

Potential and Limitations of Multicultural Education in Conflict-Ridden Areas: Bilingual Palestinian-Jewish Schools in Israel

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In recent years, a new integrative bilingual multicultural educational initiative has been developed in Israel. Its main purpose is to offer dignity and equality to the two Israeli groups who have for the last 100 years denied each other's humanity: Palestinians and Jews. The research examines this attempt at encouraging each group to take pride in their own cultural heritage while respecting and experiencing the heritage of the other. Through the ethnographic analysis of data gathered at four ceremonial events held at two of the three currently functioning integrated schools in Israel, the study inquires into the potential of school ritual events to support this endeavor. Probing into the ways in which these efforts may shape individual and group perspectives and help to overcome intergroup tensions and conflict, I expect this research to shed some light on the potential and limitations of multicultural education in conflict ridden areas. In focusing on the treatment of special ceremonial events in these schools I wish to explore the fruit of multicultural educational approaches and to question how these are shaped by contextual conditions specific to conflict-ridden areas. If multicultural education is to alleviate interethnic tension, it must offer options to refashion teachers', parents', and students' understandings of cultural borders and their positions and relations within the different cultural arenas.

For more than 50 years, America has produced and exported multicultural educational perspectives. The central aim of the multicultural effort has been to overcome racial/ethnic tensions and conflicts stemming from and nurtured by the traditional Eurocentric foundations of existent educational structures. The effort has involved a revision of all aspects of school functioning. It necessitated reforming teacher education and teaching practices as well as curricula and the uncovering and reforming of hidden curricular by-products. How much has been achieved in America and in

Europe by way of these reforms is yet unclear (McLoyd, 1990; Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

The little that is known of the impact of multicultural educational reform is not always encouraging (Freeman, 2000; Hanna, 1994; Lustig, 1997). Multiculturalism, though well on its way to becoming a well-established discipline in the field of education, sustained by a wide variety of theoretical knowledge, practical guidelines, and curricula (Banks, 1995; Bennette, 1990; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), has seen its fair share of debate and criticism. Multicultural reform has been seen as endangering national/social cohesion and supporting rather shallow intellectual perspectives (Bloom, 1987; D'Souza, 1992; Ravitch, 1990; Schlesinger, 1991) and has been criticized for some of its underlying assumptions and its particular focus on and conceptualization of identity and culture (Bekerman, 2003a; Hoffman, 1996; Urciuoli, 1999). Coming from a variety of theoretical perspectives, these critiques point to the fact that multicultural education, in spite of its relatively long history, is still ill-defined and lacking in clarity regarding both its disciplinary boundaries and the possible contextual influences on its application. It has become apparent that true multiculturalism cannot be affected simply by the addition of more culture(s) (Arvizu & Saravia-Shore, 1990). Superficial understandings of multiculturalism risk sustaining monocultural ideological perspectives while ignoring critical approaches which would uncover the underlying assumptions that sustain it (Cardinale, Carnoy, & Stein, 1999; Hoffman, 1996; Wallace, 1993). Such uncritical applications of multiculturalism risk aggravating the interethnic tension they hoped to alleviate. Eldering (1996) argues that a proper understanding of multiculturalism in a society implies distinguishing between dimensions related to objective reality, ideology, official policies, and processes of practical implementation. Disregard for these dimensions might put us in a situation in which even well-intentioned multicultural initiatives end up delivering shallow renditions of an otherwise worthwhile educational endeavor (Lustig, 1997).

The emergent realization in multicultural research of the importance of bilingualism in offering equal educational opportunities to minority groups has focused growing attention on common interests (Banks, 1995). Because of rapid social diversification, bilingual education has in recent decades played an increasingly important role in western countries. Like multicultural education, bilingual education has been acknowledged as having the potential to help overcome a wide variety of societal and cultural tensions (Slavin & Cooper, 1999) though it still remains a controversial and frequently misunderstood field. Confusion is felt regarding the goals and means of bilingual education and eliciting its target populations (Minami & Ovando, 1995; Moran & Hakuta, 1995).

Hornberger (1991) distinguishes between three basic models of bilingual education: transitional, maintenance, and enrichment. The transitional model sees language as a problem that is overcome the moment the necessary skills for the use of the dominant language are learned. The maintenance model supports the right of minorities to sustain their original language while gaining literacy in the dominant language. The enrichment model understands language to be a resource of added value. Bilingual programs can be classified on a continuum between weak and strong bilingualism with additive bilingual approaches emphasizing symmetry between both languages in all aspects of instruction (Garcia, 1997). The continua of biliteracy suggested by Hornberger (2002) situates biliteracy development in relation to the contexts, media, and content in and through which it develops and provides a heuristic for addressing the unequal balance of power across languages and literacies. In addition to these different perspectives on bilingual education, different contextual constraints have variously shaped the aims of bilingual initiatives.

For the most part it seems that all dual-language programs, also referred to as two-way bilingual, two-way immersion, and bilingual immersion, would in one way or another agree with Skutnabb-Kangas and Garcia's assessment (1995) of the three main benefits of an effective bilingual educational project: (1) a high level of multilingualism, (2) equal opportunity for academic achievement, and (3) a strong, positive multilingual and multicultural identity including positive attitudes toward self and others. Recent evaluations show that when successfully implemented, dual bilingual programs progressively achieve these goals (Crawford, 1997).

Valdes (1997) and Christian (1996) have shown how general variations, and particularly those related to the quality of instruction of the minority language, greatly influence the success of the bilingual program. Language planning researchers emphasize the need to consider how power relations between speakers of the target languages at school, in the local community, and throughout the larger society, influence the ways that a language plan functions in a particular context (Paulston, 1994; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Valdes, 1997). The importance of intergroup and power relations in bilingual programs to the reproduction or overcoming of the conditions that subordinate language minority students and their communities has also been emphasized (Valdes, 1997).

Hornberger (2000) explores the ideological paradox inherent in the use of the terms *intercultural* and *bilingual* when transforming and standardizing education into a diversifying force and in constructing a national identity that is also multilingual and multicultural. Obeng (2000) points at the influence of language attitudes—encompassing a wide spectrum of values, beliefs, and emotions—on participants' perspectives toward languages in general, and toward bilingual educational initiatives in particular. Though

there are no simple models of language use that can adequately explain or predict outcomes in language educational initiatives in complex socio-political economical environments (Burnaby & Mackenzie, 2002), it is becoming increasingly apparent that, like in all multicultural initiatives, contextual constraints greatly influence outcomes.

The present study, based on ethnographic data gathered at two bilingual Palestinian-Jewish¹ schools in Israel, examines the potential of these institutions' educational practices to further multicultural goals in conflict-ridden sociopolitical contexts, while also attending to some of the underlying assumptions on which these specific multicultural initiatives are based.

Before bringing this introduction to an end, I want to make mention of my Jewish background. Such mention is made out of a sensibility toward the multiple theoretical perspectives that, in the last decades of the 20th century, have pointed at the relevance of the researcher's sociocultural and historical trajectories in the performance of any research activity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hannaford, 1996; Haraway, 1991). This sensibility should be doubled in the case of this study, which is conducted in an area engaged in one of the most intractable and intense conflicts of modern times (Bar-Tal, 2000). Indeed ethnic, national, and religious identities operate in the lives of people by connecting them with some individuals and dividing them from others (Appiah & Gates, 1995). Still, individuals negotiate their identities while constituting and being constituted by them (Harre & Gillett, 1995; Sampson, 1993). Though in present conditions my Jewishness might be a given, I want to believe that throughout my many years of life experiences and theoretical training in a variety of sociohistorical perspectives, I have come to at least be able to sustain a critical perspective on myself and the circumstances of my research. Indeed this has never been an easy task; suspicion (self and other's) has been everywhere (Bekerman, 2003b). Thus, in addition to my own reflective and critical position, I have made sure throughout the research process to be assisted by figures (i.e., Palestinian research assistants) fully identified with those groups who might not have an initial trust in my ethnic/national/cultural presence and have offered all interested the option to express themselves in the presence of these or other figures and the language of their choice, be it Arabic or Hebrew.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on an analysis of data collected, using a variety of ethnographic methods, during a 2-year research effort conducted from August of 1999 to July of 2001. During the course of the research, 95 interviews were conducted with parents—most of them in individual

sessions lasting approximately 1 hour each, and the rest in small group meetings, which lasted approximately 90 minutes each. All staff members—12 teachers, administrative staff, and principals—were interviewed two or three times during the 2-year period. I also talked with the children, either in brief semistructured individual interviews or in more informal circumstances, mostly during recess. Interviews with Palestinian parents, teachers, and pupils were conducted in Hebrew or Arabic, according to the preference of the interviewee. All interviews were conducted according to qualitative ethnographic principles (Seidman, 1991; Spradley, 1979); the interviewer focused on a number of topics that seemed relevant to the study but allowed subjects to tell their stories without limiting the interview to a fixed agenda. I recorded all 28 meetings of the School Steering Committee (a consulting body comprising parents, teachers, and representatives from the NGO, which established the schools) during the 2 years of research. During 60 days of school activities, I conducted both systematic as well as informal observations during class and recess and attended all national and religious ceremonial events. The qualitative data were carefully analyzed, looking for patterns and thematic issues of relevance, which were then coded so as to allow for further analysis.

Though large amounts of data, related to a variety of interactional, curricular, and pedagogical issues, were collected throughout my 2-year research period, this study reports almost exclusively on the observations gathered during the ceremonial events, complemented by references to the interviews conducted with parents and teachers regarding these topics.²

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

The State of Israel is as much a product of an invented tradition (Hobsbawm, 1983) as any other modern nation-state. As such, it has institutionalized itself through the establishment of public education, the standardization of law, and the development of a secular equivalent to church and by the invention of public ceremonies and the production of public monuments, which mold a unifying historical narrative (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999; Gellner, 1997; Handelman, 1990).

Israel, since its inception (and as is clearly stated in its Declaration of Independence) has been committed to full political and social equality for all its citizens irrespective of their religion or ethnic affiliation. Still, even the Israeli government agrees that it has not been fully successful in implementing this ideal and has, for the most part, implemented segregationist policies toward its non-Jewish minorities, policies which only recently are starting to be challenged in the courts of justice (Gavison, 2000).

These separatist policies were, for the most part, ad hoc arrangements, products of the military emergencies which accompanied Israel's development from the beginning of the Zionist colonizing process more than 100 ago. Though the outcomes are varied, they are most visible in residential and educational arrangements, which are, but for a few exceptions, fully separated for both the Palestinian and the Jewish communities (Rouhana, 1997).

The Palestinian presence and its awakening to national consciousness have problematized the seemingly natural construct of the Israeli nation. The Jewish-Palestinian conflict remains perhaps the most potentially explosive of conflicts in Israel, placing the Jewish majority (80% of the population) and the Palestinian (primarily Moslem) minority (20%) at perpetual odds. The two peoples have been plagued with tragedy and suffering, and political efforts to overcome their conflict have been unsuccessful to date. Paraphrasing Said (1994, p. 14) it could be said that we are dealing with "two asymmetrical communities of *symmetrical* fear"; though structurally there is a sharp asymmetry between the two communities, they each believe that they have a monopoly on the objective truth regarding the conflict and the identity of the villain in it, which undermines possibilities for conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 1990, 1998).

Abu-Nimer (1999) defines the Palestinian-Jewish conflict in Israel as being predicated on three main factors. The first relates to the absence, since 1948, of a political framework for self-determination of the Palestinian people. The second concerns social, economic, and political inequalities that are products of Israel's definition as a Jewish State. Last is the traditional and nonindustrial social and cultural structure of Palestinian society, as opposed to Israel's Western-type social and cultural structure.

For the most part, Israel as an ethnic democracy (Smootha, 1996) has not welcomed the active participation in political, cultural, or social spheres of any other than its legitimate invented community (Anderson, 1991) of Jews. Israeli Palestinians, though officially offered full rights as citizens, have chronically suffered as a putatively hostile minority, with little political representation and a debilitated social, economic, and educational infrastructure (Ghanem, 1998). In short, the Palestinian Israeli population is geographically segregated and institutionally and legally discriminated against (Al-Haj, 1995; Kretzmer, 1992).

Though riddled with conflict and social cleavages, Israel must attempt to meet the often competing requirements of a multiethnic national religious society. These sociopolitical conflicts are reflected in the Israeli educational system, which is divided into separate educational sectors: nonreligious Jewish, Religious National Jewish, Orthodox Jewish, and Arab, all under the umbrella of the Israeli Ministry of Education (Sprinzak, Segev, Bar, & Levi-Mazloum, 2001). In spite of the structural constraints (Kretzmer, 1990)—that is, the state's ethno-exclusive superstructure achieved through

the exclusive promotion of the Jewish collective, exclusionary immigrant laws, and use of State lands, which are reflected also in the educational system—great progress has been made by the Palestinian population of Israel. There has been a steady growth in literacy, reaching over the 90% at present (Israel, 1995). Still, when compared to the Jewish school system, great discrepancies are found regarding physical facilities, teacher qualifications, numbers of dropouts, and other indices of special services and attendance rates (Rouhana, 1997). For example for the years 1991–1992 only 64.4% of high school-age Palestinian youth attended schools compared to 89.4% in the Jewish population. From a curricular perspective, rather little attention is paid in Palestinian-Israeli schools to Palestinian history and culture, while Palestinian students learn Zionist and Jewish history and Jewish literary studies (Rouhana, 1997).

Last it is worth mentioning some features of the Palestinian educational system in Israel that reflect the unique sociocultural background of this population (Abu-Nimer, 1999). Among these there are an authoritarian model of student-teacher relationships, a very traditional frontal pedagogical approach and, for teachers, a sense of conflict regarding their loyalty toward their employer, the Ministry of Education, versus their loyalty toward their Palestinian community. The last follows from the curricular constraints imposed on the Palestinian educational system, which is not allowed the freedom to choose its own narratives in central issues related to cultural national trajectories. The security measures that were traditionally used by Israeli officialdom to restrict teacher appointments were canceled only in 1994 (Kretzmer, 1990; Rouhana, 1997). The Arab educational system in Israel lacks the preferential support given by the government to the Jewish educational system, thus creating an enormous gap that leaves the Arab educational system decades behind the Jewish one.

The rather optimistic political outlook following the Oslo Accords, which characterized the atmosphere in which the bilingual schools were created, has radically changed in the wake of several more recent events. The events of *Yom Ha'Adama* (Day of the Land commemorating six Palestinian Israelis who were killed by the police in 1976 while protesting the confiscation of Palestinian lands by the Israeli Government) and those that followed Ariel Sharon's visit to the El-Aksa Mosque area on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in October 2000, provoked an outburst of violence throughout the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority as well as mass demonstrations by Palestinian Israelis in the northern area of Israel (the last ending with the killing of 13 Israeli Palestinians in violent clashes that took place with Israeli police forces). These events shattered the already fragile Palestinian-Jewish relations within Israel and shocked the populations of both schools. That, despite these events and persistent violence, the schools under study are still functioning and have entered their 4th year of

activity, is a testimony to the ongoing efforts their constitutive communities have invested in keeping their dreams alive under extremely difficult circumstances.

THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Considering the sociopolitical context in Israel, the idea of creating Palestinian-Jewish coeducation is, in and of itself, a daring enterprise. The Center for Bilingual Education in Israel (CBE) was established in 1997 with the aim of initiating and fostering egalitarian Arab-Jewish cooperation in education, mainly through the development of bilingual and multicultural coeducational institutions (Bekerman & Horenczyk, in press). In 1998 the Center established two schools guided by these principles, one in Jerusalem and the other in the Upper Galilee. This initiative was not the first attempt at bilingual, desegregated education in Israel. In the last decade, the Neveh Shalom elementary school, located in a small Palestinian-Jewish settlement in the vicinity of Jerusalem, has also been working toward similar ideological aims (Feuerverger, 2001; Gavison, 2000). The central difference between that project and the initiative discussed here lies in the environments within which each has evolved. The Neveh Shalom school is situated in a small settlement, ideologically identified with the vision of full equality for Palestinian and Jewish community members, while the two bilingual programs initiated by the CBE in 1998 were implemented in a mixed (Palestinian-Jewish) residential area in the Upper Galilee and an urban center in Jerusalem.

The schools are recognized as nonreligious schools supported by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Their curriculum is the standard curriculum of the state nonreligious school system, with the difference that both Hebrew and Arabic are used as languages of instruction.

These schools, still considered a curiosity on the Israeli educational scene, must pioneer solutions to the multiple curricular problems posed by mixing Palestinian and Jewish populations. These problems have to do with cultural and identity boundaries and with historical discourse and interpretations, including those which sustain the present violent conflict.

According to a publication of the CBE (CBE, undated), its central aim is to develop a new educational scheme for integrated Jewish-Arab schools. In this scheme, children, parents and the rest of the community, together with governmental institutions (Ministry of Education and Local Authorities), will build a cooperative framework that will allow all involved to study and develop together while sustaining each groups' particular language and cultural traditions and even strengthening them while learning about the other group on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

The document posits bilingual study (in Arabic and Hebrew) and the gaining of proficiency in the language of the other group can be instrumental in deepening each group's understanding of the other and enable the development of positive relationships between groups. The document cites recent research efforts that have shown that children learning both their mother tongue and a second language reach better achievements in a variety of educational fields as well as developing tolerance toward alterity. The document suggests that Palestinian children, in learning Arabic and Hebrew, will become competent in language skills central to their future development in Israeli society. Jewish children, the document states, in gaining competence in both languages, will be prepared for the future opening of Israel to the Arab world with the progress of the peace process. Moreover, they will be better prepared to develop positive relationships with the Palestinian population in Israel.

Ideologically, the CBE seems well aligned behind those perspectives that see bilingual education as forwarding multicultural goals, thus serving as empowerment pedagogy through the incorporation of home language and culture in school community participation and increasing the self-esteem of minority students. As far as the majority group is concerned, bilingualism would not only allow for greater intellectual enrichment, but the elite would also benefit from the social consequences of greater cultural integration and pluralism.

This initiative is a daring educational enterprise. The whole construct of Israeli society, its historical conflict between Palestinians and Jews, the present political arrangements and future options all threaten in one way or another the success of such schools. From these perspectives, both schools are courageous endeavors worthy of support. Still the initiative lacked the resources and experience to deal with the challenges of composing two equal groups with such overwhelmingly difficult and contrasting narratives. The CBE believed it best to begin the project, developing solutions in response to the emerging problems, rather than trying to predict possible pitfalls in advance. Delay, they sensed, could endanger the initiative altogether. Beginning in this way meant having no curricular tools ready and having to use only the existing curricular resources that supported the educational work of the segregated educational system in Israel (Sprinzak et al., 2001).

THE POPULATION

During the 2000–2001 school year (the second year of our study), the two schools ran three classes, from first to third grade. In the Jerusalem school, 37 Palestinian children (21 boys and 16 girls) and 26 Jewish children (half

boys and half girls) were enrolled. The school in the Upper Galilee was attended by 41 Palestinian children (25 boys and 16 girls), from cities and villages in the vicinity of the school, and 35 Jewish children (17 boys and 18 girls) living in nearby settlements.

Parents from the two national groups sending their children to these schools could be characterized as belonging to the upper middle class in Israeli society. In the interviews, Jewish parents first proffered ideological reasons when explaining their choice of these schools for their children's education ("we believe in coexistence and sending our kids to the school is putting our deeds where our mouth is . . . specially here where we live—in the upper Galilee—it is important for us to get to know each other"), and only second their belief that the education would be equal to, if not higher than, what their children would receive in a regular secular Israeli school ("the fact that the classes are small and that two teachers are present is important to us"). Palestinian parents, on the other hand, first mention their expectation of safeguarding their children from the putatively backward and unpromising education offered by regular Arab schools ("our schools are backward, they teach in old fashion ways, we heard that here children are taught how to fish and are not just fed fish"), and only then cite ideological commitments ("for us coexistence is important . . . in the school Arabs and Jews study together, they get to know each other and that's the only way in which they will come to respect each other and live peacefully"). These differing orders of priority might be attributed to the different positions Israeli and Palestinian parents hold in the wider sociopolitical context. Having suffered general deprivation in resources and diminished opportunities for good educational facilities, Palestinian parents are most likely to base their choice of school on the opportunity for a better education for their children. While, in contrast, the Jewish population enjoys countless educational options to choose from, most Jewish parents also attribute their choice of the Palestinian-Jewish school to the fact that it might offer better educational opportunities ("we would not have send our kids if there where no high educational standards").

Teachers appear to be excited by the bilingual initiative and the opportunities it presents to deal both with new educational challenges related to Palestinian-Jewish integration and with the difficult national-cultural issues that put both groups in conflict. In their interviews, all teachers emphasized that working in the schools definitely requires an extra effort on their part. Teachers must not only reformulate the school schedule and activities *in toto*, but they must also become accustomed to coteaching with a teacher from a totally different ethno-national background. A Jewish teacher shared her sense of discomfort: "there are so many things we have to create ourselves, there are no materials available . . . and we worry about having to work together . . . schools such as this are new and we have to

start from scratch.” Like many others in the Western world, these teachers would have readily concurred with Hoffman (1996, 1998) that, though willing to give multiculturalism a chance, they did not actually know how to do it. Like many others (H. A. Giroux, 1994; McLaren, 1993; Ulichny, 1996) they started where it seemed feasible: in special units and school events. Though they were partially aware (the Palestinians more than the Jews) that other issues, including societal patterns of discrimination and inequality, stood at the basis of interethnic conflict, their foci were based on their assumptions that all parents involved in the initiative were more worried about their children’s educational achievements than about a thorough exploration of the sources of injustice and inequality. The following statement by a Palestinian teacher acknowledges these facts, with some resentment: “we well know the Arab parents care about educational achievements more than about national identity but are not willing to admit it.”

As for the wider national context, it’s worth mentioning that this multicultural discourse is not at all echoed in governmental educational spheres. A review of the Ministry of Education’s General Director’s Official Guidelines for Schools for the decade 1990–2000 reveals no specific references to multicultural approaches. Mention is only made of the need to incorporate into the national curriculum cultural aspects related to the variety of Jewish subgroups, which compose the complex fabric of Israeli society. Moreover, given present political circumstances, the ongoing violent struggle and the rather strong rightwing sentiments that characterize the present government, there appears to be no place for the encouragement of intergroup recognition.

The CBE seems to recognize these difficulties when presenting its empowering multicultural initiative under the rubric of bilingual education. They do this while being well aware that both Palestinian and Jewish parents have, by now, almost given up on the expectation of a fully bilingual success. Palestinian parents are assured by contextual circumstances that their children will know Arabic and expect the school to be the place where their children will “learn Hebrew . . . the environment in which we live obliges her (the interviewees daughter) to know the language . . . in any university she attends in the future she will learn in Hebrew . . . (Hebrew) is the reigning language . . . thus Hebrew is the most important thing for us . . . we do not want her to suffer as we did at university.” Jewish parents realize the contextual constraints on the learning of Arabic in a country that is, for all practical purposes, almost Hebrew monolingual. They, for the most part, easily give up on the prospects of their children learning Arabic and emphasize the importance of coexistence: “I believe that the language component is less important. . . . From my perspective, the central idea is to bring the two people together . . . to respect each other.”

In focusing on the treatment of special ceremonial events in these schools, I explore the fruit of multicultural educational approaches and question how these are shaped by contextual conditions specific to conflict-ridden areas. If multicultural education is to alleviate interethnic tension, it must offer options to refashion teachers', parents' and students' understandings of cultural borders, and their positions and relations within them.

CEREMONIAL EVENTS IN THE BILINGUAL SCHOOL

Several studies have shown the importance of ritual in contemporary society (Burnett, 1976) and its effectiveness in creating and transmitting culture within educational settings (McLaren, 1993). More recent studies have revealed the centrality of rituals as political performances that communicate expectations and norms of behavior (Magolda, 2000). National rituals and memorial ceremonies are quite common in the education system in Israel. These ceremonies have been mobilized into the school curriculum as central tools in the construction and maintenance of the Zionist ideology, which sustains the state collective (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1999). Handelman (1990) rightfully notes that schools construct more than reflect the ideological bases of Israeli society, contributing to the development of well-adapted and identified citizenry. In the early years of school, this socialization is for the most part achieved through the development of a complex network of rituals and ceremonies enacted throughout the school year. In one way or another, all these events reflect the national effort to establish the mythical foundations of the imagined community. In the Israeli case, these events form a tight weave of revised Jewish narratives that serve the national needs of cohesion and endurance for confronting the political reality in which Israel has lived since its inception (Zerubavel, 1995).

Ceremonies, therefore, as prime tools of normative socialization into contemporary paradigmatic thinking, become one of the most problematic elements in the bilingual school curriculum. It is only natural that at the bilingual schools, commemorative acts are considered to be hazardous endeavors and are seriously discussed and carefully planned by the Steering Committee and the Parent-Teachers Association. Like other ritual performances, those studied here are intended to transmit norms and values, and to shape perceptions so as to forge common ideals and identities (Lankshear, 1993). Through symbolic activity, these ceremonies attempt to draw the attention of their participants to new objects of thought and emotions held to be of special significance to transform both the actors and the audience (Lukes, 1975).

In this article, I limit myself to an analysis of educational and sociocultural processes involved in the functioning of the schools as they emerge in four ceremonial events: (1) The *Kabbalat Shishi* (Welcoming Friday) ceremony, a rather short-lived experiment implemented in both schools by a Moslem Palestinian teacher searching for a counterpart to the *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Welcoming Sabbath), a weekly ceremony traditionally held in many secular elementary Jewish schools toward the end of the school day on Fridays; (2) The *Kabbalat Sefrei HaDat* (Receiving the Religious Books), a ceremony traditionally performed under the name of *Kabbalat HaTorah* (Receiving the Bible—Old Testament) in Jewish state schools in second grade, which has been transformed for the sake of symmetry and balance into a more inclusive ceremony acknowledging also the Koran and New Testament; (3) The Festival of Lights, which brings together the traditional religious ceremonies of Hanukkah, Idel Fiter, and Christmas of the three religious groups (Jews, Moslems, and Christians) in the school, set against the background of the traditional Hanukkah celebration in Israeli Jewish schools, regularly termed the Festival of Lights; and (4) The *Naqbe* (catastrophe) and Memorial Day commemorations, the first in memory of the tragedy that overcame the Palestinian population during the 1948 war which brought about the creation of the State of Israel, and the second in commemoration of the Israeli soldiers who lost their lives in all Israeli wars. This fourth set of ceremonies is performed the day before Israel's Independence Day, the day in which regular Jewish schools enact the Memorial Day commemoration.

For the sake of sustaining a simple narrative, for each of the ceremonial events I refer to examples that took place in only one of the schools, either that in Jerusalem or that in the upper Galilee. This is justified on the basis of the data gathered that shows, small differences aside, that the ceremonies in both schools are shaped along similar lines and are influenced by the guiding principles developed by the CBE which established the schools.

KABBALAT SHISHI (WELCOMING FRIDAY)

The *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Welcoming Shabbat) ceremony is one of the minor rituals performed weekly in kindergarten and the lower grades of primary school in regular segregated Jewish schools. The term *Kabbalat Shabbat* refers to the traditional section of the prayers that ushers in the Sabbath on Friday evenings. In the early grades of Jewish schools the ceremony takes the shape of a rather short ritual, which serves as socialization into Jewish customs as well as a concluding ceremony for the school week. It should thus come as no surprise that the bilingual schools in their first year of activities, and not yet having developed curricula suited to their own

particular needs, saw it as natural to continue this tradition for the Jewish children in first grade.

At the beginning of our research project, some Palestinian parents expressed concern about the unequal number of Jewish and Moslem or Christian festivals. On multiple occasions they mentioned teasingly that “Jews have too many festivals.” This justified sense of imbalance was shared by the Palestinian teachers as well, who repeatedly stated that “In Jewish primary schools, they have *Kabbalat Shabbat* every week and many other festivals . . . we needed to find a way to balance the situation.”

When considering the declared effort toward the creation of symmetry in the bilingual schools, it is not surprising that an attempt to find a solution was indeed made. The solution involved the creation of a new Moslem tradition. Though Moslem tradition has no day of rest like the Jewish Sabbath, Friday is a special day of prayer in the Islam. The new ritual invented was that of *Kabbalat Shishi*, a special short ceremony to be conducted on Thursdays at the end of the school day. The *Kabbalat Shishi* ceremony involved the preparation of traditional sweet Arab pastries, storytelling about the prophet Muhammad, and the singing of Arabic songs. The format of the ceremony was a replica of the traditional *Kabbalat Shabbat* ceremony, which also included the preparation of pastry, the singing of songs and telling of stories. More interesting, however, is that the Arabic name given to the event, by the Palestinian teacher who initiated this tradition, was *Saat Al Id* (the Festival Hour), but this name was never able to overcome the isomorphic symbolic power and ultimately did not adhere to the event which became referred to by all as *Kabbalat Shishi*, a clear rhetorical attempt to counterbalance *Kabbalat Shabbat*.

At first, the idea was a sweeping success. Not only were the Palestinian parents happy, perceiving the event as one more act of “recognition and respect for our national history and cultural traditions in ways unknown in regular Arab Israeli schools,” but Jewish parents were also pleased that their children would be exposed in this way to Palestinian culture. The ceremony was held on Thursdays during the first year of the program. However, by the time the research team arrived on the scene during the second year of activities, the teacher who had established the ceremony had left Jerusalem to work at the school in the Upper Galilee. After her departure, the ceremony as she had designed it ceased to exist. None of the other teachers in the Jerusalem school took upon themselves the continuation of the tradition, and a new effort at ritual symmetry took the form of a change in the traditional *Kabbalat Shabbat* ceremony. *Kabbalat Shabbat* was renamed *Sof Shavua Sameach* (The Happy Weekend Ceremony). The traditional *Kabbalat Shabbat* took on a partially new hybrid form, syncretized to include some Arabic songs and stories, and the Arab pastry unfortunately disappeared. This effort was only partially successful. The

new name never really stuck to the ceremony and our records show that for the most part, teachers referred to the ceremony by its traditional Jewish name, *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and only after a joking correction by one of the other teachers present, would they would call it by its official name *Sof Shavua Sameach*. The ideal of total ceremonial symmetry at the Jerusalem school had been officially abandoned. Any such invented tradition is too dependent on personal initiative and commitment, which, if not fully supported by the wider cultural system, will fail. With the move of the teacher that initiated the *Kabbalat Shishi* program to the school in the Upper Galilee, the ceremony was implemented in that school for a while, but was soon abandoned there as well; new traditions proved too difficult to sustain.

While the effort to balance the initial asymmetry might be laudable (Bekerman, in press), serious approaches to multiculturalism cannot afford artificial creations. Culture, even when not reified, is the product of historical interactional processes (Bauman, 1999; Bekerman, 2003a; Eagleton, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Williams, 1961), which, if not accounted for, might end in parody—not a good recipe for intergroup respect and recognition.

KABBALAT SEFREI HADAT (RECEIVING THE RELIGIOUS BOOKS)

This ceremony was an adaptation of the traditional *Kabbalat Sefer haTorah* (Receiving the Bible—Old Testament), another of the mobilizing rituals performed in all second grade classrooms in the segregated Jewish state school system and thus again naturally implemented in the first years of these schools' activity. The traditional Jewish ceremony is a festive event, which takes place in the evening with the participation of all children and their parents. It includes some readings from the Torah and or the oral Jewish tradition making reference to the acceptance of the Torah by the people of Israel, related songs, the reading of the Ten Commandments and, according to the skills of teachers and students, some dancing or presentations of short sketches on related issues. In this format, its implementation in the bilingual schools could also upset the delicate balance of cultural symmetry as understood in the school initiative by parents and teachers. Thus the event in the bilingual schools was refashioned, on the one hand to maintain its original meaning for the Jewish population, and, on the other, to include Moslem and Christian traditions. It is worth mentioning that, in this case and as opposed to our previous example (*Kabbalat Shishi*), there is in Islamic tradition a date which commemorates the beginning of the process of Prophet Muhammad's receipt of the Koran, traditionally considered to be the 26th or 27th of the month of Ramadan, a night devoted to prayer by religious Moslems.

The *Kabbalat Sifrei HaDat* event in the bilingual schools is considered an important one in that it allows for an emphasis on the schools' commitment to inclusiveness and coexistence. It is also an opportunity to sustain joint activities for all teachers, parents and students, a highly regarded aim of the educational planning. The ceremony I describe took place at the Upper Galilee school.

The invitation to the event, sent a couple of days in advance, invited all parents to participate and gave the full name of the ceremony: *Kabbalat Sifrei HaDat*. The invitation asked all parents to make sure to arrive on time to the nearby site at which the event would take place in the early afternoon. In preparation for the activity, parents were asked to send with their children a large shirt or *galabia* (traditional Arab attire), a *kafiah* (bandanna) or white cloth diaper for a head covering, and wool yarn needed for one of the activities. As with all other parental documents and in keeping with the ideology of symmetry, the invitation was written in both Hebrew and Arabic.

When the teachers arrive at school in the morning, all is set to begin a regular day. Nora, the Jewish teacher, tells the children about the day's schedule and the outing to Machanaim and that today they will study about *Sukkot* (the Jewish Festival of Booths). Little is said about the afternoon *Kabbalat Sifrei HaDat* event, since it is kept as a surprise for the children. Some of the children do know that by the end of the day they will be receiving a book. Most Jewish children know they will receive a Torah, in line with the well-anticipated event customary in standard Jewish schools. Palestinian children have a sense that something important will happen but do not know exactly what. A few seem to know that they will be getting a Koran in the afternoon, though they know that today is not a festive day for the Koran as it is for the Torah. Some Jewish children believe today to be the "Torah day" and tell me that the Palestinian children will be receiving a Torah as well. In the last hour of regular lessons, the Hebrew teacher tells the children they are now going to talk about antique handicrafts. She asks the Palestinian teacher to write the word *handicrafts* on the blackboard in Arabic. The Jewish teacher asks the children what comes to mind when they say antique handicrafts and they respond: "weaving, ceramics," and so on. It is worth noting that the Celebration of *Kabbalat Sifrei HaDat* is being framed in the context of aged handicrafts—in a sense, items, which in the past, were common to both cultures and communities.

The children have lunch during the break and then get organized to go to the bus that will take them to Machanaim, the site where the activity will take place. Machanaim is a community settlement above Carmiel in which a tourism site, resembling ancient Canaan, has been developed. The site includes a large Bedouin tent, a well, handicraft activity areas, and covered grounds for meals or ceremonies. The place is well maintained and directed

by a Jewish woman with no knowledge of Arabic, who is helped by a young Palestinian woman.

The activity begins in the Bedouin tent. The host tells the children, in Hebrew, that in this area long ago people used to live in tents and were shepherds. From here she continues explaining about sheep and about how wool was made. Most of the conversation takes place in Hebrew. The host does not seem to be aware that this is a mixed group. This point is important because, throughout her comments, the principle of symmetry is not sustained and only Hebrew is spoken. This creates a situation in which, for the most part, the Jewish children participate and the Palestinian children are quiet. The host then speaks about ceramics and what people a long time ago used to do with ceramics and other handicrafts, which she mentions were all popular in the “period of the Forefathers” (a traditional name for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forefathers of the Jewish people). At the end of this explanation, the host asks the children to move to a different area in the site where they will be able to practice some of the handicrafts she has described. All of the children reorganize in the different working areas and for the next 2 hours prepare ceramics, cane flutes, ancient calligraphy writing, and other such activities.

An hour into the activity, parents start arriving and some join their children in the activities while others choose to chat and wait for the central event to begin. By approximately 4 p.m., the groups have finished the handicraft activities, and teachers ask the children and parents to return to the central tent and start preparing for the big event. They ask all the children to dress up in the attire they brought from home and wait for an important guest who will soon come to visit. In their reports, teachers emphasized, that by asking all the children to dress up as shepherds, they wished to create a sense of commonality in the distant past, which could help to overcome the differences of the present. It is worth recalling too that for a while, Zionist imagery represented Jews as returning to their eastern roots in Israel, and traditional iconography depicted them in Arab attire.

I overhear one of the Jewish girls tell her Jewish friend that a mutual Jewish boy friend of theirs is now dressed like a Palestinian. A Jewish boy inside the tent calls to his mother and tells her that, dressed as he is, he is “now a real Arab.” Parents seem amused at seeing their children transformed and a bit confused. Using the past as a common ground does not necessarily help to sustain the clear and separate identities of each group, which is also part of the school’s ideology.

The stage is now set to begin the *Kabbalat Sefrei HaDat* ceremony. One of the teachers tells the children that, as is usual in all tents, “we are all expecting a guest, an important guest . . . the *Manhig* (the Leader) will come soon and he will take us to an important place . . . we should all go

quietly and in an orderly manner . . . so that at the end of the journey we will receive an important gift.” She then invites all the parents to join the group.

Given the present context, we should remember that this reference to a leader coming is very reminiscent of Moses (the Jewish leader who received the Torah). The *Manhig* arrives. He is one of the parents, a robust figure dressed in a white *galabia* robe and a red *kafia* head covering and looks a lot like Charlton Heston in the classic film *The Ten Commandments*. He shouts out “*Shalom!* I’m the Leader” and invites all the children, “to follow . . . on an important journey.” Seeing the Leader approach, many Jewish children shout out that he is Moses. Teachers try to correct them pointing out that “he is not Moses. He is the *Manhig*.” The teachers’ efforts to correct the ideological misunderstanding do not work well and Jewish children stick to their interpretation repeatedly calling out Moses’ name. The group, parents and children, follow the *Manhig* on a path, which ascends upward toward a mountain. Though the landscape differs greatly from the Mt. Sinai deserts cape of the Biblical story, it is difficult to believe that parents do not perceive it as such.

The group arrives at a place across from what looks like a high mountain from which smoke is rising. The children look up with great expectation. The sound of drums is heard from the mountain, (like the thunder of the Biblical narration). The *Manhig* asks the children if they hear the sounds and then if they know who is coming, to which the children answer “the Prophet” and “the Torah.” Two baskets are brought to the *Manhig* by the teachers. In the baskets are the pieces of parchment on which the children had earlier written their names and wishes in ancient calligraphy. The *Manhig* calls out each name and gives each child his piece of parchment. After they receive the pieces of parchment, the children and parents walk toward the building where they are going to have refreshments. (In general the atmosphere is playful and they all seem to be having a good time.) At the entrance, the teachers give each child a book: Jews get the Torah, Moslems the Koran, and the one Christian receives a New Testament. The only (recently admitted) child of an intermarried Jewish-Moslem couple receives both a Torah and a Koran. (This student left the school a couple of month later—the bilingual initiative committed to sustaining separate and unambiguous identities seem to have difficulties with border crossings.) The central decorative piece on the refreshments table is a cake with the Ten Commandments inscribed on it. Pita bread and sour labane cheese, the folkloristic elements of the perceived Palestinian diet, are also present and by default represent the Moslem tradition. Christian tradition has been forgotten or lumped together in a national Palestinian representation.

The event is considered by all involved to be a great success. It is interesting to note that though nobody seems to mind once again—as in the

Kabbalat Shabbat ceremony—the event has been framed according to a well-rehearsed Jewish pattern (in this case the receiving of the Torah by Moses according to the traditional biblical text, as reenacted in conventional Jewish schools). Jewish parents are happy that the participation of their children in the bilingual initiative does not involve the abandonment of well-accepted ritual behaviors from the standard Jewish segregated school system, and the Palestinian parents (Moslem and Christians) seem happy that the school makes a sincere effort to respectfully recognize their own traditions.

Still, at a few points, the somewhat syncretistic approach chosen by the teachers for the event seems to raise unwelcome confusion. While the attire the children were asked to wear was supposed to overcome difference by reference to a common past, present contextual circumstances make Jewish children believe they have now become Arabs. Yet, Jewish imagination envelops the whole event. Indeed it becomes apparent that serious multiculturalism cannot be developed on the basis of the additions of more cultures and their stirring (Arvizu & Saravia-Shore, 1990), not even in well-intentioned bilingual initiatives.

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Hanukkah is an important ceremonial event celebrated with parental participation in standard Jewish primary schools in Israel (Handelman, 1990). It begins the calendar of celebrations that express the national Zionist narrative (Zerubavel, 1995). Hanukkah commemorates both the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Greek conquest and the miracle of the oil, which continued to burn for 8 days after the desecration of the Temple. Hanukkah, like many other winter festivals, is strongly associated with themes of light and the winter equinox. In this sense, it can be combined with Christmas and, at times, with *Idel Fiter*, the Moslem festival that concludes the Ramadan fast. In this section I relate specifically to the events that took place in the Hanukkah-*Idel Fiter*-Christmas ceremony at the Jerusalem school. Unlike the two previous examples, this combination of festivals had been conceived from the start of the integrated educational initiative as a strong statement regarding the schools' commitment to the cultural recognition of all groups involved.

A week before the festival, the school organized much activity related to the forthcoming event. Class time was allotted for rehearsals of the different segments to be enacted by each grade in the evening event, to which all parents would be invited. The walls are decorated with paraphernalia representing the three traditions. Candles, *hanukkiot* (Hanukkah candelabras), stars, Christmas trees, cutouts of mosques, and small Moslem prayer carpets were pasted in the corridors of the school or hanging from the

ceiling. The children, as a rule, seemed to take it all in stride and enjoyed special days that include festive activities. During the breaks they played as usual. They ran and played ball, but during these days they were also spotted pretending to ride in Santa's sleigh.

The festive celebration took place in the central room of a neighboring community center because the school lacks a space sufficiently large to welcome all parents attending, and indeed the parents, children, and other invited people—more than 200 spectators—filled the room. Crescent moons, representing the sign of Ramadan, *hanukkiot*, Christmas trees, and other related paraphernalia also decorated this hall and the table where, at the end of the evening all invitees ate a light buffet together.

Parents entering were directed to the second floor to a large rectangular room. Rows of chairs were prepared for the parents and pupils, and a platform was erected to the right of the room and served as the stage. This room was decorated with hanging *hanukkiot*, Christmas trees, and crescent moons. On stage, there were three equally large displays: a Christmas tree, a *hanukkiah*, and a replica of a mosque. In front of the mosque, 10 chairs were prepared for the actors participating in the presentation. Eight of the chairs were decorated with big cardboard candles (symbolic of the eight-stemmed *hanukkiah* candelabra). The air was buzzing with excitement. All teachers, parents and children were dressed festively. On center stage, a big poster in Hebrew and Arabic read "Welcome" (preserving the school's principle of total symmetry between the two languages). The first to come on the stage is the school principal who, speaking in Hebrew, greeted all those coming to the Festival of Light commemorating the three festivals of Hanukkah, Ramadan, and Christmas. Second to the stage was one of the codirectors of the CBE, a Moslem Palestinian, reinforcing the cornerstone policy of symmetry, which characterizes the school activities. His opening words of welcome were spoken in Arabic and then, surprisingly, he moved into Hebrew and spoke about the sense of fulfillment he has from participating in this event which represents the success of something believed impossible: a school in which Palestinians and Jews are equally represented and work together for a better world. The teacher in charge of the event then invited a Jewish parent to light the first Hanukkah candle. A second parent was then invited to the stage, a Palestinian dressed in traditional Arabic dress, who gave a short account of the meaning of Ramadan and Idel Fiter. Lastly, four mothers were invited to the stage. They formed a choir singing Christmas songs, and part of the audience joined in.

After the parents' presentations, the student presentations commenced. These were organized like a television program. First to come on stage were two second graders, a Palestinian and a Jew, carrying a cardboard construction resembling a television set. They introduced the program of

the month in Arabic and Hebrew. The first scene of the program related to Ramadan. In Arabic one of the children said, "Black clouds, stars and moon, at dawn Ramadan begins and with the dusk it ends." After this a song praising the month of Ramadan was sung by all the children in Arabic. The second scene of the program was introduced by the first two children who opened the new segment saying, "And now a word from our sponsors." At this point, in the corner of the stage, two girls appeared, a Palestinian and a Jew, each holding a basket with olives. One said to the other, "I make the best olive oil." The other responded, "No, I make the best olive oil," after which they both said in unison, "Together we make the best olive oil." After this short scene in which both Hebrew and Arabic were spoken, all kindergarten children took the stage and danced in a big circle singing a Hebrew Hanukkah song about a little flask of oil (*Kad Katan*). All of the children followed by singing two more Hanukkah songs "A Great Miracle Happened Here" (*Nes Gadol Haya Po*) and "Happy Days of Hanukkah" (*Yamei HaHanukkah*). The two children that hosted the simulated television show now announce the forecast for snow and at this point, children who had been waiting at the side of the stage with boxes full of white styrofoam started throwing it in the air in imitation of snow. Then Santa, a child in costume, came in ringing a bell and carrying a sack of sweets. He approached the children and offered gifts to them all. Santa's gifts to each child were a spinning top (*dreidel*) representing Hanukkah, a chocolate representing Christmas, and dates for Ramadan. Meanwhile the children sang a Christmas carol in Arabic. With this the presentation came to an end, and all parents were invited to the entrance hall for refreshments.

It was apparent throughout the event that a great effort was being made to provide a sense that all religious traditions are equally respected. The effort to create symmetry between the traditions was expressed in the way the stage and the decorations were constructed and presented, as well as in the amount of time allotted to the different festival represented. For each festival there were traditional songs and a short skit, regardless of the number of children in the school from each group. In fact, the number of Christians in the Palestinian school population was quite small, yet Christmas was offered the same status as the other festivals.

Despite the apparent symmetry, however, one must note that two of the festivals, Hanukkah and Christmas, were diluted in their symbolic messages. For example, in standard Jewish schools it is customary to see the figure of Judah the Maccabean, dressed in old Roman-style attire and armed with a sword, as part of the theatrical presentation for Hanukkah. This figure did not appear in this school ceremony, an apparent attempt to neutralize any conflictual nationalistic aspects related to the Zionist Hanukkah tradition. Instead, the religious version of Hanukkah is favored as in the Diaspora Jewish narrative, without emphasizing the Maccabean

military victory. The rededication of the Temple, which is made possible by the miracle of the oil, is also left untold, presumably to avoid allusions to the disputed sovereignty over Jerusalem and the restoration of the Third Temple in place of the present Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, as advocated by certain extreme right-wing Jewish groups.

As for Christmas, in spite of it being a fully religious festival with no national overtones, for Jews it represents a long and problematic historical relationship between Christians and Jews particularly of European descent, whose collective Diasporic memory still dominates Israeli culture today. Christianity, which began as one of a number of Jewish sects in the West, became a competing tradition, often historically identified by Jews as the reason for anti-Semitic persecutions culminating in the Nazi Holocaust. In this sense, Jesus, the Christian Messiah figure, could have been seen as a threat to Jews and was therefore neutralized. Thus, in the school event, Christmas is represented as heralding the New Year and not as the birthday of the Messiah.

Idel Fiter seems to be less of a problem. For the most part, the Israeli Palestinian conflict is presented in common discourse and in the media as a national, not a religious, conflict. Moreover, the Moslem religion has traditionally not been perceived as competing with Judaism and is known to recognize its debt to Judaism. Historically, Eastern European Jews, the forefathers of the national Zionist movement, lacked exposure to Islam, and it therefore holds little associative meaning, even though from the start, Palestinian uprisings against Jews in Palestine, and later in the State of Israel, have been associated with Moslem religious leaders and fervent, religiously indignant mobs pouring out of mosques. Even today the secular Israeli Jewish majority continues to read the Palestinian struggle as a national one, without emphasizing the central role of Islam. Christianity, therefore, remains the historically antagonistic enemy religion, though its effect on the Israeli experience is minuscule in comparison to the role of Islam. Therefore, the Christmas representation at the school ceremony undergoes a radical revision while the Idel Fiter representation remains intact. At the religious level, there seems to be a reversal of the role of the enemy. While nationally Moslem Palestinians are generally considered to be the enemy, Christians represent the greater cultural threat to the Jews (Bekerman, 2003c).

The schools' dual goals of strengthening in-group identity, together with out-group tolerance and understanding, apparently require the revision of cultural identity markers. Both Jews and Christians forfeit central national and religious symbols in the public presentation—Judah the Maccabean and Jesus. Yet all parties seem satisfied as the somewhat diluted religious emphasis seems to achieve their higher aim of mutual recognition.

The Hanukkah-Idel Fitter-Christmas celebration, like all other rituals, is in the business of bringing out elements of all the possible might-have-beens of social reality (Douglas, 1982). In the words of Don Handelman (1990), "Public events are locations of communication that convey participants into versions of social worlds in relatively coherent ways. . . . Not only may they affect social life, they may also effect it" (p. 15). From a multicultural educational perspective, the case presented seems to be working in the right direction. Efforts are invested in paying special attention to the dynamic relations across national/ethnic/religious boundaries while encompassing broader societal and political issues (Freeman, 2000; Lustig, 1997) relevant to the particular Israeli conflictual context that shapes the occasion. As such, this public event is a construct dedicated to the making of a new order of peace and coexistence.

THE NAQBE AND MEMORIAL DAY COMMEMORATION

While the religious festivals allowed for a combined approach, in the national focused commemorations of Memorial Day and Naqbe we see a radically different structure, which, while recognizing both national traditions, keeps them apart as separate commemorative acts.

As opposed to the Hanukkah-Idel Fiter-Christmas ceremony that is a broader school event including parents, the Memorial Day ceremony is a students-only event and takes place on the eve of Israeli Independence Day during regular school hours. Memorial ceremonies for the fallen soldiers play an integral role in Israeli Jewish culture. These ceremonies are central to the constitution of the Jewish nation-state and its hegemonic collective memory, shaping its ethnocentric national identity and establishing its continuity (Ben-Amos & Bet-El, 1990; Etzioni, 2000; Ichilov, 1990; Ram, 2000).

Jewish Memorial Day school ceremonies throughout Israel traditionally include the use of state symbols, menorahs, flags, and the Israeli Declaration of Independence. The ceremony starts when a siren is sounded at 11:00 a.m. for 2 minutes followed by a *Yizkor* prayer written especially for this day (a Jewish prayer traditionally recited in honor of the dead), poetic or prosaic texts commemorating heroes or heroic acts, songs, a short speech recalling the fallen alumnae of the school, and concluding with the singing of the national anthem.

Due to the problematic aspects of such a ceremony in a school composed equally of children of Palestinian and Jewish parents committed to recognition and inclusion, the CBE organized parent workshops for each grade level conducted by the school advisor. The workshops were designed to allow parents to express their feelings about the ways in which they personally relate to these events, and secondly to express their views

regarding the best ways to treat these subjects with their children and in school. During these 2–3-hour evening workshops, there was some inclination on the part of the parents to consider holding a joint ceremony for all students. Nonetheless, somewhat influenced by the predetermined views of the CBE and the teachers, they all agreed in the end to hold separate ceremonies, one for the Jewish children in commemoration of Israel's fallen soldiers, the other for the Palestinian children in commemoration of the Naqbe.

The basic parameters for the curriculum and the ceremonies were set during teachers' meetings. Preparations at the school in the Upper Galilee began a week in advance and included the creation of decorations for the courtyard and the classrooms. In 2001, these decorations included two large bulletin boards, one dedicated to the Palestinian cohort and the other the Jewish one. The one representing Palestinian collective memory included a map of Mandatory Palestine, the story "Haifa" (a children's story about an old Palestinian refugee in Lebanon dreaming about returning to his home in Haifa), pictures of Palestinian villages destroyed during the 1948 war, and some drawings and short statements by the students in third grade mostly telling stories about their own families' suffering during that time. The board representing Jewish collective memory was designed to include traditional Israeli national symbols, some pictures commemorating military acts of valor, and references to the Holocaust—one of the central arguments in post-World War II Zionist ideology for the creation of the State of Israel.

The children from each grade level prepared similar displays within the classrooms. All students were requested in advance to interview family members regarding the events of the 1948 war or their recollections of past Memorial Days. The information gathered in the interviews became the basis for a class discussion, which took place immediately before the ceremonies. These classroom discussions were not uniformly structured or invariably harmonious. For example, in the second grade class, after the presentation of familial narratives, the Jewish teacher read from a recently published children's book, which she believed presented a relatively fair account of the 1948 events (i.e., it partially acknowledged Palestinian suffering). The reading of this book to the whole class triggered the Palestinian teacher's protest over the unfairness of the account. Two graphic representations in the book were considered to be offensive and misrepresentative of historical facts: a Jew waving his hand offering peace and a Palestinian with his hand extended holding a sword and a Jew offering a half apple symbolizing the acceptance of the partition plan and a Palestinian with his hand extended in rejection of his half of the apple.

Approximately 15 minutes before the 11:00 a.m. siren announced the official start of Memorial Day ceremonies around the country, the

Palestinian and Jewish children were assembled in separate rooms, where each group would conduct its own commemorative act. The Jewish ceremony followed the traditional pattern for national ceremonies as described previously. The only unusual detail was that the Jewish teachers emphasized some issues related to the Israeli flag, which had been left out from the regular joint classes. Some of the rhetoric used could be characterized as much more ethnocentric and nationalistic than the rhetoric used during regular joint classes, implying that once alone teachers could speak their standard Israeli Jewish language. The Palestinian ceremony was organized much like the Jewish one. Texts were read, stories told, and songs sung. Again I had the sense that teachers felt much more at ease and expressed themselves much more openly regarding national issues.

The agreement reached at the teachers' meetings in which the organization of the ceremonies was discussed included the provision that no flags, Palestinian or Israeli, would be present in the school. However, the Jewish teachers had understood that no Israeli flag would be publicly displayed but that one could be used in the room where the Jewish ceremony would take place, and that no Palestinian flag would be present at all, while Palestinian teachers understood no flags would be present in the school at all. The Jewish ceremony stuck to the compromise (as they understood it) and had a rather small Israeli flag hanging from the board in the room where the Jewish ceremony took place, alongside a *talit* (prayer shawl), traditionally acknowledged to be the inspiration for the present Israeli flag. In the Palestinian ceremony, a small Palestinian flag was used many times. A teacher pulled it out from her handbag when required, and put it back each time. By the end of 45 minutes, both ceremonies were over. The children returned to their homerooms and classes resumed. For the next hour, students in the second grade shared their experiences in both ceremonies and discussed some issues regarding peace and coexistence raised by the teachers. Throughout it was clear that what really interested the children by this point was recess. The break finally came and the children seemed pleased to return to their favorite activities: playing soccer and hide-and-peek, mostly in self-segregated national groups (as a rule, interaction between the children of different national backgrounds was relatively low, occurring mostly during class sessions, while during break time it was by and large absent). By the end of the day, all of the children dispersed toward the buses that would take them home. National issues had faded into the background.

As evidenced in our observations and teacher interviews, the week prior to Memorial-*Naqbe* Day was one of growing tension, in sharp contrast to the increasing levels of excitement that had preceded the school's evening celebration of Hanukkah-Idel Fiter-Christmas. The teachers' meetings in which the organization of the ceremonies was discussed were very tense and

ended without clarity on central issues, such as the one mentioned previously regarding whether, in the separate ceremonies, national flags would be present or not. The story "Haifa," presented by the Palestinian teachers, was perceived by the Jewish teachers to challenge the legitimacy of the State of Israel, while the aforementioned story chosen by the Jewish teachers insulted Palestinian sensitivities by presenting what was in their view a very unbalanced narrative of the events preceding and following 1948, as well as stereotypical and denigrating caricatures of Palestinians.

It seems that in contrast to the Hanukkah-Idel Fiter-Christmas celebration, which offers a variety of interpretative options, thus allowing for creative ways to bridge between the communities, Memorial and *Naqbe* Day allows for little exegetical play. The historical proximity of the events, the present political situation and other contextual factors constrain interpretative possibilities (Bekerman, 2000, 2002a; Bekerman & Horenczyk, in press). We must, however, keep in mind that there are no real limits to possible renditions, and other possible interpretations have yet to be explored.

While Hanukkah can afford a religious emphasis for the secular Jews at the expense of nationalistic overtones, Israel's Memorial Day doesn't seem to leave room for such calibrations without delegitimizing the Zionist narrative. Secular Jews see themselves as Jews due to their Israeli national sentiment; therefore, surrendering this connection may seem too high a price to pay. For Palestinian participants, if the *Naqbe* and the suffering and struggle of the Palestinian people are misrepresented within the bilingual educational initiative, they could be judged guilty of betraying their people. In the present political stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is no way they can afford such accusations.

While the Festival of Lights is highly inclusive, it is not one that tries to minimize differences among the traditions. It is inclusive in presenting each holiday, in admitting all to the presentation and in giving each group a role, but it is exclusive in that it does not seek to bridge (or end) differences or suggest that all people should participate in the same ritual. Each group sits at the table (inclusion) but there is a recognition (if you like) that they don't all eat the same foods at their own home tables. At this point, on the other hand, the national ceremonies cannot afford to create a sense of inclusion; the wounds are still open and memories too present.

The events related seem to validate Hanna's (1994) warning about the lack of evidence that multicultural programs are reaching their goals and also point at the real dangers of unintended consequences. Multicultural education should be approached much more cautiously and entails more than the mere inclusion of cultural traits in educational settings (Arvizu & Saravia-Shore, 1990). Multicultural efforts can indeed aggravate interethnic tensions when put into practice uncritically (Lustig, 1997).

DISCUSSION

Through my discussion of four ceremonial events of the bilingual Palestinian-Jewish schools, I illustrated some of the complex issues these events raise for all involved in the educational initiative. When considering the premises that sustain the initiative we should remember that the foundational rhetoric of the CBE can be characterized as one that promotes the transformation of present power relations between the minority and majority ethnic/national groups. This process implies the empowerment of groups through the strict preservation of symmetry so as to achieve mutual respect and recognition. In contrast, the participants in the initiative, while rhetorically agreeing with these aims, see it for the most part as an opportunity to gain access to a good or better education. Jewish parents, though pointing at the ideological importance they attach to the initiative, readily confirm the centrality they attach to the educational success of the schools. Palestinian parents emphasize similar concerns. Although the rhetoric of symmetry and empowerment certainly played a role in these parents' decisions to send their children to the schools, the parents still expect a greater emphasis to be placed on academic achievement. The upwardly mobile parents measure the primary success of the educational effort not in terms of its liberatory power, but rather according to its role in developing their children's abilities to attain desirable positions in the bureaucracies of present dominant Western cultural traditions (Giroux, 1994; McLaren, 1995). And indeed, in terms of academic achievement, the schools seem to fare well. However, I question what results can be expected at the ideological multicultural level.

The bilingual schools discussed represent a commendable effort toward a more respectful and humane relationship between ethnic groups in a conflict-ridden area. Working partially against the state-imposed and ideologically normative Jewish hegemony, the participants in the initiative searched for ways to counter the weight of ideology and tradition. Lacking ready-made curricular tools, they, consciously or not, used the existing curricular resources that support the educational work of the segregated Jewish educational system in Israel. Thus they acted under the strong influence of the same traditional representations and historiographies that have shaped their personal biographies, delimited by the present political context in which they live.

The participants themselves are Jews and Palestinians raised in a segregated, conflictual context, which cherishes essentialist aspects of identity and culture. Parents reflect this tension when, together with their aspirations to secure their children in place within the sphere of reigning elites, they also emphasize the need for the educational initiative to foster mutual respect among their children, while at the same time strengthening

their ethnic pride and affiliation. Teachers, as officers of one of the exemplary institutions of the nation-state—that institution most responsible for a discourse of identity and culture (Bekerman, 2002b; Elias, 1998; Gellner, 1997)—reflect and fortify the identity discourse, sometimes in contrast to the parents who, for functional reasons, seem at times, ready to disregard these ideals. The positions of both Jewish and Palestinian teachers coincide on this issue. A Jewish teacher stated, “I am not asking to turn the school into a religious school, but I would like to strengthen the Jewish identity of the kids in school.” Palestinian teachers, worried as they are by the potential influence of the wider context on the Palestinian students, reported similar though stronger positions regarding this issue: “the wider context is mostly Jewish . . . Hebrew is everywhere . . . we have to be careful not to allow the weakening of our students sense of (Palestinian) identity.”

The multicultural options that can be considered are circumscribed by conditions of inclusiveness (such as in the ceremony of The Festival of Lights), symmetry, and mutual respect (as is the case for the *Kabbalat Shishi* and the *Kabbalat Sefrei HaDat* ceremonies). At the same time, they must balance inclusion with the reinforcement of existing patterns of identity and ethnic affiliation (as in the Memorial Day and *Naqbe* ceremonies). Present conditions do not foster other options that do exist but rather frame them as betrayal. For example, the schools could choose not to allow any reference at all in their curriculum to national or religious events of any of the parties involved and devote time and effort to develop reconciliatory events.

What we have seen emerge in the descriptions of the four events is what is perceived to be the only possible path. This path is characterized by a number of implicit and never openly stated assumptions: an essentialist concept of identity and culture, product of the historical development of the nation-state (Bhabha, 1994; Elias, 1998; Hall, 1996), which accounts for the need to emphasize in all events the presence of separate and unambiguous identities through inclusion or exclusion, and, in line with the local Jewish expressions of nation state ideology in Israel, the need to draw extensively on religious expressions of identity to support the Zionist goal of a national homeland for Jews, at least nominally, alongside Israel’s vision of a democracy.

Making these assumptions explicit could explain that three out of the four events described related to cultural/religious issues in the tradition of both peoples (which is somewhat surprising when considering that parents in both groups are mostly secular). Jews appear to use religion to safeguard themselves from assimilation and to justify the Zionist ethnocracy as a national home for Jews; Palestinians, though for the most part traditionalists and not religious, use religion to avert the accusation of betraying their national identity when involved in a bilingual educational endeavor.

The central choice made by the educational initiative was the use of ceremonies as a starting point for the construction of a bilingual curriculum because they are circumscribed and thus relatively easy to deal with in comparison to the general curriculum and, though in a sense dangerous, they are public and thus, if successful, hold the potential to effect the whole community and procure wide recognition. The resources for the creation of these ceremonies were limited and guided by the school ideology of sustaining symmetry and the cultural resources (Neuman & Bekerman, 2001) available to participants in the proximal context.

The invention of *Kabbalat Shishi*, though a creative step, was more the outcome of a forced ideology of symmetry than of a careful consideration of the functioning of cultural elements in the social scene. In a paradoxical sense, its invention represents the ultimate replication of the nation-state's perceptions of culture (Anderson, 1991; Gillis, 1994). Given the unsupportive larger context and the lack of rooted interest, it had little chances of survival and was soon exchanged for an expanded and transformed Jewish ceremony—the *Kabbalat Shabbat* remolded into *Sof Shavua Sameach*. This hybrid worked for a while due to the commitment to balance cultural representations, but it also lacked rootedness in the Palestinian and Jewish community and disappeared a short time later.

The ceremony of *Kabbalat Sifrei HaDat* was the benign abduction of Moslem and Christian elements into a Jewish ceremony (*Kabbalat HaTorah*). Although at least in the Moslem tradition there exist some similar elements regarding the receipt of the Koran, their incorporation was never considered an option. Again the framing of equality and recognition took place, in spite of the declared empowering efforts of the school's initiators, within the dominant Jewish tradition. Following the teachers' review of the activity and their recognition that it did not reflect properly the school's goals, the festival has been entirely removed from the school calendar.

The Festival of Lights seems a more serious attempt at dealing with traditional cultural religious elements while transforming them. The result in this case was a diluted rendering of Hanukkah and Christmas that offered a reinterpretation of the tradition, which was possible given that both the Jewish and Christian communities present were rather secularly inclined. The Jews were offered the transformative option of emphasizing Diasporic interpretations of Hanukkah rather than the nationalistic ones to which they have been accustomed. That the Moslem Idel Fiter was left untouched points at the ongoing peripherality of the Moslem cultural tradition, something that might eventually surface as problematic. At the cultural religious level, and given the accepted view that cultural recognition stands at the basis of coexistence, the communities were invited to share a common sphere. However, traditions were circumscribed by this

commonality, thus in a sense negating the very principle of respect and recognition upon which the integrated schools stand.

Finally, the national commemorations of Memorial-*Naqbe* Day had to be held separately, and even then they became the source for serious questioning and suspicion between the two communities, which endangered the continuity of the educational initiative.

CONCLUSION

The educational initiative's approach to identity and culture, represented by the ceremonies, seems to move along an essentialist continuum from a somewhat accommodating religious/cultural identification to a stricter national one, all under the umbrella of the banal (Billig, 1995) ideology of the nation-state. In a sense, the religious cultural side of the continuum allows for more flexibility, experimentation, and creativity. It was in the Hanukkah-Idel Fiter-Christmas events that participants were invited to reconsider the strict limits of religious national interpretation. On the opposite side of the continuum, we have seen that national ceremonies risked endangering the initiative in its totality. Multiculturalism as understood today might not be a good formula for countries that are still unstable. These might be in need of a much more careful and critical approach.

The multiculturalism expressed in the events described appeared as a superficial version of the multicultural ideal. In her work, Lustig (1997) has shown how interethnic tensions are aggravated by educational reforms that highlight each ethnic group both sequentially and in isolation. From the account we might learn of the need to shift the focus of multicultural education from ceremonial activity to a long-term educational effort spread throughout the school year and across multiple disciplines. From the categories left vacant in the discursive resources that our context offers us, culture, religion, and national affiliation as offered by the context of the nation-state, to the unveiling of other resources available and their shaping forces, thus engaging them in a critical dialogue. This is no easy task. Present multicultural initiatives seem to be geared mostly toward facilitating the advancement of elites or helping minorities to adapt more easily to monocultural settings. It is questionable whether true multiculturalism can be achieved in a way that essentially helps to sustain the very infrastructure that first established the need for it.

The Eurocentric maladies multiculturalism set out to abolish are intrinsic to the establishment of the nation-state, and only a critical approach toward the epistemological basis of the nation-state can help overcome them. Singh (1998) has shown the strong relationship between cultural pluralism, better known today as multiculturalism, and America's needs to claim the rhetoric

of a civilizing mission and world ordering at the end of world war two. Our schools seem at times to be moving on a similar path. Traditional approaches to multiculturalism are lacking in that the reality of the nation-state is not sufficiently accounted for by disciplinary research on social identity or identity in cross-cultural encounters. Billig (1995) fittingly points to the flattened topography of identity due to the fact that theorizing that nationalism is overlooked by identity theoreticians and made, by default, functionally equivalent to other types of identity. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) also urge the social sciences to recognize the crucial influence of national structures in the shaping of group identities. This oversight is detrimental to social theory and education in general, and multicultural education in particular.

Multicultural efforts could benefit from attempts to create small opportunities for the emergence of particularity and perspectival identity (Castells, 1997) from under the hegemonizing power of the universality of national ideology. Working toward emancipation from present national formations might sound utopic, but it's worth a try. The secret to the persistence of present resources is their banality, which in turn is responsible for our nonreflective experience. Similarly, the discursive practices inscribed in the banality of the nation-state blind us to the resources that establish, drive, and produce it. Inevitably we are far more likely to reinscribe ourselves and our circumstances within these resources, with their hidden ideologies, rather than reflexively deconstruct the building blocks of our present consciousness. Nonreflexive educational endeavors, be they multicultural or not, rather than counteract it, simply reinforce the hegemonic reality.

Decodification, Freire's (Freire & Macedo, 1995) metaphor for literacy learning, might be the right process to begin uninscribing the nation-state's latent hegemonic power in multicultural initiatives. A critical pedagogy (Apple, 1982; Burbules & Berk, in press) might be the way to discern a world of relationships that has the potential to create both essentialist and dynamic identities and cultures. Any other choice will continue to obscure the ideological distortions that sustain the worldviews and reified categories we seek to change. Yet critical approaches tend to place too much faith in the power of reasoning and might guide us back into the creation of new dichotomizing meta-narratives. While they may be the ones of our preference, these alternative meta-narratives can be equally misleading in their insidious homogenizing power. To approach the discursive resources of nation-state critically does not necessarily mean doing away with them (though this might not be such a bad idea) but, rather, to show how their authority is constituted and constituting. Participants in the critical inquiry retain the choice of integrating or rejecting such critical knowledge.

Working in this direction might help pave the way to new, more generous imaginings in sociopolitical organization. Some are already experimenting with such ideas. Europe, for one, is trying to reconsider its reorganization toward what might even become unexpected meta-national structures. Some (e.g., Nobel peace laureate S. Peres) have suggested considering such innovations in the Middle East as well. More important, in the case presented, working in this direction might free the imagination for more productive multicultural educational work.

I join theoreticians such as Lustig (1997) and McCarthy (1993) in their call to support a multicultural approach that emphasizes a critical relationality and multivocality more than mere inclusiveness. A multiculturalism limited only to the objective level of coexistence of ethnic cultural groups in society and an ideological discourse about society's cultural identity can only encourage monoculturalism (Eldering, 1996). Critical dialogical approaches, those committed to a pedagogy of articulation and risk (Grossberg, 1994), though difficult to establish, seem the only ones which might be able to help us uncover new options. As previously stated, proceeding otherwise might make us vulnerable to the trap of serving the nation-state ideology which bears much responsibility for present interethnic conflict. These steps in conflict-ridden areas, such as that under study, have to be taken with care. The groups involved have many reasons to prefer present understandings that, though painful, offer recognizable patterns rather than the adoption of new paths as yet untested in their transformative potential. The political-ideological context in Israel seems to oblige the maintenance of segregation at least until the political conflict is resolved. Even then it is not clear, given both groups' present understanding of nation and culture, that they will successfully overcome segregation.

There are no universal multicultural approaches that can be offered independent of sociopolitical contexts. Every multicultural endeavor involves new imaginings and difficult, hazardous work.

The project on which this paper is based was funded by the Ford Foundation (Grant Number: 990-1558) and was jointly directed by my colleague Gabriel Horenzyk, who was mostly responsible for quantitative aspects of the study and carried out in close collaboration with our principal research assistant Nader Shhadi. I want to thank Keri Warshawsky and Vivienne Burstein for their critical insights and assistance when editing the manuscript.

Notes

1 *Palestinian* and not *Arab* is the preferred self-denomination of the largest non-Jewish minority in Israel; thus I use this term throughout the text but for when using direct quotes or referring to official or organizational statements that might use the term Arab.

2 Detailed analyses of additional aspects of the schools' population and functioning, as well as quantitative analyses of other data gathered through semistructured interviews and structured questionnaires, are provided in two reports available in Bekerman and Horenczyk (2000, 2001).

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