senior high school.

This fact is conspicuous in the general guidelines, which state explicitly that the two curricula are complementary: the curriculum for junior high school is the stage of studying chronology, while the curriculum for senior high school is the stage of going deeper (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 6).

The chapter that treats of the general objectives of the teaching of history includes the following statement: “The abundance of past events and the sources that deal with them make it impossible to become familiar with all of history. Historical study is selective by its very nature, in accordance with various criteria” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 9). This is an important statement and reflects the familiar situation of “selective information” that is followed in every educational system. It is true that the authors of the curriculum do not append clarifications to their statement, thereby leaving a number of key points without defined answers: What is the basis for selection in the curriculum under discussion? What standards are used to determine what information should and should not be conveyed to pupils? And what precisely are the “various criteria” referred to, which in the final analysis set the goals and content of the study of history in Arab and Jewish schools?

The second significant section is Section 4, which speaks of the specific central objective of the study of history: “In the teaching of history we must provide the pupils with a knowledge and understanding of Jewish history and human history, with an emphasis on the distinctive course of the Jewish people” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 9).

This section in fact expresses continuity, rather than change, in the history curriculum. Similar to the situation in the 1950s, the enhancement of Jewish national awareness is the central axis of the history curriculum.

There is no mention of exposing Jewish pupils to the rival narrative of the Palestinian national movement or that of pan-Arab nationalism. This goal is submerged into the general objective of familiarity with human history.

The other three sections are general and relate to pedagogical principles relevant to the study of history, such as the need to emphasize the variety in the lives of society and culture, learning about earlier generations, the need for a perspective on the trends in human development, and the importance of seeing the present as a process and the outcome of developments with many inputs (Ministry of Education, 1998, pp. 9–10).

The goals associated with information are conventional and also appeared in the previous version of the history curriculum, published, as noted, in the early 1980s.
Under the heading of values, however, there is something new, although not far-reaching. The first two sections refer to very important educational values, such as fostering judgment of historical events on the basis of humane and ethical values, and fostering understanding and toleration of the feelings, traditions, and ways of life of other peoples and nations. But having stated these liberal generalities the curriculum in practice fails to relate to a cardinal point—the form in which the Arab–Israeli and Israel–Palestinian conflict and the various and contradictory narratives about this conflict are to be considered.

In addition, because the history curriculum was drafted after the beginning of the peace process in the region, and especially the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians and the peace treaty with Jordan one might have expected that it would relate to the central question: What is the role of the history curriculum in a transition from conflict to peace? What new themes, both information and values, should reflect the historic change taking place in the region?

These questions are also left unanswered in the enumeration of the general goals, which relate to information, the acquisition of skills, types of historical concepts, analysis of social phenomena, development of historical thinking, fostering judgment of historical events, fostering understanding and tolerance and fostering an identification with the people and the state.

In fact, the only innovation with regard to values is in the goals for Arab schools: “Fostering a sense of affiliation with the Palestinian-Arab people and the Arab people on one hand, and with the State of Israel and its citizens on the other” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1999, pp. 8–9).

This statement of about fostering a sense of affiliation with the Palestinian-Arab people appears for the first time as a central objective of the history curriculum in Arab schools. In the previous curriculum the goals related, as stated, to developing “a feeling of identification with the Arab nation and its culture” with no specific reference to the Palestinian people.

It may be assumed that this innovation reflects the change that took place in the attitudes of the Israeli public in general, and Israeli policy-makers in particular, with regard to the Palestinian people and Palestinian identity. The recognition of the PLO by the government of Israel and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the territories increased the legitimacy in Jewish eyes of the Palestinian identity and the identification with it of the Arabs in Israel.

Of course the process is still in its infancy and we are far from a sweeping legitimization of the Palestinian identity for the Israeli public, mainly after the deterioration in the peace process since the events that started in October 2000 (called by the Palestinians, the Second Intifada—the first was between 1987 and 1992). It is, however, reasonable to assume that this identity is not viewed as threatening, at least not to the same extent as it was before the beginning of the peace process. What is more, manifestations of Palestinian national identification among the Arabs in Israel, such as flying the Palestinian flag, formerly against the law, are today legal and widespread.

It is true that “fostering a sense of affiliation with the Palestinian Arab people” is accompanied by fostering a sense of affiliation “with the State of Israel and its
citizens on the other”, with no reference to the nature of the State of Israel and the status of its Arab citizens. What is more, one of the key goals in the curriculum for Jewish schools is “recognition of the role of the state in the life of society and fostering a desire for active participation in shaping its destiny” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 12). This section, which is missing from the curriculum for Arab schools, aims at perpetuating the status quo that internalizes the perception by Jewish students that Israel is a Jewish state, and not a civil state shared by Jews and Arabs. Unlike Jewish students, Arab students are not called on to participate actively in shaping the destiny of the state and to feel full members thereof.

Consciously or unconsciously, then, Arab students are called on to “enhance the sense of belonging … to the state of Israel and its Israeli citizens” as a Jewish state and not as a bi-national state, a multicultural democracy or the state of all its citizens.

Noteworthy is the section about values. In both Arab and Jewish schools the general clauses are phrase in a balanced fashion and refer to the need “to foster humane ethical values to permit judgment of historical events, fostering critical thinking and avoiding dogmatism, fostering recognition of the reciprocal influences among peoples, and evaluation of individuals according to their actions and not their affiliation”. With regard to knowledge and understanding of different historical narratives, both curricula emphasize the following goals: “Fostering the ability to understand the position of the other from the other’s point of view and fostering the recognition that there are other points of view (and not just one) that can be accepted with regard to national problems too (Hebrew curriculum, p. 12; Arabic curriculum, p. 8).

If we consider the translation of the general principles to the specific national context, however, we receive an asymmetric picture with different standards for Jews and Arabs. In Arab schools, the general principles are applied meticulously and with a broad multicultural perspective. The curriculum presents the two narratives, the Jewish-Zionist and the Arab-Palestinian-Muslim, in the same breath. Students are required to know about the place of Palestine in the Palestinian-Arab and Islamic consciousness vis-à-vis the place of the Land of Israel in the history and consciousness of the Jewish people.

A comparison of the goals prescribed for Arab schools and for Jewish schools reveals that the principle of fostering an ability to understand the other’s position and get to know other points of view of the same events and national problems is applied in Arab schools. In Jewish schools, however, what is studied is a one-sided picture in which the main weight is Jewish-nationalist and the historical perspective is based on learning about the distinctiveness of the Jewish people “with regard to its essence and destiny”.

What is more, whereas in Jewish schools the specific goals that relate to fostering a sense of identification with the Jewish people emphasize the sentimental element and are built on knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the most important historical figures in its history, the specific goals that translate the general goals of enhancing the sense of affiliation of Arab students with the Palestinian people and Arab nation are presented in a dry factual manner that emphasizes knowledge only
and does not refer to the attitudes that are to be cultivated as part of the educational process.

6. Conclusions

This paper has dealt with multiculturalism in deeply divided societies, through the examination of the Israeli case. More in particular, Jewish–Arab relations in Israel were examined along with the education system. For this purpose, we traced the history curriculum in Arab and Jewish schools in Israel over the course of about 50 years. The analysis has been based on a comparison of the goals that serve as guidelines for the two curricula and the specific content of each curriculum. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the history curriculum, which is one manifestation of the educational system, reflects the dominant ethno-national culture that is controlled by the Jewish majority. The asymmetrical relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel is manifested in the educational and cultural system as well. Throughout the years of Israel’s existence the message that has been internalized by Jewish students is that Israel is a Jewish state and for Jews; there has been no attempt to foster a civic culture in which the Arab citizens are a separate but equal component. On the other hand, Arab students are called on to accept this situation of identification with the state, although its nature remains vague and, unlike Jewish students, they are not called on to play an active role in it.

A comparison of the successive editions of the curricula reveals a number of changes in both the general goals and specific goals, especially in Arab schools— from a curriculum quite devoid of Arab national content in the 1950s, to one that refers to fostering identification with the Arab nation in the 1970s, and finally to identification with the Arab nation and Palestinian people in the 1990s. Of course these goals are presented in a balanced fashion that in the same breath emphasizes the goal of fostering affiliation with the state of Israel and its citizens, as stated, with no reference to the nature of the state.

The Arab–Israeli and Israeli–Palestinian conflict that stands at the center of the curriculum for Jewish schools is presented in a one-way fashion that corresponds to the Jewish-Zionist narrative, with no expression of the Palestinian or pan-Arab narrative. By contrast, the history curriculum for Arab schools refers to the conflict in a balanced fashion with a dry presentation of the historical facts from the points of view of the Jewish people and of the Palestinian-Arab people.

From the theoretical aspect, the curriculum for Jewish schools is still very far from multicultural education, even from the positivist-establishment perspective. The use of phrases like “critical thinking”, “non-dogmatism”, and the like is thus purely declarative and vanishes completely in the value-oriented part of the curriculum in Jewish schools. The curriculum in Arab schools, by contrast, reflects a multicultural perspective. However, this kind of “multiculturalism” is an imposed one, where the minority has nothing to say in terms of its contents: neither regarding its own curriculum, nor regarding that of the majority.
Over time, no attempt, whatsoever, has been made to develop an all-encompassing multicultural concept through the education system in Israel. In this sense, the start of the peace process in the 1990s has not changed the existing situation. Despite slight changes in the history curriculum for Arab schools, in Hebrew schools the main line of ethnocentric education just continued.

We may conclude, therefore, that the school curriculum reflects the power system that exists in the wider society. The education system, in this sense, serves as a mechanism of control and as a tool for perpetuating the status quo and legitimizing the dominant ideology. Thus, deeply divided societies, especially those under conflict, usually produce a deeply divided curriculum. Under these circumstances, the asymmetric, majority–minority relations are also reflected in the education system. Hence, school curriculum serves to furnish one-sided “co-existence”, based on the superiority of the majority and the internalizing of the minority for its inferior status. Such kind of curriculum is far from leading to any model of multiculturalism, or intercultural relations that might form a basis for shared civility. It rather leads to the widening of cultural gaps and the deepening of group alienation.

References


Zo Haderekh, 14 February 1971 (Hebrew).