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'I am living proof of coexistence': the experience of Israeli-Arab teachers in Jewish schools

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ABSTRACT

Arab teachers in Jewish schools (AJ) constitute a unique case of minority teachers. This mixed-methods study set out to examine the school experience of AJ (N = 101) in comparison with two groups: Arab teachers in Arab schools (AA; N = 76) and Jewish teachers in Jewish schools (JJ; N = 99). The questionnaire measured three aspects of the teachers' experience: motivational, professional and ecological. AJ teachers reported lower levels of professional difficulties than the two same-culture groups. Among AJ, novice and experienced teachers reported similar levels of motivation, while among the other groups, novice teachers reported lower levels. AJ teachers' answers to an open-ended question enriched the understanding of the positive experiences alongside the negative aspects that included some incidents of racism and microaggression. The findings support the benefit of contact to positive attitudes and tolerance. Nonetheless, questions arise regarding the processes that underlie these results.

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Introduction

Minority teachers

The phenomenon of integrating minority teachers in majority schools has become reliably prevalent in many Western countries, such as the United States (King, 1993), Britain (McNamara & Basit, 2004), Australia (Santoro, 2007), and Germany (Strasser & Waburg, 2015). While the broad definition of minority in sociology refers to any group that is disadvantaged (Healey, 1995), the literature on minority teachers usually refers, as will this paper, to ethnic minority.

The professional literature illuminates two facets of minority teachers' experience. On the one hand, minority-group teachers face stressful and frustrating experiences, and cope with barriers to successful integration into their schools and communities, particularly in the initial phase of their work.

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Those difficulties may appear during the teachers' interactions with the formal education system, the school and the classroom. Hargreaves (2011) noted that minority teachers in Britain suffer from institutional racism, including restriction of their career options by the governing bodies. It has been consistently noted that former Soviet Union teachers (FSU) have a significantly lower sense of belonging compared with native teachers, even 30 years after having arrived in Israel (Michael, 2006; Gindi, & Erlich-Ron, 2020). Several authors have also noted minority teachers' reduced involvement in their organization (Ramanathan, 2006); Author, in press)

Frustrating experiences within the classroom may appear in various forms, such as a lack of respect for their pedagogical expertise (Hargreaves, 2011), embarrassment and misunderstanding due to differences in the interpretation of non-verbal cues (McLean, 2007), or difficulty with language (Author, 2020). Strange pronunciation may cause the teachers to feel rejected and even mocked (Remennick, 2002).

On the other hand, minority teachers are often seen as an asset. Activists, academics, theoreticians and policy makers are calling to diversify teaching in order to provide diverse students with role models and to improve teacher-student communication (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Haddix, 2017; Schmidt & Janusch, 2016). 'The power of their presence' (Quiocho & Rios, 2000) stems from their unique personal experiences that may assist them in coping successfully with cultural or language barriers (Strasser & Waburg, 2015), to adopt an empathic perspective towards students from diverse backgrounds who are misunderstood by the dominant cultural majority, and to create a healthy climate of multiculturalism in their educational environment (Kheimets& Epstein, 2000). Sometimes their impact is not limited to their own school, and they help promote tolerance in the community at large (McNamara & Basit, 2004).

Minority teaching tend to be linked to such practices as critical multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching. Critical multiculturalism highlights the importance of addressing ethnocentrism in the curriculum, bridging between cultures and races, and assisting in intercultural mutual appreciation (May & Sleeter, 2010). Likewise, the literature on culturally responsive teaching has often been connected to minority teachers and outlines such goals as supporting students in maintaining their cultural identity and native language, including diverse perspectives, and empowering student sociopolitical consciousness (Civitillo, Juang, Badra & Schachner, 2019). The argument is that minority teachers are in the ideal position to provide students with culturally responsive teaching and advance the goals of critical multiculturalism.

The Israeli context

Israel was established as a Jewish state, and in that established a clear hierarchy among the different ethnic groups that will have comprised it and an inherent difficulty in the recognition (Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1997) of minorities. Over the years Israel has followed the pattern sociologist Rogers Brubaker (1995) has identified as a 'nationalizing state', namely, a state that elevates the nation's core interests over other populations. The nationalizing agenda employs state ideological mechanisms and political philosophy that establishes the Jewish Western citizen as the ideal that all minorities should try to emulate, and justifies economic, cultural and political injustice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). In the service of this agenda, the Israeli legislation prioritizes the Jewish wellbeing over democratic values (Jamal, 2007). Consequently, the largest minority in Israel – the Arab-Palestinian (henceforth Arab) is most effected by such economic, cultural and political injustice.

Arab teachers in Jewish schools

Israel provides a unique case of minority teachers. We focus on Israeli-Arab teachers teaching in schools where the majority of students and staff are Jewish, which we call AJ teachers for short. More than a hundred years of violent conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in Israel has produced an atmosphere of mutual mistrust and hostility, and has shaped negative intergroup stereotypes. In this political and social atmosphere, encounters between Arabs and Jews often become a confrontation between identities rather than a dialogue between individual people. Almost every interaction between Arabs and Jews in a formal setting (e.g., an Arab doctor treating a Jewish patient) is potentially a source of tension and hostility (Keshet & Popper-Giveon, 2019). This atmosphere has an inhibiting effect on Arab teachers in Israeli, even in Arabic-speaking schools, who feel that they have less freedom of speech, as reflected among other things by avoidance of discussions on controversial political issues (Gindi & Erlich Ron, 2019). In such a climate, we may expect that AJ teachers would face significant challenges. However, the well-supported contact theory, suggested by Allport (1954), predicts that continuous contact in a non-political context helps to promote tolerance and reduce stereotypes.

So far, not much empirical evidence has been gathered on these competing predictions because contact between Arab teachers and Jewish students is sparse (e.g., Hughes, 2007). Since the foundation of the State of Israel, there has been a separation between the Jewish-Israeli and the Arab-Israeli education systems. The separation was partly motivated by geographical segregation, but also meant to strengthen and preserve Jewish identity

among Jews (Khattab, 2003). As a result of this policy, contact between Arabs and Jews in an educational context is minimal. Most of the Jewish students have never met Arab students or teachers, and most of the Arab students have never met Jewish students or teachers, until adulthood. The separation causes discontent for ideological reasons as it contradicts values of multiculturalism and tolerance, and exacerbates intergroup anxiety. In education, there is also the practical aspect in that there is a high proportion of unemployed Arab teachers in Israel while Jewish schools have difficulty filling vacant positions (Agbaria, 2011). Initial efforts to integrate AJ teachers were made in the 1970 s and 1980 s, but they were marginal in their scope. Only in 2008, did the Ministry of Education set the substantive increase in the number of AJ teachers as an objective. Since then, the number of AJ teachers has steadily increased and they teach various subjects, such as Math and Science, as well as Arabic (Merchavim, 2016).

Studies on AJ teachers are few and most of them use a qualitative methodology. Their findings on the success of their integration into Jewish schools are inconsistent. In-depth interviews with Arabic language teachers in Hebrew-speaking schools led Brosh (2013) to conclude that 'teachers are separated from their students due to a lack of cultural understanding [...] and are often treated by those whom they wish to educate as inferior or as an enemy' (p. 10). Sion (2014) also studied teachers of the Arabic language and found that teachers and students expect them to conceal their 'Arabness', and that despite their efforts to gain acceptance, they feel lonely, isolated and vulnerable. Different findings were reported by Bendes-Jacob and Mahool (2013), who found that teachers who taught Arabic in Jewish schools were highly satisfied with their integration into the schools, and perceived the environment as supportive. In a recent study, Jayusi and Bekerman (2019a, 2019b) interviewed fifteen AJ teachers, and found that almost all of them reported a positive experience of integration, including having a good working relationship with principals, staff, students and parents. Moreover, they were able to reduce prejudice and promote mutual understanding, and thus contribute to coexistence in the context of the school.

Similar to the picture emerging among minority teachers around the world, in Israel too there is evidence of difficulties and challenges for teachers coming from the Arab minority alongside the encouraging evidence. Several studies exposed the complex position that requires the Arab teacher to employ multiple strategies of bargaining in order to achieve maximum personal gain (Gindi & Erlich-Ron, 2019; Sion, 2014). Thus, the teachers seek to self-preserve and reduce possible sources of danger alongside making the most of the opportunities they have within the unequal power relations in Israel (Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019a, 2019b; Saada & Gross, 2019a, 2019b). Arab teachers feel the ambivalent gaze of

the Jewish hegemony viewing them as partners on the one hand as the enemy on the other (Saada & Gross, 2019a; Sion, 2014). Arab teachers feel under constant scrutiny of their functioning and loyalty in society in general and in organizations in particular, bargain simultaneously with both Jewish hegemony and their school (Gindi & Erlich-Ron, 2019). Several studies have distinguished active and passive approaches by teachers (Cohen, 2019: Saada & Gross, 2019a). 'Passive teachers' rely mainly on contact (Allport, 1954) to change students' attitudes, and silently ignore the subtle discrimination they endure, while 'active' teachers believe that contact should be accompanied by introduction of one's narrative and protest against discrimination of any sort (Saada & Gross, 2019a). Along a similar vein, Cohen (2019) described Arab civic teachers' tension between teaching their students an active or passive mode of citizenship.

The present study emerged on the backdrop of the paucity of empirical evidence on AJ teachers and the inconsistent findings on the subject. We set out to study the experience of AJ teachers using a mixed methods design. The quantitative part compared AJ teachers to two same-culture groups: Arab teachers who teach in Arab schools in Israel and Jewish teachers who teach in Jewish schools.

Research questions

Teachers' experience is explored through three levels of difficulties proposed by Vonk (1995): personal, professional and ecological. The personal level represents the motivational aspect of teaching, as defined by the satisfaction from choosing the teaching profession and self-confidence. The professional level represents difficulties in performing professional tasks within the classroom. More specifically, this facet includes difficulties reported by teachers about types of tasks, such as pedagogical and interpersonal. The ecological level relates to difficulties in teachers' sense of belonging to the school, their perceived impact on the decisions, and their positioning within the school.

We set out to explore the following research questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences in the school experience of Arab teachers in Jewish schools (AJ) compared to same-culture teachers, Arab teachers in Arab schools (AA) and Jewish teachers in Jewish schools (JJ)? (2) What relationships are there between the teachers' characteristics (years of experience and subject that they teach) and the school experience of the three groups? The third question focused on the perceived impact of the teachers' Arab origin on the success of their integration, as reflected in their personal narratives concerning their employment at the Jewish schools.

Materials and methods

Participants

The sample comprised 276 teachers who worked in elementary and high schools in the public education system all over Israel. Most of them taught mathematics, sciences or language. Questionnaires were administered in teacher conferences, to which the participants came from all over the country. Demographic questions included age (in years), teaching experience (in years), level of religiosity: (secular/traditional/religious) highest level of education attained: (1.B.A./B.Ed., 2. M.A./M.Ed). The sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

In order to examine if the groups differed in terms of characteristics, we conducted Chi square tests for the nominal variables, and a one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc tests for the parametric variables. The tests yielded a significant difference on one characteristic – AJ teachers were significantly less experienced as teachers compared to the two same-culture groups. No differences between the groups were found regarding religiosity or level of education.

Instruments

The experience of difficulty with teaching and school situations questionnaire

We used a questionnaire developed by Sagee and Regev (2002) for measuring the experience of difficulty among novice Israeli teachers. The respondents were presented with a list of potential types of difficulties and asked to rate the extent of difficulty they experienced in their practice on a 6-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotation yielded four factors, explaining 62% of the variance. The criterion for including an item in a factor was loading higher than.40. The factors discovered were: (1) pedagogical tasks (e.g., planning a lesson, applying instruction skills), (2) class management (e.g., discipline, working with diverse populations), (3)

Table 1. Characteristics of participants in the three groups of teachers (in percentage).

Nominal variables Characteristic	Category	AJ (N = 101)	AA (N = 76)	JJ (N = 99)
Gender	Women	87	73	95
Level of religiosity	Secular	36	23	28
	Traditional	58	64	56
	Religious	6	19	17
Level of education	BA/B.Ed.	59	61	55
	M.A./M.Ed.	41	39	45
Parametric variables (Mean and SD)				
Age	Mean	33. 06	36. 77	40. 75
	(SD)	(8. 12)	(8. 87)	(9. 54)
Years of	Mean	5. 78	9. 39	7. 20
teaching experience	(SD)	(6. 02)	(6. 70)	(6. 49)

interpersonal relations (e.g., the relationship with the principal and colleagues, loneliness). (4) workload (e.g., daily tasks, overcrowded classes, expectation that they fulfill tasks without any formal reward). Four measures were computed for each one of the types of difficulties by averaging the responses to the specific items.

The feeling of belonging in the school questionnaire

The teachers' perceived feeling of belonging in the school where they work was measured by a questionnaire that was developed in a previous study on Arab teachers in Jewish schools (Ezer, Gilat, & Sagee, 2010). The questionnaire consisted of two scales that measure two aspects of belonging to the school: (1) the teachers' perceived impact (e.g., 'I am involved in school decision making'; 'I have an impact on solving school problems'); (2) the teachers' personal positioning in the school (e.g., 'I feel comfortable mentioning my needs to the principal'; 'I can be promoted and get senior positions in the school'). Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha and yielded satisfactory values of 0.83, 0.76 and 0.88 for the perceived impact, the feeling of belonging and the entire questionnaire, respectively. Measures were computed for each of the two aspects of belonging as well as a global feeling of belonging measure, by averaging the responses to the specific questions.

The motivation to teachquestionnaire

Teachers' motivation was measured using a questionnaire developed by the author (2010), which incorporates the following items: 'Generally, I am satisfied with my job'; 'I am pleased that I chose teaching as a career'; 'I see my ability to teach as being high'; 'I intend to continue working as a teacher for a long time'. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a Likert scale ranging from one (I strongly disagree) to six (I strongly agree). Reliability for the Motivation to Teach Questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, and was satisfactory ($\alpha = .75$). A global measure of motivation in teaching was computed by averaging the responses to the specific questions.

The well-remembered event (an open-ended question)

The Arab teachers in Jewish schools were asked to recall a well-remembered event about their experience in their school that had to do with their Arab origin, and to write a detailed description of the event. The purpose of this narrative question was to differentiate between the factors that promote successful integration among AJ teachers and the inhibiting factors that had not been mentioned in the structured questionnaire.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 21.0 (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY, USA). We calculated descriptive statistics for all measures included, and conducted statistical comparisons according to the types of the variables. Thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) was used on teachers' descriptions of their well-remembered events, aiming to identify themes that may illuminate aspects of Arab-Jewish interactions at schools and in communities.

Results

The quantitative comparisons among the three groups were conducted through three analyses of covariance, with group as the independent variable. Years of experience was added as a co-variate because the three groups differed significantly on this variable. During the first analysis we conducted a MANCOVA, with the four types of difficulties as multiple dependent variables. In the second analysis we conducted a MANCOVA with the two categories of a feeling of belonging in the school as multiple dependent variables. In the third analysis we conducted an ANCOVA with Motivation in Teaching as the dependent variable. In cases where the analyses yielded significant effects, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey procedure were conducted to reveal the sources of differences between the three groups.

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables by group. Descriptively, scores can be seen to be at around the mid-level on the 6-point Likert scale with Motivation to Teach scores being nominally highest. As mentioned above, we used MANCOVA analyses to examine the statistical significance of these differences, and post-hoc Tukey procedures to explore the source of significant differences that were found. Results of the analysis of covariance are presented in Table 3.

Table 2. Means and SDs of school-experience measures in the three groups of teachers.

Measure	Categories	AJ (N = 101)	AA (N = 76)	JJ (N = 99)
Types of difficulty	Pedagogical tasks	2.14 (1.17)	2.33 (1.23)	2.72 (1.42)
	Class management	2.45 (0.85)	3.03 (0.93)	2.74 (0.95)
	Interpersonal relations	2.21 (1.16)	2.40 (0. 99)	2. 62 (1. 24)
	Workload	2.84 (0.89)	3.21 (0. 90)	3. 00 (0. 92)
A feeling of belonging in the school	Perceived impact	3.22 (0.92)	3.06 (0. 99)	3. 28 (1. 13)
	Personal positioning	3.77 (0.65)	3.52 (0. 83)	3. 53 (0. 78)
Motivation to teach		3.82 (1.02)	3.82 (1.09)	3. 42 (1. 10)

Table 3. Results of the MANCOVA comparing the three groups on school experience.

		DF	F value	Tukey
Types of difficulty	Pedagogical tasks	2,271	6.48 **	AJ <JJ <AA
	Class management	2,271	6.43 **	AJ <JJ, AA
	Interpersonal relations	2,271	4.99 **	AJ <JJ <AA
	Workload	2,271	5.49 **	AJ, AA <JJ
Feeling of belonging to school	Perceived impact	2,271	1. 45	AJ = JJ = AA
	Personal positioning	2,271	6. 88 ***	AJ> JJ, AA
Motivation in teaching		2,271	2. 31	AJ = JJ = AA

The results presented in Tables 2 and 3 show that AJ teachers report lower levels of difficulty in performing pedagogical tasks, in managing their class, and in establishing interpersonal relations with their professional environment, compared with teachers in the two same-culture groups (AA and JJ). The workload is experienced as higher by the JJ teachers compared with the two groups of Arab teachers. In addition, AJ teachers view their personal positioning in the school as higher than teachers in the two same-culture groups. No significant differences were found among the groups in terms of the perceived impact on the school and in terms of motivation to teach.

In order to examine whether the effect of the group on the dependent variables is mediated by the teachers' characteristics, we connected a series of two-way ANOVAs with the group as one independent variable and each one of the following as the second independent variable: education, level of religiosity, years of experience, and the subject they teach. The dependent variables were the three categories of school experience- difficulties, a feeling of belonging to the school, and motivation. The analysis revealed an interaction effect between years of experience and motivation, with years of experience having a mediating effect on the relationship between group and motivation (F (2,270) = 8.58, $p < .001$). Figure 1 presents the means of motivation according to group and level of experience.

Post-hoc comparisons were conducted between the two levels of experience in each group. The results showed that novice teachers reported lower levels of motivation than non-novices, in AA (t (74) = 5.23, $p < .001$) and in JJ (t (97) = 4.49, $p < .001$). Among the AJ group, novice and non-novice teachers did not differ in their motivation. Thus, while novice teachers in same-culture schools reported having a lower level of professional motivation than their experienced counterparts, novice AJ teachers begin their careers with a level of motivation similar to that of more experienced teachers.

Well-remembered events

The AJ teachers' responses were analyzed using data-driven thematic analysis. The purpose of the analysis is to identify categories that illuminate the

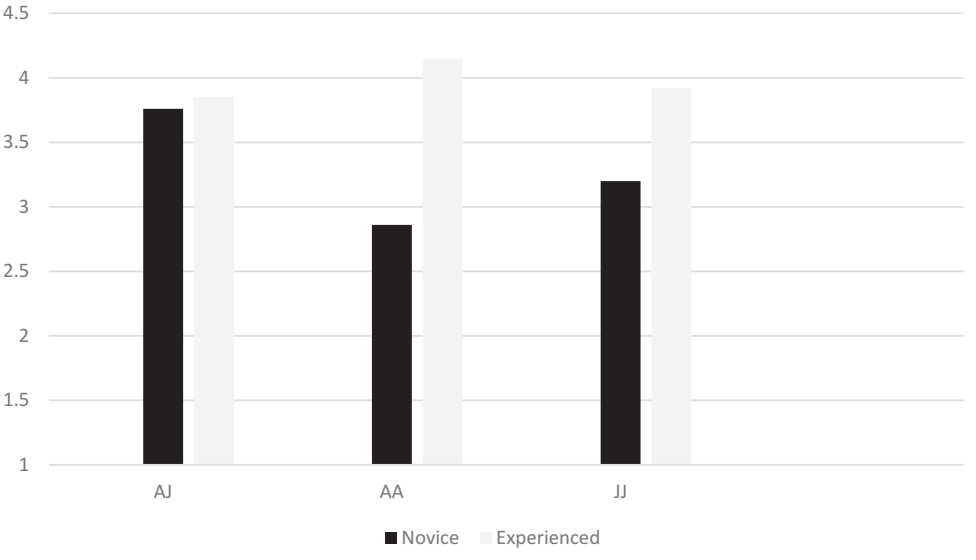

Figure 1. Comparison between novice and non-novice teachers in each group on motivation.

Arab teachers' experience in Jewish schools. The authors used thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019), in which the categories are not guided by pre-defined theoretical concepts but derive directly from the data. The analysis yielded three major categories: Positive experiences, negative experiences and lack of influence of being a minority teacher.

Positive experiences

The analysis revealed three sub-themes of positive experiences related to being a minority teacher: improved communication with the students, exposure to Arab culture, and blind acceptance.

Improved communication with the students

The teachers utilized their cultural resources proactively as a means of promoting a relationship with students, sometimes in clever and unconventional ways. One teacher uses Arabic to deal with interruptions in class:

> Sometimes when there are disciplinary problems in the classroom, I use Arabic (which the students don't know) to draw their attention to me. And sometimes it adds humor to the lessons.

In the following quotation, the teacher uses Arabic and the universal language of music to establish rapport and loosen up the relationships with students:

> As I mentioned, I am a Math teacher, but sometimes I teach the students songs in Arabic. I think it helps in a relationship. They enjoy singing the Arabic birthday songs and other children's songs.

Exposure to Arab culture

As is also evident in the previous quotation, the participation of students and teachers in various aspects of Arab culture raises interest and contributes to a favorable familiarity with Arab society. Some AJ teachers spoke about the Jewish teachers' exposure to Arab culture and the deconstruction of prejudices:

> We talk a lot in the staff room about Arab culture. The teachers were very surprised by my way of talking, my clothes, my thinking. They thought that Arabs are primitive and not liberal. Every day they discover something new that changes their view of the Arab population.

The students' exposure to Arab culture also made their behavior more empathetic and considerate when Muslim customs were concerned:

> The children are very interested in my culture and customs. For example, the month of fasting (*Ramadan*) just transpired, and the children identified with me and felt guilty when they ate in front of me; they ask questions and take an interest in everything.

AJ teachers often wrote about the students' curiosity and the way that the contact helped ameliorate previous hesitations:

> During the most important field trip of the school year, students "discovered" that I was Arab. At first it surprised them, but right away it developed into curiosity that led to questions and a very nice discussion. They had an opportunity to learn about another aspect of Israeli society that they weren't exposed to daily.

Blind acceptance

Several teachers felt that their Arab origin was a non-issue, and have a strong sense of belonging in the school. These statements ranged from teachers saying that it was as if other teachers ignored their 'otherness' to teachers saying that they were favored. In the following quotation the teacher's description of her integration in the school is so remarkable the reader may question to what extent her identity is squashed by her integration into a Jewish school:

> The very fact that I am an Arab was never a problem in all my years of work. On the contrary, I am living proof of coexistence … I was a home-room teacher for six years; I led a trip to Polish holocaust sites and I never felt that I was judged because of my origin. I really feel part of the staff at every event and ceremony that takes place in the school

The following quotation places a lot of emphasis on the respect that the teacher receives from both students and staff:

> My school accepted me wonderfully. Thank God, I have a good relationship with the staff and especially with the students. I never felt that I was different from the other teachers at the school. On the contrary, they respect me a lot and I feel that they are my good family . . .

The use of the term 'on the contrary' is quite outstanding as there is no 'negative' experience to feeling otherness (being extremely mainstreamed?), and it seems so unlikely in the case of an AJ that it shows the extent to which the experience is euphemized.

This euphemizing was also quite palpable when two AJ teachers expressed their feeling that they were favored rather than discriminated against due to their nationality ('The opposite is true . . . Being an Arab, I get more respect from both the staff and the students') or religious affiliation ('There is a sense of respect on part of the whole staff because I am a Muslim.'). Once more, we see the use of the superlative in the expression 'the opposite is true' which seems to suggest that the lady protests too much.

Negative experiences

Two types of negative experiences emerged in the described events: Racist reactions to AJ teachers and cultural alienation from mainstream Jewish culture.

Racist reactions

Many teachers noted reactions that expressed racism or ridicule; for example, by students making fun of their accent: 'I remember that during my first year a student made fun of my accent', or by making blatant racist comments: 'We aren't in your village' was one racist condescending comment that a teacher mentioned. Flagrant racist comments seem to be straightforward to deal with: 'There was one incident when a student came to me with racist statements, but the school dealt with it harshly.' Micro-aggressive racial comments (Sue et al., 2007), on the other hand, were often difficult for teachers to cope with, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> At the beginning of my employment, one parent started doubting my ability to distinguish between the 'B' and 'P' consonants due to a bizarre stereotype. He expressed his concerns to the principal. To take care of the matter, the English supervisor was invited to the school, and was supposed to watch me to confirm or refute the parent's concerns and those of the system. As noted, I found that I had no problem distinguishing between the consonants and could even pronounce consonants that don't exist in Hebrew or English.

Cultural alienation

*Teachers describ*ed emotional difficulty in identifying with Jewish or Zionist events at school:

Being an Arab teacher and a home-room teacher, it was very difficult for me during the Jewish official holidays and ceremonies … to be aware of customs, and when a discussion started or when questions were raised it was very difficult for me to talk about this subject

Discussion

The present study sought to examine the experience of Arab teachers in Jewish schools (AJ), and found more positive experience among this group of minority teachers compared to the two same-culture groups. More specifically, AJ teachers feel more involved, positioned more strongly at their school, and report fewer difficulties in pedagogy and in connection with problematic students and parents than their counterparts in the other two groups. In addition, the sense of well-being at work and the intention to continue teaching are higher among Arab teachers in both groups than among Jewish teachers.

At first observation, these findings are surprising given previous research on teaching in a different cultural environment and the socio-political climate in Israel at the end of the second decade of the 21st century. The professional literature on minority teachers presents a variety of barriers to successful integration into school. The literature documents barriers to promotion (Hargreaves, 2011), low organizational involvement (Ramanathan, 2006), and difficulties in communicating with students and parents against the background of cultural differences (Remennick, 2002). The continued and ongoing tension and resentment between the Arab minority in Israel and the Jewish majority are presumed to have intensified these barriers. Moreover, the present study was conducted at a time when tension was growing, as a result of a sense of deadlock in the peace talks, unceasing terrorist activity, and institutional actions that might harm the sense that Arabs in Israel are equal, such as the Basic Law: Nation-state of the Jewish People (Knesset, 2018).

At second observation, the findings are congruent with findings of studies that examined the teaching of Arab teachers in Jewish schools over the past decade. In several studies, Jewish principals and AJ teachers testified to the high satisfaction of all those involved (Jayusi & Bekerman, 2019a, 2019b; Saada & Gross, 2019a, 2019b). Moreover, AJ teachers and other stakeholders reported that the integration of AJ teachers promoted a climate of tolerance and acceptance (Bendes-Jacob & Mahool, 2013; Heisherik et al., 2010). The findings of this study further support the success of AJ teacher integration and present a surprisingly optimistic outlook compared with same-culture teachers. The findings indicate that novice AJ teachers have more positive experiences than teachers teaching in same-culture schools. After about two years, the gap between the groups closed. This may indicate a selection bias,

namely – the teachers who take on the challenge of being in an AJ context may be more optimistic and positive to begin with, and therefore show this gap in the first two years.

Arab teachers who decide to seek employment in Jewish schools may be outliers. One has to bear in mind that in Israel today there are approximately 42,000 teachers in the Arab education system with almost all being Arab and 137,000 teachers in the Jewish education system out of which less than a thousand are Arab (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). One explanation that has been suggested is that teachers who choose to teach in Arab schools have more intra-community perspective while those who choose Jewish schools have a more multicultural point of view (Erlich-Ron & Gindi, in press). Future research would do well to investigate further the personality characteristics of teachers who choose to cross cultural boundaries.

The quantitative findings of this study, which mainly examined the product of the teachers' experience rather than the process leading to it, do not allow us to delineate the path of the formation of the beneficial relationship and the conditions that preceded it. At the same time, an analysis of the events written down by the AJ teachers suggests that both sides contributed to building such a relationship. Some AJ teachers were able to take advantage of their 'otherness' to spark student interest, and their Jewish counterparts demonstrated a receptive, and sometimes even a favorable, attitude towards them.

Previous research has noted passive versus active modes of teaching among Arab teachers in Israel with regards to the salience of their identity and narratives within the school and the kind of citizenship that they educate towards (Cohen, 2019; Saada & Gross, 2019a; Sion, 2014). Analysis of responses to the open-ended question reveals that teachers lean heavily toward a passive mode of teaching, which was evident by all the practices that emerged in the qualitative analysis. Respondents in this study were satisfied with exposing Jewish students to Arab culture, improving communication with students, and some even dismissed their otherness as a non-issue. This is far from the active alternative or the paradigm of critical multiculturalism: the Palestinian narrative is not introduced and teachers feel reluctant to expose the problems of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel.

The process taking place can be explained by Allport's (1954) contact theory, whereby direct encounters between members of rival ethnic groups may give rise to cancelling out stereotypes and developing a climate of closeness (McKay, 2018). Nonetheless, one of the conditions that Allport (1954) presented for the encounter to have a positive effect was equality in terms of status, whereas AJ teachers' status may be questioned: there is a clear hierarchy between the Jewish hegemony and the Arab minority, and Arabs are implicitly required to conceal their 'Arabness' or at least to be 'good Arabs' (Sion, 2014). It is possible that the context in which the meeting takes place

enables the creation of a close relationship between those with different statuses: the present study examined encounters that took place in a school context, which allowed teachers to avoid the political context of their position by focusing on their professional role.

A competing explanation may be that AJ teachers are highly compliant with the existing order, and do not contest it. According to this line of thinking, Jewish teachers and students see AJ teachers as being at the right distance – they do not take jobs from Jews since there is more demand than supply in the Jewish education system, they do not take administrative roles or even home-room teaching, which is a basic prerequisite of any other administrative role. The AJ teachers are 'good enough' for the Jewish society to feel liberal, but they return to their hometown at the end of the school day. The outwardly exaggerated descriptions of AJ teachers' positive experiences provide some support for this explanation.

Contact theory may not be enough for change to occur within the discriminatory Israeli context. As previous theoreticians have suggested, contact alone, without addressing the unbalanced power relations and the long-established mechanisms of discrimination of Arabs in Israeli society, may not be enough (Bekerman, 2007; Saade & Gross, 2019). This study reiterates the notion that contact may change relational attitudes and reduce stereotypes but does not necessarily address the beliefs at the root of institutionalized discrimination. Looking at the goals of critical multiculturalism, one may argue that the way minority teaching is practiced in Israel today partially addresses the goal of diffusing interracial boundaries, but is far from addressing the ethnocentrism in the curriculum and achieving appreciation between Jews and Arabs. The connections to culturally responsive teaching are even frailer. Arab teachers in Arab schools unequivocally connect their students to their native tongue but the extent to which they empower their students sociopolitical consciousness is a question for future research. The qualitative findings of this study on Arab teachers in Jewish schools, however, do not point to many instances for culturally responsive teaching.

In addition to the expressed positive experiences of AJ teachers, the findings provided evidence of two types of difficulties. One is expressed in racist remarks, some blatant and crude, and other micro-aggressive and more difficult to deal with. The quantitative weight of the racist comments in all the events that were collected was limited, but their very appearance indicates that racist attitudes are still present in the classroom and school climate, and the danger inherent in them has not been eliminated.

In conclusion, despite the difficulties encountered during the integration of Arab teachers into Jewish schools, which are apparently unavoidable in the socio-political reality of the State of Israel, the main and clear idea

emerging from this study is that Arab teachers have a good experience working in Jewish schools. This finding is consistent with previous findings that deal with the success of the Arab teachers' integration into the Jewish environment, which shed light on this issue from the perspective of principals (Bendes-Jacob & Mahool, 2013) or of fellow teachers (Heisherik et al., 2010). The conclusion that emerges from all these findings supports integrating Arab teachers into Jewish schools. In addition to the practical benefits of the increased supply of teaching positions in the Arab population, the integration may promote a climate of tolerance within schools, and if implemented in large numbers, may be projected into the wider social environment.

The present study is limited by its being based mainly on a quantitative approach. Within a quantitative approach such complex and multifaceted concepts such as religiosity, and culture are reduced and essentialized. The notion that there is such a thing as 'same-culture teachers' relating to the AA and JJ groups generalizes and flattens the complexity and diversity of culture within these groups. While this approach allowed for statistically valid conclusions about the differences between AJ teachers and same-culture teachers, it failed to reveal the nature of the process that started developing in the Jewish schools upon the entry of Arab teachers into the classroom and the staff room, upon their meeting parents, and the other ways in which they became part of school life. In order to illuminate such a process and learn how to promote it, a deeper qualitative research approach is required, based on phenomenological and ethnographic evidence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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