

Equality and inclusion of the Palestinian minority in mixed Israeli schools: A case study of Jaffa's Weizman School

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The Israeli education system is primarily shaped by the religious nature of the state, although there are some mixed schools where both Palestinian and Israeli children learn together. Jaffa is unique within the system due to its history and its Palestinian minority, and the Weizman School is an interesting case as parents are particularly involved in the school's choices. Several initiatives in Jaffa aim to cultivate a multicultural and egalitarian education, and their differing results are discussed here. The article suggests new directions for the future, taking into consideration the viewpoints that emerge from the interviews with teachers and parents.

Keywords: Israel; Palestinians; mixed education; equality

Introduction

This paper explores how mixed schools can improve the education received by Palestinians living in Israel and thus help them to overcome their identity as a 'trapped minority' (Monterescu and Rabinowitz, 2007). The goal of this mixed schooling is ultimately to provide these Palestinian students with the opportunity to succeed in higher education so that they may gain social and educational equality. This short introduction explains the methods and focus of my research, the terminology used, and the context of the research – specifically Jaffa and the Israeli school system, as related to the religious nature of the state of Israel. This provides essential background for understanding the study of the Weizman School in Jaffa as a microcosm of a problem that exists nationwide.

Methods and research questions

This article is drawn from my PhD research project 'Similarities and differences: Research on mixed education in Jaffa'. The fieldwork was conducted in Jaffa from August 2012 to January 2013 and involved eight different institutions, encompassing all school grades. I observed participants in three kindergartens, one high school, and several public parks, where children spend a lot of time after school. I conducted about 45 semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents in these places, as well as with social workers and volunteers for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Additionally, I circulated questionnaires that were filled in by 90 middle- and high-school students and 33 parents of children from three separate kindergartens.

However, I eventually focused on a case study about a primary school in Jaffa. The article focuses on this school, and examines these research questions:

- How are religious and ethnic diversity managed by teachers and parents in the context of mixed education?

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- How do parents describe the unusual events at the Weizman School and what were the consequences for the school population?
- What role has integration or segregation played in these events?

Note on terminology

In the text the term 'Palestinians' refers to Palestinian citizens of Israel not living in the West Bank or Gaza, who have Israeli citizenship but are labelled by the state of Israel as Arab Israelis. In the interviews they are sometimes referred to as 'Palestinians' and sometimes as 'Arabs', but this discrepancy only occurs in direct quotations or where necessary to make a distinction.

Palestinians living today in the State of Israel are the offspring of the non-Jewish people that were living in historical Palestine during the British mandate and before 1948.

The word 'Israeli' refers to Jewish-Israeli citizens and the term 'religious Jews' refers to the Hebrew words *datim* or *haredim*, which correspond to 'orthodox Jews' in English.

The Israeli school system and language issues

Ever since the State Educational Act defined and institutionalized 'Arab education' in 1953, ethnically segregated schools have been tightly controlled at both the ideological and political levels (Levy and Massalha, 2010). Far from a unified network, the Israeli school system is subdivided into four groups: state Jewish schools; state Arab schools; state religious schools; and private schools.

In each school the principal is responsible for pedagogical issues at their institution, particularly in secondary schools, and this autonomy plays a significant role in the selection of staff. In the secular private schools, educators tend to reflect educational philosophies that are either based on the curriculum of a foreign state (such as American schools) or tied to international movements (such as Steiner schools). State religious schools offer intensive programmes in Judaic study, while private religious schools base their curriculum mainly on religious studies. There are also private schools managed by religious organizations not related to Judaism. These are mainly Christian, although some can be attended by non-religious or Muslim students (for example the Terra Santa School in Jaffa), or even by Jewish students (like Collège des Frères, also in Jaffa) (Beckerman, 2004). Within the state-school category, there are Arab schools and Hebrew-speaking schools, the latter colloquially referred to as 'Jewish schools' since it is mainly Jewish children who attend. In state Jewish schools the language of instruction is Hebrew – although Classical Arabic (Fusha) is taught as a compulsory subject in lower secondary schools and later offered as an optional subject in upper secondary schools. These schools provide a general curriculum that typically consists of language, maths, science, history and civic education, and includes instruction in Bible study. A minority of Palestinians also attend these schools, particularly in 'mixed' towns where Palestinians and Israelis live side by side. The language of instruction in state Arab schools is Arabic, although Hebrew is also taught. Historically, these Arab schools have been underfunded compared with Jewish schools, although recent governments have taken action to redress the imbalance, including the building of new classrooms to meet the needs of a growing population. Student–teacher ratios are much higher in these Arab schools than in their counterparts, the secular Jewish schools, and almost all of the teachers are Palestinians. This imbalance is also confirmed by some educators, such as Rony,¹ a Jewish teacher working in a Jewish state school where 50 per cent of students are Palestinians:

The majority of teachers do not live here. I and many others are part of an 'elite' that come from north Tel Aviv, or at least from the best areas of Tel Aviv, to this underfunded school to teach in Jaffa. The school is not considered good. For this reason, many parents want to send their children to better schools and give them a better future, not just in education.

Despite this imbalance in quality and in the student–teacher ratio, the curriculum is nearly the same for both Arab and Jewish schools, although the courses are taught in Arabic rather than Hebrew at the Arab schools. Palestinian graduates of these Arab secondary schools consequently find it difficult to succeed in higher education where, with the exception of one or two teacher-training institutions, the language of instruction is almost exclusively Hebrew. They are also put at a disadvantage when competing for places in higher education because Jewish students receive financial support from the government to prepare for the Bagrut matriculation exam and for university entrance exams. Children from more educated, and usually wealthier, families score significantly higher than those in less privileged circumstances (Shavit, 1990). Teachers are also affected: although the formal levels of training and salaries for Palestinian teachers are the same as those for their counterparts in Jewish schools, the difference in funding is evidenced by the higher student–teacher ratios in Arab schools (Abu-Saad, 2006) as compared to the Jewish ones.

A further complication of the language divide is that the written Arabic that all children learn in school does not reflect colloquial Arabic and the Palestinian dialect (Beckerman and Geisen, 2012). In effect, this means that Palestinian children need to learn a 'foreign' language just to achieve literacy in their native tongue, while also learning Hebrew (and later English). Native Arabic speakers also face a social stumbling block in that the Arabic language is held in low esteem, especially in urban areas. The first bilingual school offering all instruction in both Hebrew and Arabic, co-taught by a Hebrew-speaking and an Arabic-speaking teacher, was founded in 1984 within the project of Kibbutz Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam. Other bilingual schools are run by NGOs, such as Hand in Hand, or are related to the international network of Steiner schools. At time of publication, there are only five bilingual schools managed by Hand in Hand across Israel, in Jerusalem, Haifa, Galilee, Wadi Ara, and Jaffa (where a bilingual kindergarten opened in 2013) – but only in Jerusalem are all the grades covered (Hand in Hand, 2014). The Israeli Ministry of Education is also currently developing programmes proposed by other NGOs. These focus mainly on achieving coexistence (Maoz *et al.*, 2002; Rabinowitz, 2000) and the introduction of the spoken Arabic language in early school grades through a national project such as the 'Ya Salam' programme proposed by the Abraham Fund (2014). Efforts to develop bilingual instruction in the Israeli educational system are hindered by political concerns and popular resistance, and the many studies in this area address not only the socio-linguistic aspect but also the educational one related to the concept of ethnic identity (e.g. Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999).

The nature of the state and its influence on the educational system

An ethnic democracy, as defined by Smooha (1997), is a political system that combines the dominance of a particular ethnic group with democratic, political, and civil rights for all citizens. The dominant ethnic group and the marginal groups all have citizenship and are able to participate fully in the political process. However, the dominant ethnic group, by virtue of their majority, has control of politics, the state, and rights. In addition, the state is identified with the majority group and not with its minority citizens.

Many studies of Israel fail to take the religious dimension into account or, rather, they fail to acknowledge that it is impossible to define Israel as other than a Jewish state, related to the diaspora, characterized by a deep division between the Jewish majority and Arab minority (Smooha, 1997). In his essay 'Israel and its Arab citizens: Predicaments in the relationship between

ethnic states and ethno-national minorities', Rouhana (1998) calls Israel an 'ethnic state' and analyses the difficulty of relations between the Israeli state and its Palestinian minority. He argues that, given its bi-national reality and limited democracy, Israel fits his definition of a constitutional ethnic state. He then examines the contradiction between the state's democratic aims and its ethnic superstructure, which cannot provide for the Palestinian minority's democratic demands for acknowledgement of their basic human rights: equality, inclusion, identity. Rouhana specifically refers to some basic laws, including the Israeli constitution, to illustrate how far the definition of Israel as a Jewish state limits equality for those who are not Jewish and restricts full democracy to those who are.

Thus, while Palestinian citizens possess full rights and equal citizenship, they live in a state built specifically for the Jewish people – a contradiction that leads inevitably to a division according to religious and ethnic identity, and which pervades all aspects of life, not least the educational system. The problem is most evident when Palestinians and Israelis coexist in the same town. This creates obvious difficulties of language and culture, but Palestinian inhabitants must also decide whether to send their children to better-funded schools that employ different religious calendars than their own, use different languages for instruction, and offer a better quality of education, or to enrol them in less well-endowed and perhaps overcrowded institutions that more closely match their personal beliefs and linguistic preferences.

This is the dilemma facing many parents living in Jaffa and other mixed towns, and is critical to understanding why the Weizman School in Jaffa is in continuous danger of closure. This school represents a microcosm that illustrates how difficult it is to manage the diversity of religion, language, and ethnicity inside a mixed educational context. In Jaffa, Palestinians and Israelis live side by side so there is a *de facto* coexistence in the town, but this does not automatically translate into an equitable educational arrangement.

The Palestinian minority and Jaffa's example

Stories are important because they can reveal meaning without committing the error of defining it (Arendt, 1973: 107).

Jaffa: Today and in the past

The evolving reality of urban space – the new definition of borders and cooperation in political and economic links between Palestinians and Israelis – is exemplified through the Tel Aviv–Jaffa dyad. The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians in these twinned cities is a good example of a dialectical process. Since its founding in 1909, Tel Aviv has had a problematic and ambivalent relationship with Jaffa, its mother city which later became its rival. Tel Aviv was founded on 11 April 1909 as a 'Jewish Garden' on the outskirts of Jaffa, but began to overshadow Jaffa during the 1930s, both demographically and economically, and eventually conquered Jaffa in the 1948 Palestine War and annexed it in 1950. Individually, each city represents the metropolitan images of its majority inhabitants. Tel Aviv is seen as the White City, mythologized by Zionism, and Jaffa as the bride of Palestine, embodying a modern, secular, and cosmopolitan Palestinian city.

The battle between these two neighbouring cities has been an existential struggle for survival between two exclusive national projects; the slow obliteration of one has enabled the rapid growth of the other (Monterescu and Rabinowitz, 2007). During the 1948 war, over 90 per cent of the 70,000 Palestinians who lived in Jaffa left their homes and, as a result, Jaffa became a predominantly Jewish town. In 1950, after a period of military rule, it lost its autonomous status

and was annexed to the municipality of Tel Aviv. The Jaffa described in today's media is a dismal place: crime reigns, the school system is poor at best, and drugs are a serious problem (e.g. *Jerusalem Post*, 2014a; 2014b). Yet once, Jaffa was not only a cosmopolitan commercial centre, but also a safe haven for migrants who came from other regions seeking employment. Now this image remains only in the memory of a dwindling few. Today, Jaffa is populated primarily by young Jewish couples who cannot afford to buy houses in Tel Aviv, very poor foreign workers, and Palestinian collaborators who have revealed valuable information to the Israeli army and therefore can no longer live in the West Bank or Gaza. However, in the last few years there has been a fledgling revival in which new building projects are enhancing the neighbourhoods and the value of houses in this mixed city (Monterescu, forthcoming).

Palestinians in Israel: A trapped minority

A Palestinian living in a mixed city such as Jaffa has many opportunities, but also dwells in tension and contradiction (Monterescu and Rabinowitz, 2007). Unlike Palestinians who inhabit Palestinian villages in the north, these so-called 'Israeli Arabs' are described by some scholars as a 'trapped minority' (Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2005) and, at the same time, are labelled by other Arabs as their 'Israeli neighbours'. Their 'Israelite' status isolates them from not only non-Israeli Arabs living in that region but also Arabs in other countries. They are formal citizens of a country that denies non-Jews a genuine sense of belonging, and are trapped in a political and cultural cross-fire between their state and their ethnic nation. Some of them describe themselves as a 'double minority' (Monterescu and Rabinowitz, 2007). Rabinowitz has devoted much of his research to defining the minority 'Palestinian citizens of Israel', and analysing the relationship of this minority to the Jewish-Israeli majority (Rabinowitz, 1997) and their Palestinian neighbours. Through his work, he developed the concept of a 'trapped minority'.

In official documents of the various Israeli ministries and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) there are clear references to this minority, broadly defined as 'Israeli Arabs', who are sometimes further subdivided (especially by the CBS) according to the ethnic and religious groups that are encompassed by this label, including Sunni Muslims, Bedouin, Druze, and various religions to which Israeli Arabs or Christians belong (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Monterescu and Rabinowitz (2007) argue that the term 'Israeli Arabs' constitutes a real and deliberate 'state label' and they contrast it with an alternative term, 'Palestinian citizens of Israel', which clearly considers only Palestinians and excludes other ethnic minorities. According to these scholars, this definition encompasses those who already have Israeli citizenship and who, to all effects, are the descendants of the 700,000 Palestinians who remained inside the borders of present-day Israel following the 1948 war (Morris, 2004). The term 'Palestinian' encompasses both a reference back to 'historical Palestine' that existed under the British mandate until 1948, and forwards to a future ideal Palestinian state. It draws not only on the historical background of this minority, but also on their future and present, as many of the Palestinians living in Israel maintain strong ties with their extended family members still residing in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Emblematic of this is the story of Professor Kawla Abu-Baker, told in the book *Coffins on Our Shoulders*, in which she laments missing her father's funeral in the Occupied Palestinian Territories because Israeli citizens, including Palestinians such as herself, are denied access to the territories for security reasons (Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2005).

The picture becomes even more complex if we consider that this group is defined as 'non-recognized Palestinians' by the Palestinians of the West Bank, but are not true Israeli citizens either, since they have a different language, religion, and history, and are excluded from white-collar careers because they are non-native Hebrew speakers. The situation is further aggravated

by the fact that they do not have access to military careers (Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker, 2005), although posts on the 'Transformations' news and politics blog suggest that this has changed in the last few years (e.g. Hackl, 2014). It is also essential to analyse the prospects of young people since this control mechanism is evolving and Palestinian citizens of Israel are becoming increasingly aware of it. In fact, mixed schools are a perfect example of a response to this evolution because more and more parents – realizing the limitations on adults who are not fluent Hebrew speakers or who were educated 'outside' the system – choose to send their children to an Israeli school of poor quality rather than a higher-quality, private Palestinian school (defined as Arab by the state). This reality has inspired many parents to call for change (Shavit, 1990) and to join together as members of the Stand Tall Generation, which Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker (2005) describe extensively in *Coffins on Our Shoulders*. The Stand Tall Generation demands that Israel no longer be a solely Jewish state but rather a state for all its citizens. Disillusioned with the unlikelihood of becoming equal citizens of Israel under the current system, they are also no longer interested in being a marginal and 'angry' part of the Zionist project. Rather, they see citizenship as a collective title, a title that should be independent of religious affiliation.

Dynamics in Jaffa's mixed educational institutions

The educational problem in Jaffa

Levy and Massalha (2010) investigated issues in Jaffa related to the education of the Palestinians. Specifically, they studied how much the educational choices of Palestinian families are influenced by three main factors: their marginalized social position; how far they are from the dominant culture; and their inability to make a difference.

Given the complexity of global and local economic pressures within the context of Jewish political superiority, many Arab parents struggle to choose the education that would offer their children the best future. However, the desire to choose a quality education is inescapably influenced by issues of identity that intersect and form the Jewish–Palestinian relations in Israel (Levy and Massalha, 2010). Even the privilege of making a choice is increasingly limited by the fact that Christian schools have become very selective on financial and attainment grounds. For example, the Terra Santa and Collège des Frères schools, both private institutions, usually cost around 800 to 1,000 Israeli new shekels (NIS) per month (about 160–200 Euros), a prohibitive sum considering that the minimum wage is about 3,300–3,500 NIS (about 650 Euros) per month and many Palestinians live below the poverty line. These schools certainly offer a high standard of instruction, with a low student–teacher ratio, so that graduates are often accepted to universities where they successfully continue their studies. But, while at these schools, students must follow strict rules that are influenced by the religious nature of these institutions – for example, uniforms are compulsory, hair and clothes under the uniform must be presented in a certain way, while make-up, smoking, and cell phones are not permitted. None of these restrictions apply in Israeli public schools.

Many Palestinian parents become discouraged by the lack of integration in these schools and by their prohibitive costs, so that most of their children transfer to state-run Israeli schools. For these reasons, among others, parents and educators are currently looking for new paths to education that avoid the poor quality of interdisciplinary state schools and overcome the authoritative pedagogies of schools connected to a Christian church. Levy and Massalha (2010) have analysed the birth and development of the Arab Democratic School of Jaffa. It was a private school with no connections to ethnic/religious institutions and whose guiding principle was democracy, with its emphasis on freedom of study, student autonomy, and the importance of

an education in Arabic as well as the use of Arabic as a first language. In September 2012 I interviewed Mary, the former principal of the Arab Democratic School, who had previously been the principal of a Christian Orthodox school. In the interview it came out that the Arab Democratic School closed just a few years after opening. The municipality had not recognized it as a state school. Consequently, the teachers did not receive their salaries and, after a few months, went on a strike that ultimately led to the school's closure due to financial problems.

The Weizman School – a case study using interviews

The political and social factors influencing the educational decisions that Palestinians face are well illustrated by the Weizman School, and this section analyses interviews conducted with parents and educators active in the school to explain why it is an emblematic case. Their words and experiences illustrate how the situation in Jaffa is really dynamic and how parents can make a difference if they are determined enough.

During the British mandate, the Weizman School was a Palestinian school, but in the 1950s it was divided into two different schools: Zahara (for Palestinians) and Weizman (for Israelis). Nowadays, children from low-income families in both communities attend both schools and Palestinians attending Zahara are often the children of Israeli collaborators. In 2009, the municipality of Tel Aviv–Jaffa and the principals of both schools decided to build a fence to divide the playground shared by Zahara and Weizman, but the parents strongly opposed this decision and their persistent vocal protests convinced the administration to change course so that, instead, they alternated the time of breaks during the day (Ilany, 2009).

Language was another big problem at the Weizman, complicated by the fact Palestinians are losing their primary language by mixing it with Hebrew slang. This difficulty was confirmed by Ilan, the Jewish director of the Weizman School, who said that 'neither Israeli nor Arab kids have a proper language but just a language of the street, and this is a problem we have to deal with at school'. However, this is just one of the many challenges facing this unique place, which is under a constant risk of closure.

The Weizman School – which is a state Jewish school in Jaffa – had an informal quota of 30 per cent Jewish to 70 per cent Palestinian students until 2000 (Levy and Shavit, 2014). Then, a Palestinian mother and teacher at the school challenged the situation in court because her son was rejected in order to maintain the quota. Her actions resulted in a relaxing of the quota so that even more Palestinian children were admitted and the ratio of Palestinian to Jewish children became even higher. As a result of the high number of Palestinian children in this school the school ran a special programme between 2007 and 2009 that was followed by the Ministry of Education and the Seminar Hakibbutzim College of Education in Tel Aviv. The programme encouraged the study of Arabic from first grade, as well as the celebration of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holy feasts (such as Christmas–Chanukah–Hijra, together called Hag Ha Hagim). Things changed after the war in Gaza (27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009), when many Jews became reluctant to enrol their children at the Weizman School due to rioting in Jaffa in protest at the Israeli action in Gaza; without Jewish students, the school was in danger of closing. At that time, according to Weizman parents Avi and Yael, some parents at the school, both Israeli and Palestinian, tried to convince parents from other kindergartens to join the Weizman school. They worked really hard to encourage Jewish enrolment, although many were discouraged by the socio-economic status of families at the school: 'There is a truth in that, it is a difficult situation. In the class of our son none of the parents have an academic education. This has an influence' (Yael, parent, Jewish).

Meanwhile, the Progressive Jewish Movement arrived in Jaffa and established a centre called Beit Daniel, which financed a project of educational coexistence in Jaffa (Lior, 2011). The

arrangement between Beit Daniel and the municipality was to create two new first-grade classes at the Weizman School from two of its existing kindergarten classes, one run by Beit Daniel, in which the students were predominantly Jewish, the other run by the municipality, in which students were 85 per cent Palestinian. The two classes were held in different buildings and none of the parents were officially informed about these distinctions, so they did not fully understand the situation until a few months after school began.

In June 2011 the project exploded. In the words of Yael, one Jewish parent in the current study: 'When we [the parents] discovered the situation we were shocked. We understood that racism was regular there [at the Weizman School]. First, the parents tried to talk with the principal who had signed a deal with the municipality and Beit Daniel. They proposed that, instead of separating the students into different buildings, the parallel classes should be on different floors. At this point the parents obtained the document that detailed the school's separation policy and called journalist Avi Amit, who talked to the municipality and broadcast an investigation on TV that was seen by many. Later a municipality employee tried to explain their decision:

We have seen wide demographic evidence that there is no justification to open another Jewish school in Jaffa when in fact we can place them [the Jewish kids] in other Jewish schools and turn the Weizman into an Arab school. Local Jewish residents, however, have strongly asked us to leave the school as it is, as they do not want to go to other districts (Amit, 2011).

The reactions to the divided classes were very strong: Beit Daniel left Jaffa accused of racism, the principal resigned, and many Jewish parents did not register their children for the next year. The Weizman School, a unique case of coexistence in Israel, was again in danger of closing. In September 2012 a new principal arrived. According to one Jewish parent, Yael, this director believes that: 'Racism and nationalism are things for adults, children are innocents and do not know them. He doesn't want even to talk about a percentage or different tracks, although we proposed a collaboration with Hand in Hand.'

The new principal's policy is to improve the school's educational level by: encouraging children to read at home and after school with the participation of the parents; creating after-school activities in collaboration with local associations; and giving a special prize (breakfast in his office) to the best students of the month, an approach that some scholars have nicknamed a 'cous cous pedagogy' (Campani, 1996). This approach is advocated by the principal alone, and does not include the democratic collaboration of the families in a structured intervention that is advocated by research centers.

A few parents are happy about these ideas and appreciate them, although many – including research participants Gal and her husband; Avi and his wife Yael; and Noa and Aissa – are not satisfied, and strongly denounce the situation while keeping their children enrolled at the Weizman. Gal, a Jewish parent who converted to Islam, provides some idea of why parents stay:

The school is good but I feel that something is missing. The children read for 15 minutes before class every day and this brought them closer to a lot of reading and books in general. The behaviour has improved and [they go] more to the library.

Gal has also talked about the brief period when there was a separation inside the school:

When [my son] was in kindergarten I had not noticed. Then when the child moved to first grade I realized that there were only Arabs in his class. So I started trying to figure out what was going on and I understood that the two classes were not only divided between Arabs and Jews, they were in different buildings. I thought: Are we in the Shoah? They want to separate the children! I said, 'Stop!' My child has heard all these stories and he asked me: 'Mommy, but they want to separate me from Yonatan because he is Jew and I'm Arab?'

Of the three couples mentioned, only Avi and Yael are both Jewish. The other two couples are culturally mixed and deal with complications such as how to manage different languages and attitudes inside one family. In fact, Gal is a Jewish immigrant married to a Muslim Palestinian and this religious diversity within her family created a distance from her parents and relatives who, in the beginning, didn't accept her marriage to a Muslim. This also caused problems registering her children at the Weizman School:

I wanted to tell you that I tried to register my first child here, but I was not allowed. The municipality enrolled him in an Arab school. So I went there with my document, that of my father, my mother ... and in the end they decided on [placement at] the Weizman in a mixed class, mainly with Arabs. For the second child it was easier because the first one was already there. We organized a demonstration about this situation. We were also on TV for it. Hearing talk among children that says 'He's a Jew' or 'He's an Arab' is absurd to me.

Hromadzic (2009) talks anecdotally about divided Mostar Gymnasium in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where adolescent students were segregated in class, meeting only in the toilet during breaks to smoke cigarettes. In places that are, or have been, ravaged by conflict, mixing is often taboo. This phenomenon is confirmed by some parents that I interviewed in Jaffa, including Yair, who said, 'It is simpler to marry a European than an Arab woman.'

'A spicy religious salad'

The level of involvement of the teachers in the Weizman School is very high; some have taught in Jaffa for many years and they do it with great dedication. Among them, Dana is particularly active in the community:

I could have worked in many other situations, other schools, but I chose to teach in this school in Jaffa. It's not just because I was born and raised here but because it is special here; I have a class with children who come from all parts, and are of all religions, of all colours. This is a special place, very special. We call our class 'spicy religious salad' – more and more it is spicy and special. For example, when the Arabs had the feast *Eid ul fitr* we talked about it the whole week. We tried to find connection points between the Jewish holidays and other religious holidays, and discussed the diversity between them. Another example is that there is Chanukah and then there is Christmas, and so they learn that we are all the same: God is unique, there is a God of the Jews, Muslims, Christians; it is always the same God. The important thing is to have the intention to be good people, this is important. This is the message that I try to give the class. Perhaps our religions are different but we are all the same. (Dana, teacher, Jewish)

Dana is a key character at the Weizman School. Using start-up funds from the municipality she established a cooperative public vegetable garden called 'Green inside and outside'. She involved the children and adults at the Weizman in its creation, although anybody who wanted was welcomed to participate. It became not just a garden but a way to involve children after school, collaborate with parents, and create a neutral cultural and social meeting place. But despite this successful initiative, she feels that in class kids sense they are not equal:

I always have to choose who does what using 'Endendino, Sof Ha la catino' [popular Hebrew song similar to 'Eeny, meeny, miny, mo'] because it's the only way they know that I'm not giving a preference to somebody; they are really scared about being excluded. This is because at home or in the street it works like that.

Teachers in the other mixed Jaffa schools that I observed and in which I carried out interviews, also voiced the difficulties working in a mixed environment. Most of the participant teachers agreed that acceptance and respect are fundamental in mixed schools, but they also talked about

how often they find themselves in hard situations for which they feel unprepared, managing diversity both at school and at home. For example, a Jewish teacher said that, after an Arab colleague had left her house her children said, 'Mum, even if she's Arab she's nice!'

This same teacher was told by a Palestinian mother that her child would not dress for Independence Day: 'I'm not sending my daughter with a white T-shirt because this is not our feast!'

Conclusion

The notion of mixed has a central importance in the formation of the interpretations of identity and self-confidence, of having a place in the world, interpreting the quality of relationships between individuals, between communities, between nation states, and between religions (Khan, 2004: 3).

We all eat from the same plate and, in situations like the one we're living in, bombs don't know if you are Jewish or Arab! (Fatima, teacher, Palestinian, Muslim)

Fatima's short reflection on the realities of an ethnic minority residing in a religious state leads us to abandon the words of Rosaldo (1988), who argues that 'cultures have borders', in favour of those of Rabinowitz, who argues that 'the boundaries have cultures' (Rabinowitz, 2001: 8). In Rosaldo's perspective when we define cultures, we have borders between them; in Rabinowitz's perspective, we have border cultures that are hybrid and mixed and not clearly defined.

Jaffa is a mixed city and its educational institutions are contained within a sort of boundary where different cultures pollinate each other in a 'space of the encounter' (Callari Galli, 1996), producing something new and dynamic and often volatile. Donnan and Wilson (1999) argue that border cultures are productive units of analysis so should no longer be considered marginal by the majority of the population. The development of human experience that unfolds in these border areas is of a more evolved form than occurs in a homogenous metropolis, but it does not have to take place only on the boundaries – the interaction of ethnic groups living on the margins with the state and with the majority are important.

Some questions about mixed education remain following this research, for example in relation to quotas. While not ideal, quotas are probably the best solution for Jewish schools attended by many Palestinians as the only way to prevent 'white flight', the tendency for parents of the majority population to remove their children from schools attended by too many students from the minority population (Clotfelter, 2004). But while quotas might seem an obvious way to ensure that ethnically diverse students are educated together, they also create a system that relies on simplistic labelling of students as Jewish or Arab. This can prove too inflexible in reality. For example, how would one define a child of a Russian-Jewish mother who converted to Islam and a Muslim father who speaks Hebrew? They attend a Palestinian school but it will be difficult for their parents to help them with their Arabic homework. If they attend a Jewish school the schedule will not reflect their family's religious holidays, and so on. In ethnically diverse Jaffa there are many mixed couples and their identities can be difficult to define.

The evolution of mixed education continues. In September 2013 a new Hand in Hand kindergarten opened in Jaffa, extending the 'mixed' educational offerings to very young children. Meanwhile, at Weizman, the much-admired director is leaving the school and the future will be greatly shaped by whoever takes up the post. Whatever comes next, there is a great deal yet to study and to know about Jaffa's unique mixed education dynamics. Perhaps the greatest lesson of the Weizman case is that trust in academic institutions still exists and that parents, teachers, and children can work together to make change or at least make their voices heard.

Note

1. All names are pseudonyms.

Notes on contributor

In April 2014 Sabina Leoncini completed her PhD in Educational Science at Florence University, where she had earlier obtained her MA in Anthropology (2008). She received scholarships from both the Italian and Israeli ministries of foreign affairs to study at the Rothberg International School in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJI). In 2012 she was a Visiting Research Fellow at HUJI. In 2013/2014, she was a scholarship holder at the Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, and Visiting Student at the European University Institute.

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