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Separate but Not Equal

Discrimination Against Palestinian Arab Students in Israel

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Palestinian Arab education in Israel receives inferior allocations for training, supervision, nature, and art lessons. In general, the physical conditions in the schools are bad and they lack basic study aids. The Palestinian Arab schools have significantly fewer of the unique programs in which the Ministry of Education invests. But discrimination in budgets and "how many" questions cannot lead to an understanding of the whole picture of inequality. Employing questions and methods used by various waves of feminists to explain and combat inequality between men and women, the author asks, How could the education system benefit from equal representation of the voice of Arab leadership? Borrowing from feminist discourse that raises the importance of the diversity of voices and multiculturalism, the author explores and proposes ways of respecting and reinforcing diverse cultural and national identities in the Israeli education system.

Keywords: *equality; discrimination; Palestinians; Israel; feminism*

In the summer of 1999, Yossi Sarid, the head of the liberal Meretz Party, was appointed Minister of Education under Labor Prime Minister Barak. He promised, in an eloquent torrent of words, to focus all his efforts on equality in education—or as he called it, "bridging the gaps." I was hired to develop a plan for the Ministry of Education to address inequality.

I devoted about 2 years to studying the ways that the education system aggravates the inequality between the center and the periphery, between poor and rich, between Arabs and Jews, and between boys and girls. The more I learned, the more alarmed I became at the growing disparities. I tried to translate them into simple questions: How can we give Jasmine, the third-grade student in Azzazme school, or Jasmine who lives in a development town, or Jasmine in a wealthy settlement, or Jasmine in the big city equal chances of a decent education? There are no private schools in Israel, and the state is supposedly providing a good education for all, but only 8% of students

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accepted to universities are Arabs, and the percentage of Jewish students from developing towns is not much higher. Looking at the data of the Ministry of Education—which clearly show that the percentage of Arabs who pass the matriculation exams is much lower than that of Jews—I tried to understand why. In this article, I want to share with you the process of learning about inequality and the problems that we faced on the road to change.

Early on in my work, I was told that my job was not meant to address Arab education. "By equality in education," I was told, "we mean the gaps between underprivileged and rich neighborhoods, the periphery and the center in Jewish education. In Arab education there are so many gaps that they have a 5-year plan."

The 5-year plan, which proposes an addition of NIS 50 million (approximately US$10 million) per year for 5 years, amounts to a small tranquilizer administered too late and does not even pretend to solve any of the problems that have emerged from years of neglect of Arab education. As one of the Arab superintendents told me, "It is like giving a child a dollar out of your salary and asking him to believe that you have just opened up a world of opportunity for him." Despite Sarid's statements about the need for an approach that promoted social justice rather than charity, the 5-year plan was based neither on a sense of justice nor on long-term change. It contained no addition to the basic budget for Arab education, it did not empower the Arab teaching personnel for the long term, and it was not even managed by Arabs. A retired army captain was hired to direct the implementation of the 5-year plan—not a single word of which was ever translated into Arabic. It was astonishing that even a minister who presumes to be on the left, who heads the Citizens Rights Movement, did not see fit to appoint an Arab educationalist to head the designated plan for Arab affirmative action. In the spirit of Margaret Thatcher's education reforms, the 5-year plan was contracted to large private companies. But the bid was publicized only in the Hebrew newspapers, and the requirements were such that no Arab company could have competed. One of the companies to win a contract to improve the reading capacity of Arab students was a college in the West Bank settlement of Ariel.

I, therefore, insisted that in addition to the 5-year plan, and parallel to it, my recommendations would be to address the entire education system in Israel, both Jewish and Arab, in the plans for equality in education. The intention was not only to speak about social justice but also to build plans for a more just distribution of resources and empowerment of teachers so that they could lead the required change. For that purpose, we formed the Committee for Equality in Education, which I coordinated with the key bureaucrats of the ministry, academics, teachers, and principals. Through long sessions, we proposed fundamental changes in budget allocations: Poor schools would receive more than rich schools and teachers' status and pay would be raised, mainly in development towns and underprivileged neighborhoods. We proposed and developed programs for training teachers and suggested changes in the curriculum to reflect the presence of many cultures and two national identities in Israel (Betts, 2003; Golan-Agnon, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2001). I soon found out that although the tenure of Yossi Sarid provided opportunities to talk about injustice, lack of equality in the country, and how the education system nurtures, facilitates, and preserves that lack

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of equality, Sarid did very little for change. He was so preoccupied with his battle against the education system of Shas, the religious Mizrahi Party, that he missed the opportunity to produce real change in the state education system and he resigned after a short time in office. But some of our recommendations were adopted by Likud Education Minister Limor Livnat and some were the base for the newly appointed Dovrat Commission for the reform of the education system.[1]

Looking for the sources of inequality in education, and trying to design a plan for change, I employed questions and methods used by feminists to explain and combat inequality between men and women. I learned the various nuances, implications, sources, and, hence, also the various questions asked in the attempt to understand inequality from feminist approaches that propose different and diverse ways of analyzing sources of inequality and ways to effect social change (Humm, 1992; Kristeva, 1981).[2]

Questioning Inequality—First Wave

First-generation feminists searched for egalitarian social relations and ways to change unequal social conditions through the search for equal citizenship. They believed that if institutions of the state (electoral politics, higher education, etc.) were opened to women, women would become equal citizens. From Olive Schreiner to Simone de Beauvoir, first-generation feminists were preoccupied with the issue of women's material differences from men. In her book, *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner (1911) argued that women's candidature for the political sphere depends on not only access to that sphere but also an alteration in the meaning of public and private. Virginia Woolf (1929), as well as other first-wave feminists, argued that women need financial independence.

Thus, women from the first generation of feminism focused on questions that I term the "how many" questions: How many women hold key positions in government, the parliament, and other public offices? How many women writers are taught in schools? How much do women earn in relation to men? These questions touch on the formal aspects of equality and are based on the assumption that the greater the representation of women in key positions, the more their status will improve. The task of the struggle for equality is to create numerical equality between women and men in pay, positions, opportunities, representation, and access to key positions.

The question I asked was, How much does the Ministry of Education invest in one student in Yeruham and Dimona and Raanana and Jedida? And although they kept telling me this was not a good question, and that there was no answer to it anyway, I kept asking how much the Ministry of Education invests in Arab education. It took me months to figure out the numbers. But the figures clearly show at least some of the discrimination: Arab education receives inferior allocations for training, supervision, nature, and art lessons. In general, the physical infrastructure of the schools is more dilapidated. The educational situation of the children in the unofficial Bedouin villages is extremely dire. Many students are forced to walk kilometers to the nearest bus

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stop and then travel large distances (up to 70 km) to reach their schools. The physical conditions in the schools are bad and they lack basic study aids. The Arab schools have significantly fewer of the unique programs in which the Ministry of Education invests. We found, for example, that the money invested in an Arab student who falls under the category of "extra need for nurturing" is on average only one fifth of the amount invested for Jewish children and, thus, through our efforts, the Ministry changed its measurement and budgeting methods of its "nurturing budgets" (Kahn & Yelinek, 2000). In a study we planned with the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, all school principals in Israel had to reveal the budgets they have, not including teachers' salaries. We found that for each Jewish student, schools have an average of NIS 4,935 a year (approximately US$1,097), and for each Palestinian-Israeli student, NIS 862 (US$191). In the south, for each Palestinian-Israeli child, there are some NIS 270 (US$60) compared to children of Jewish settlers in the West Bank, for whom there are some NIS 6,906 per year (US$1,535; Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

How much money is invested in Arab children in Israel as opposed to Jewish education? The data are hard to comprehend—the information is hard to find and the discrimination it reveals is tough to explain. Of NIS 22 billion (approximately US$5 billion)—the Ministry of Education's budget for 2001—the Ministry was supposed to invest at least NIS 4.4 billion in Arab students, who represent more than 20% of children in Israel. How much does the Ministry of Education actually invest in Arab education? It is hard to say, but the investment definitely falls far short of the above amount. If we examine the payment to teachers for teaching hours (the form of payment that is the major part of the Ministry of Education's budget and is calculated per hour), in elementary education an average of 1.7 hours are invested in a Jewish student and 1.4 in an Arab student; 43.8 hours are invested in an Arab class as opposed to 48.7 in a Jewish class. Until 1997, all programs funded by the Ministry and aimed at providing extra care (the Shahar programs) were for Jews only. Subsequent to the Israeli Supreme Court case *Follow-Up Committee for Arab Education v. Ministry of Education* (1997), the Ministry promised that these extra care programs would also operate in Arab education. In recent years, many programs have indeed been developed for Arab education. Still, even if the Ministry honors its commitment to the Supreme Court and allocates 20% of the Shahar division's resources for Arab education, there will still be discrimination because the proportion of Israeli Arabs who constitute a needy population by the definition in the Shahar division plans is much higher than 20% of the general population.

The unequal distribution of support funds that the Ministry of Education gives to associations and nongovernment organizations acting outside the education system is especially interesting. In 1999, the Ministry of Education gave NIS 1,309,588,679 (approximately US$350 million) to associations, less than 1.5% of which went to Arab associations. In other words, every year the Ministry of Education assists in the promotion of associations and bodies working on behalf of education (youth movements, newspapers, museums, etc.) but gives almost no help to Arab associations.

Why are classes more crowded in Arab education? Why does the state of Israel fund fewer school hours for Arab students? Do they need to learn less? When we talk

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about our children, I kept asking at Ministry of Education board meetings, do we not include the Arab children? The Bedouin children? Are they not also our children? Then why are some of our children studying in such poor conditions? Why do we invest less in them?

Questioning Inequality—Second Wave

First-wave feminism won legal and public emancipation for women, the vote, and welfare rights for women. But women did not gain full equality. Thus, although first-wave feminists pressed hard against the notion of separate spheres, arguing that inequalities between the sexes were socially divisive, second-wave feminists, while agreeing that sexual differences shaped the sexual division of labor, nonetheless argued that women's needs and rights were not identical to those of men. They claimed that inequalities between the sexes could not be overcome by allowing women into male-run society but rather, by changing the society to include the needs and interests of women.

Second-generation feminists started focusing on the specifications of women's differences from men; they focused on the conditions of women's everyday difference from men in the street and at home (Humm, 1992). The second wave challenged the traditional understanding of politics by expanding the discussion to all women in society and arguing that "the personal is political." Introducing the term *sexual politics*, Kate Millet (1997) asked, "Can the relationship between the sexes be viewed in a political light at all?" And Millet went on to affirm her answer by defining the political as "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another." Thus, to understand inequality in education, the discrimination in budgets—the how many questions—cannot lead us to comprehend the whole picture of inequality. Just as women learned that the liberal notion of equality is not good enough—that it is not enough to make the same salary to create a society in which women are equal—I added some how questions in the spirit of the second-wave of feminism that asked why the female voice is marginalized. Considering this feminist discussion of the diverse qualities and different perceptions held by men and women that could enrich our society (see Gilligan, 1982), I asked, How could the education system benefit from equal representation of the voice of Arab leadership?

Arabs are not partners in the Ministry of Education's decision-making system, in the outlining of policy, or in planning. There is no Arab district manager, no Arab administration head, and no Arab representation in the Ministry's management. Of the thousands of people who work in the Ministry's administrative headquarters, not even 10 are Arab, and most of them work in the cafeteria. The education system that purports to teach our children democracy, human rights, and active citizenship does not apply these values itself.[3]

One of the Ministry of Education board meetings was held during the month of Ramadan. I asked if the cafeteria could be opened for the early dinner of breaking the fast, and in an unusually generous gesture, they did. It was the first time that such a

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request was ever made. I invited to that meeting a number of Palestinian-Israeli intellectuals, and one of the senior participants from the Ministry told me: I have been working here for 25 years, and I have never met such Arabs; people who are intellectuals and not appointed as yes-men or collaborators with the security services.

The Arab head of the Arab education system not only has no authority or budget but also never even says anything at the meetings. Between us we call him "the plant." His deputy, a Jewish man appointed by the General Security Service, actually runs the department.

The fear of the Arab voice is so great that even today, every appointment of an Arab teacher requires the approval of the General Security Service via the deputy supervisor of Arab Education. My attempts, as well as those of human rights organizations who appealed to the high court, to stop this situation in which each teacher needs the approval of the General Security Service have been unsuccessful. This situation creates fear and lack of trust in the Arab teachers and principals and increases the sense among the Arab public that the education system discriminates against it and neglects it.

The fact that Arabs have no representation in the Ministry of Education reflects their absent presence in the lives of most Jews in Israel and especially in the lives of most of the decision makers. The inequity in budgets, curriculum development, and subject materials that respect the culture and identity of Arabs are the problem of not only the Arabs in Israel but also Israeli society as a whole. There can be no education without empowerment, and this situation in which Jews make decisions, plan, and develop curricula is one that represses not only the Arab minority but also the Jewish majority.

Dr. Khaled Abu Assba (2004), as well as other Arab educators, claimed that equal representation of Arabs in planning and management positions will be possible only if an autonomous Arab administration is established. Why not acknowledge our different voices, the Arab educators ask. To preserve the unique interests and characteristics of the Arab population, and to determine the order of priorities and the content of study materials, perhaps autonomous administration is necessary. In the current political situation, when all Arab teachers are suspected unless proven innocent, the idea that Arabs will run their own education system seems very far from materializing.

The discussions of the Committee for Equality in Education were part of the Ministry of Education's dialogue on renewal and change, a process called *Michlolim*. The title cannot be easily translated into English, as even in Hebrew the word is not clear. But what it meant was that the Ministry should go through a holistic change.

One of the meetings of the Michlolim team took place in the hall of a hotel in Zichron Yaakov. In attendance were 62 senior members of the Ministry of Education. The conference was devoted to change and the fear of change and was facilitated by three organizational consultants, all of them formerly organizational consultants in the military. We sat at six round tables, about 10 people per table. One of the facilitators asked those sitting at my table to change places with those at the next table. "Why should we?" I asked. The facilitators used our refusal to change places to demonstrate the different stages of the fear of change. Using diagrams they had prepared in

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advance, with accompanying transparencies, they explained the fear of change that exists in every organization.

"Meaningful change," I suggested,

> would be if everyone at our table were to get up and leave the room and other people, Arabs, were to come in and replace us. There are 62 of us, senior staff of the Ministry of Education, and only 2 of us are Arabs. Today the Arabs make up about a fifth of the population of the state of Israel and there should therefore be at least 12 Arabs in the workshop run for the top echelon of the Ministry of Education.

My words were met with an utter silence.

These questions—of Arab representation in the leadership of the Ministry of Education—are ones that have never been asked. The two Arab representatives were never given any budget or power to make a difference. And it was agreed that the education of Arabs should be run only by Jews.

Questioning Inequality—Third Wave

I knew all along that I could not comprehend the full meaning of inequality in education in Israel. I knew that as a Jew, the texts I learned at school in Israel respected my history and culture but not those of the Arab minority. I also knew that as it is not enough to know the answers to the how many questions and the how questions, we also have to study the curriculum, to ask, What is Fairuz, an Arab student in Um Al-Fahm, or Rahat, or Ramle taught? What is she taught at school? About herself? Her people? Her past? Her future? Relying again on feminist theories, I looked for questions asked by third-wave feminists.

Second-wave feminism turned to psychoanalytic as well as to social theories about gender differences to create new feminist ethics (Cixous, 1993).[4] What remains constant throughout all waves of feminism is the idea that women are unequal to men because men create the meaning of equality. But the third wave of feminists criticized "the false universalism" in feminist theory, arguing that there is more than one women's voice, articulating the historical and cultural differences of race and class (Davis, 1981; Smith, 1984).

In the third generation of feminism, women raised the importance of the diversity of voices and multiculturalism. To the prevailing second-generation notion, according to which women have a different voice, were now added questions of diversity and multiplicity among women. Black feminists in the United States claimed that their struggle for equality was not necessarily like the struggle of middle-class and upper-class White women's struggle for equality (Damari-Madar, 2002; hooks, 1991). In Israel, these voices belonged to Mizrahi and Palestinian women, women who emphasized that their socioeconomic status and cultural origin influenced their perceptions and their voices and that the creation of an egalitarian and just society would be possible only if the variety of voices and cultures were given room within it. Borrowing from the feminist discussion, we considered, studied, and proposed ways of respect-

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ing and reinforcing the different identities in the Israeli education system. Just as feminists started talking about different voices rather than a single different voice, so we tried to look for the roots of inequality by studying what Arab children are taught and how their curriculum can be diversified.

In a brilliant and innovative lecture delivered to the management of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Ramzi Suliman (2004), head of the Department of Psychology at Haifa University, claimed that the political and economic marginality of Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel engenders cultural marginality. The void that resulted from their alienation from their national culture is partially filled by their assimilation in a marginal and distorted type of Israeli culture with ghetto characteristics. The product of this culture is the "half Israeli–half Palestinian" who is meant to successfully integrate the two identities, national and civil. Suliman stressed that the state and its various institutions, in particular the education system and state media, continue to play a key role in creating and perpetuating the marginal "Arab-Israeli" culture.

The emphasis on Jewish-Zionist values, with no respect for Palestinian national identity, has increased the sense of alienation between the two nationalities and the Arab minority's sense of being disregarded in Israel. The Arab education system in Israel institutionalizes the fear: fear of connection with the past, fear of sharpening the sense of cultural and national identity, and the teachers' fear of engaging current affairs. It is not only the Arab schools that are damaged by this discriminatory education policy; the denial of Palestinian history is also a characteristic of the Jewish textbooks.

It was my friend Samie Sharkawi who taught me most of what I know about the discrimination against Palestinians in Israel. Samie joined me in working at the Ministry of Education after much hesitation and long deliberations about whether to work for the establishment. For hours I tried to convince her that there was no choice; that if we wanted to effect change we had to work in the education system. It is easy, I told her, to say that this is a discriminatory system, but come try and change something to give more children a chance. She never felt at home at the Ministry. Neither of us had worked for the government, and although I found the freedom to ask questions, to make many new friends among those who did not question the system there, Samie could not stand the long drive to Jerusalem, the ugly office, and the loneliness that came with being the only Palestinian in a building of thousands of people. For me it was coming home, in a strange way: My mother worked at the Ministry of Education for 35 years, and when I arrived, I met many of her old colleagues, mostly women, who adopted me as their daughter and told me many things they would have never said on record.

Samie Sharkawi joined the Ministry of Education not long before the second Intifada started. In the days of riots, she called to tell me about her meetings with Palestinian teachers who were afraid to let the children talk about their pain and anger. Two of those killed by the police in October 2000 were high school children—not a single official of the Ministry of Education came to the families to console them, and not a single psychologist was sent to their schools.

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Samie was mostly interested in trying to change the curriculum at Arab schools—until now, no significant effort has been made to facilitate curricula that reflect Arab culture, history, and literature in Arab schools. "Why do we have to learn Bialik and all the Jewish poets and literature, learn history from a Zionist point of view, when there is not a single textbook at school which is devoted to our own Palestinian history?" she asked. Samie led a group of Palestinian-Israeli educators in writing and planning their own curricula in history and civic education—they tried to develop programs in Arabic (not just translations from Hebrew) based on Arab culture.

Samie is particularly pained by the lack of respect with which the school curriculum addresses the identity of Palestinian students in Israel. She wrote about her experience, as a child, of negotiating the disparity between the story she was told at home and the story she was told at school. About the poems that her father, a poet, wrote about their family lands, which today are the lands of Kibbutz Metzer, and about her teacher who was afraid to read those poems in class. Throughout the months we worked together at the Ministry of Education, Samie told me that very little has changed since her own days in school; her children go to schools that are still driven by fear. She concluded,

> At home I was pulled towards my roots; at school, consistently and powerfully, I was uprooted. Looking back I can smile at how home won in the end. *Education*—that was the magic word, the key word. That's where we have to bring both the light and heavy tools and continue to work.

Yes, there is much work to be done—in making sure budgets are allocated in a just way, in allowing Arab educators the freedom to plan and run their education programs, and in changing the curriculum. Reforming the education system is essential in our pursuit of justice, and there is room for much research to understand the roots of inequality and methods for change.

But as my friend Samie Sharkawi taught me, we should not lose our optimism. She told me an old saying that her mother, who was her yesterday, today, and tomorrow, used to say: "You can't hide the sun with a sieve." For years the establishment has been trying, mainly by means of the Ministry of Education, to do so. It has not yet understood that this is impossible. You cannot hide the sun with a sieve.

Notes

1. For the first part of the report of Dovrat Commission, see http://www.education.gov.il.

2. There are different ways to categorize feminist theories. Julia Kristeva (1981), for example, suggested that the first phase—suffrage and existential feminism—demanded economic and professional equality with men. This phase, Kristeva argued, identified with masculine time, which is linear and is characterized by a progressive evolutionary model of social change. The second phase sought to construct a counter society whose ethics would be shaped by female-identified concerns in "female time." Finally, Kristeva envisaged a third phase of feminism where the very notion of a stable identity can be called into question through what she termed a "demassification of power." For this article, I have used the discussion by Humm (1992) on two generations of feminism and added the Palestinian-Israeli and Mizrahi Jewish Israeli women's discussion of

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third-generation feminism as was manifested in the annual feminist conferences, especially the conference of 1996.

3. Education for human rights and democracy should be introduced to school curriculum. One of our achievements was the declaration of International Human Rights Day on December 10, as a celebration day at schools. We produced educational materials, videos, and teacher guides, but that was a very small step on the way to educating for human rights in Israeli schools.

4. Second-generation feminists developed a new knowledge from the standpoint of women and were involved in the writing of a new language—for example, the *@0233criture feminine* of French feminist Helene Cixous (see, e.g., Cixous, 1993).

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