"It is an act of rebellion"

The Intersectional Perspective on Bilingual Schools Experiences

in Israel's Ethnic Conflict

Author: Mariia Medvedeva
Supervisor: Helle Rydström

Abstract

In the reality of Israel's educational system, it is highly unlikely that Arab and Jewish students will ever meet at school. Within this state-segregated context, bilingual multicultural education, while having the potential to act as a catalyst for change and promote intercultural dialogue, remains on the brim of academic interests. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the complex interplay of power dynamics within the Israeli educational system, focusing on bilingual schools as contested spaces of "rebellion" that reflect broader societal tensions. Guided by the central research question: *How do power relations in the Israeli educational system shape bilingual education?* it applies Yuval Davis's framework of belonging and politics of belonging. Central to the inquiry is the exploration of how social categories such as ethnicity, language, culture, and class contribute to the construction of state-created national narratives of 'the other'. The findings underscore the intricate connections between language, ethnicity, identity construction, and the educational landscape, shedding light on the broader implications for societal inclusivity and coexistence.

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In these gloomy days, I have no more to say aside from "Ceasefire now".

Notes

In this text the term **'Arab population'** or **'Arabs'** refers to the citizens of the State of Israel who comprise its largest minority group and are usually labeled by the state as 'Israeli Arabs' or 'Arab Israelis'. This group is unified by the shared use of Arabic as mother tongue, but is unique and diverse in self-identification of ethnicity and religious practices. This can include Bedouin, Christian, Druze, Moslem, Palestinian and other identities. As noted by Bekerman, despite the focus being placed on the larger Arab group, it should not discourage sensitivity towards other minorities' education within the State of Israel (2016). These are briefly mentioned in the literature review section of the thesis where the scope of research allows. The emphasis on the Arab population within the text is intentional and guided by my feminist stance and aspiration to empower the experiences of this minority.

The term **'Jewish population'** or **'Jews'** in the text refers to the majority of Israel's population, whose mother tongue is Hebrew. While this group has its own distinctive divisions according to the level of religiosity, as well as diasporic ancestry (Ashekanazim, Sefardim, Mizrahim and others) it should be noted that the thesis focuses only on state recognized educational institutions. State recognized education for the Jewish population has separate religious institutions within, which is, however, not symmetrical for the Arab population, for whom diverse religious schooling is not state-provided. Where the accent on Jewish religious groups is necessary, it is explicitly articulated in the text.

In this context, the term **'Arab schools'** in this work refers to state educational institutions where the medium of instruction is Arabic. **'Jewish schools'** refers to state religious and non-religious educational institutions with Hebrew as the medium of instruction.

Within this study's scope, **'schools'** refer to educational institutions within the K-12 system, meaning stretching from kindergarten to upper secondary school (grade 12) (Azulay et al., 2013).

Definitions

'Bilingual multicultural education'
As duly acknowledged by Meshulam (2019), the variety of terms describing schools that are attended by both Arabs and Jews in fact reflects the lack of a comprehensive educational model. Terms such as: Arab-Jewish, bilingual, binational, integrated, multicultural education, critical democratic education, co-existence education, Palestinian-Jewish, peace education, shared education were found throughout the literature examined during the work on this thesis. While it is puzzling to choose the most

appropriate term since the research is not a study of a particular educational model per se, I departed from the schools' own definitions. Hand-in-Hand and Wahat-al-Salam/Neve Shalom schools examined in this study widely use the terms **'bilingual', 'multicultural', 'integrated', 'shared'** education (either jointly or separately) in their narrative. Across this work, these definitions should be understood as mutually replaceable, and 'bilingual multicultural education' would be used most often mirroring the schools' official narratives.

'Identity'

I am using Yuval Davis' definition of identity who understands it as (in plural) "individual and collective narratives that answer the question 'who am/are I/we?" (2006b, p.5). This definition is further elaborated in Chapter 4. Theory.

'Zionism'

"A nationalist movement developed by a group of the Jewish intelligentsia in Europe, the goal of which was to establish a Jewish state in Palestine"(Abu-Saad, 2006b, p. 709).

ACRONYMS USED

HIH – The Center of Bilingual Education in Israel Hand-in-Hand

MoE – Ministry of Education

NGO – Non-governmental organization

WSNS – Wahat al-Salam / Neve Shalom (Oasis of Peace) village and a non-governmental organization that operates the first bilingual multicultural school in the country.

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – The United Nations Children's Fund

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"The minute you are born, you belong to a fighting team or group, and whatever you do, you will always remain an Arab or Jew. Many Israelis are educating their kids in a very nationalist, powerful identity, since kindergarten—and the Arabs as well".

Sayed Kashua

These lines are written by a Palestinian Arab, a citizen of the Jewish state of Israel, known for his works written in Hebrew while his mother tongue is Arabic. The seemingly satirical sentence portraying one of the most successful novelists of today's Israel, Sayed Kashua, is in fact too accurate in capturing the reality of intertwined identities of Israel's multiethnic society. The idea of choosing the topic for this thesis was sparked by Kashua's work which revolves around identity and belonging struggle, particularly his debut novel "Aravim rokdim" ("Dancing Arabs"), largely reflecting the author's own childhood. A young Arab boy who desperately tries to fit into the Jewish educational system keeps questioning his own identity and finds himself stuck between the Arab and Jewish worlds, not really belonging to any of them. Navigation of multiple identities within an educational setting, unfolding against the complexities of social reality, prerequisites the unique case study in the intersection of ethnicity, belonging, education, and conflict.

The contemporary socio-political milieu of Israel as a multicultural and multilingual state goes against it being declared as a Jewish one (Rouhana, 1997). Today's Israel comprises multiple ethnicities out of whom Arabs constitute the largest minority of 21.1% of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The very establishment of Israel, seen as a miraculous event by some, remains a source of pain and suffering for others, particularly the Palestinian population displaced in 1948 (Mor-Sommerfeld et al., 2007). The geo-socio-political situation has resulted in an almost complete spatial separation between the two populations, who reside in distinct cities, towns, villages, and even separate schools (Ayalon et al., 2019; Feniger et al., 2022). However, blurred borders occasionally emerge in shared spaces such as workplaces, public institutions, and commerce, reflecting a complex interplay of trust, suspicion, and alienation (Deeb and Kinani, 2013).

The contradiction of Arab-Jewish separate co-existence jeopardized by prolonged ethnic conflict, which escalated to another extreme level with the events of October 7th, 2023 is

reflected across all societal systems, including the educational one. In recent decades, Israel has experienced governmental instability marked by what Yemini et al. describes as "ethnocratic" dynamics (2014). This instability is characterized by attempts to reinforce the Judaization of Israel through the manipulation of public policy and resources by dominant classes (ibid). Against this backdrop, the focus on education becomes crucial, as it is in this arena where the narratives, identities, and ideologies are transmitted and reinforced.

In the reality of Israel's education system, it is highly unlikely that Arab and Jewish students will ever meet at school. The existence of two ethnically, linguistically, and physically separate educational streams – Jewish and Arab – is well known to Israeli and Palestinian researchers (Al-Haj, 1995; 2005; Rouhana, 1997; Bekerman, 2004; 2011; 2016; Abu-Saad, 2004; 2006; Jabareen, 2006; Arar, 2012). At the same time, there are attempts to overcome the educational divide. Thus, since the 1980s schools uniting the two populations began to appear as bottom-up joint initiatives of Arab and Jewish families, based on the ideological vision of shared education (Meshulam, 2019). United by their strive for co-existence against all odds of ethnic conflict, hatred, and segregative state policy, they present a unique example of education that has the potential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society in contemporary Israel, distinguishing them from purely linguistic bilingual educational models (ibid). After 30 years since the first school establishment, their number has reached only 8 institutions across the entire country, and their activity remains on the brim of governmental interests (Ayalon et al., 2019). Moreover, as will be shown in this work, it is alarmingly evident how the sphere of bilingual education does not catch much of the attention of European scholarship and remains understudied.

1.2. Purpose of the study

This thesis aims to unravel the intricate interplay between power relations and bilingual education in Israel, guided by the central *research question (RQ)*:

How do power relations in the Israeli educational system shape bilingual education?

The focus on power relations is rooted in the recognition that educational systems are not neutral; they mirror and perpetuate broader societal dynamics, impacting the experiences and opportunities of different ethnic groups (Apple, 2011).

Understanding the intricacies of power dynamics underpinning educational segregation and ethnic and linguistic divisions which are contested through bilingual schooling in Israel provides insights into the perpetuation of conflicts and the potential for future coexistence. Closely examining the construction of belongings and their borders within the framework of Nira Yuval Davis's theory (2006a, 2011), I explore the "rebellion" of bilingual schools (Participant 4), emphasizing the pivotal role education plays in shaping the national narratives and identities within the diverse mosaic of Israeli society. From a broader perspective, this thesis paves the way to a feminist intersectional understanding of the Israeli educational landscape.

The importance of this research extends beyond the immediate educational context. It speaks to the strive for coexistence and shared citizenship within a region marked by ethnic conflict. By focusing on the 'gray area', where multicultural schools exist, this research seeks to contribute to both the theoretical understanding of how educational systems can contribute to or alleviate ethnic tensions within a conflicted society and address the gap of the understudied area of Israeli bilingual education.

To answer the RQ a qualitative case study approach is employed, focusing on several state-recognized bilingual schools. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals provide insights into the lived reality of two divided groups, brought together at the school's meeting point. While the study delves into exploring the perspective from within bilingual schooling, it does not comprehensively explore broader societal dynamics of educational inequalities between Arabs and Jews, nor does it offer a comparative analysis of other bilingual multicultural education cases outside the Israeli context. Since the scope of the study is limited to state-recognized bilingual school practices, the realm of higher education, informal education, as well as specific educational programs employed under the umbrella of 'shared education' initiatives by the Ministry of Education is irrelevant to this research. This study aims to provide a focused examination of power relations within the specific context of multicultural schooling in Israel, recognizing that a comprehensive analysis of the entire Israeli educational landscape would require a more extensive and multifaceted approach.

1.3. Thesis outline

The thesis is structured as follows: the second chapter continues unfolding contextual understanding of the Israeli education system, attentive to its legislative and governance

processes. The third chapter reviews existing literature on education in Israel while connecting this work with the broader scope of sociological research on ethnicity and ethnic conflict. The fourth chapter provides theoretical grounding of the study, presenting intersectionality as an analytical lens as well as the theory of political belonging. In the fifth chapter, the qualitative study design is thoroughly explained, describing the process of data collection and methodological choices made by the researcher. The sixth chapter presents the results of the study guided by the chosen theoretical approach and draws attention to specific topics emerging from the data. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the work, providing insights for further inquiry in this field.

Chapter 2. Background of the study

Education, in all its forms, is inherently political and should be regarded as the arena for political contention (Agbaria, 2018). The influence of certain sociopolitical contexts on education shapes the 'educational regime', where educational policies are altered under political pressures in favor of dominance of certain groups (ibid).

The educational sphere in Israel presents a tangled system, intrinsically reflecting and shaped by political, religious, legal, ethnic, and cultural dimensions. Its today's structure, officially formalized and legally enabled through a number of laws and acts, contains numerous pitfalls, and is nearly nonexistent in the state governmental discourse.

In fact, the existing structure of the educational system is underlined by unequal power relations between minority groups and dominant culture and rooted in racism and decades long Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Yemini et al., 2014). The implications of this conflict, influence of Zionist ideology on collective identity building, and suppression of Palestinian minority leading to socio-economic, spatial, linguistic separation and their impact on the educational system are well documented in academic literature (Al-Haj 1995; Torstrick, 1995; Arar, 2012; Or and Shohamy, 2016; Agbaria, 2018).

In today's Israel, Jewish and Arab populations live in geographically separate communities: 90% of Arab citizens reside in predominantly Arab neighborhoods, and only 22% of the Jewish population live in mixed cities Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, however, still in Jewish neighborhoods (Feniger et al., 2022). This further contributes to the isolation and overall limited interactions between Jewish and Arab populations (Golan-Agnon, 2006 in Arar 2012).

The structural segregation between Arabs and Jews in Israel has led to a practical absence of Arabs in Jewish schools and severe segregation within the education system (Agbaria, 2018; Feniger et al., 2022). The concerning outcomes of this segregation has resulted in nearly half of secular Jewish students and Arab students expressing disinterest in any form of contact with each other (Kashti, 2015a in Agbaria, 2018). In fact, the concept of educational

segregation has long become a mundane routine to most Israeli citizens along with linguistic, residential and religious separation (Shwed et al., 2018).

Arab and Jewish students attend separate schools and statistical data indicates that approximately all Arab students in Israel (98,5%) study in schools where the entire population is Arab, and the rest (about 7,000 students per year) study in mixed Hebrew schools or in bilingual schools (Shwed, et al., 2014 in Ayalon et al., 2019). The segregation of education results in substantial differences in learning outcomes between Jewish and Arab populations in Israel which are the highest among OECD countries (OECD, 2019).

Within the plethora of educational institutions in the country, bilingual multicultural schools constitute only a small part, often situated on the brims of governmental support and interests. To provide a comprehensive picture of the context in which multicultural education efforts exist, several crucial aspects of the larger educational system functions have to be taken into consideration:
- the State of Education Law and current legislative framework
- the religious division of education and the strong religious powers influencing all aspects of the educational system
- the positioning and power relations among governmental authorities enabling the functioning of educational system
- the unrecognition and (dis)inclusion of Arab education system in the canvas of educational structures

This chapter will address and further unfold those aspects, particularly relating them to the Arab-Israeli population, whose education as a minority is consistently excluded and overlaid by and in favor of the Jewish majority. Firstly, the main legislative base and governance apparatus of the education system in Israel will be presented, highlighting the discrepancies in recognition of educational subsystems in governmental narratives. Secondly, the unequal power distribution between the Jewish and the Arab educational sectors will further be unraveled and exemplified. Thirdly, the existing network of bilingual and multicultural schools will be described and contextualized, providing the brief history of multicultural education in the country.

2.1. Educational system in Israel: legislative framework and governance

The public education system in Israel consists of 5 levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary (lower and upper), post-secondary, and higher education (Azulay et al., 2013). Public education is compulsory and free, starting from the age of 3 (pre-primary level) through 18 (12th grade in upper secondary school) (*Compulsory Education Law*, 1949).

In terms of governance, the education system of the state of Israel is strongly centralized, headed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Director General (Bekerman, 2016). Acting as the main governing body of the system, the MoE obtains full rights to shape the components of the system and change the educational legislation. It establishes national objectives, manages resource allocation and budgets, designs the national curriculum, oversees the establishment of new schools, evaluates student performance through national assessments, and hires educators (Geva and Peterka, 2016).

Formally, the foundation of the national education system in Israel was laid through two significant laws enacted shortly after the State's establishment in 1948. The 1949 Compulsory Education Law outlined the state's responsibility for funding public education, local authorities' role in establishing schools and enrolling students, and compulsory attendance (1949). The 1953 State Education Law standardized the education system, and introduced two educational streams: **state education (chinuch mamlachti)** and **state-religious education (chinuch mamlachti dati)**. Parents have the right to choose an educational stream for their child according to their religious beliefs (*Compulsory Education Law*, 1949). Apart from these two laws, various other legislative documents pertain to the educational system, addressing specific aspects like inclusion, student rights, the school day, transportation, and more.

The attempt to map the existing landscape of Israeli public schools and follow the division into two streams, as stated in the law, presents a hideous task. While the State of Education Law itself does not specify the types of institutions falling under state or state-religious streams, neither of the MoE documents provide any further clarification. In fact, what is evident from analyzing various governmental reports, is their failure (or persistence) to comprehensively describe Israel's schooling system.

The official MoE reports, specifically the "Facts and Figures in Educational System" publications from 2004, 2010, and 2013 (the latter two produced in collaboration with the OECD as part of Israel's membership process), provide variations in the description of educational streams, lacking a comprehensive elaboration on these divisions. The 2004 report omits explaining the division of educational streams as such, although it does present statistical data that distinguishes 'Arab and Druze education' separately from 'state' and 'state religious' education (Sprinzak et al., 2004).

In the 2010 report, it is acknowledged that Israel's education system encompasses "educational institutions for its Arab and Druze citizens," which align their structure and curricula with those in the "Hebrew-speaking sector," incorporating necessary adaptations to accommodate the language and culture of these communities (Azulay et al., 2010, p. 11).

In contrast, the 2013 report delineates an educational system that includes "Hebrew-speaking and Arabic-speaking educational institutions" while identifying "ultra-Orthodox education" as a separate stream (Azulay et al., 2013, p. 10). However, the precise classification of these institutions under each category remains indistinct, and the report does not provide further specification.

The Ministry of Aliyah[1] and Integration, responsible for assimilating new repatriates into Israeli society, has produced a specialized booklet on education in partnership with the MoE. Within this booklet, the education system is outlined into the following categories:
1. State Education (mamlachti)
2. State Religious Education (mamlachti dati)
3. Independent Education (chinuch mukar)
4. The Religious Ma'ayan HaTorah network (Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, 2019)

Scholars exhibit variations in categorizing Israel's educational landscape, employing ethnicity, language, and governance as primary classification parameters. Bekerman, for instance, examines the entire system through the lens of school independence, delineating three categories to which students can be assigned:
1. 'Official' schools, which are government-maintained.

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[1] Alyah (hebrew: עלייה - 'ascent') ° an official term enabled in the Law of Return (1950) providing the right of Jews to repatriation and Israeli citizenship. One of the core concepts of Zionism.

2. 'Recognized' schools, subject to government supervision and support.

3. 'Exempted' schools, which operate independently, largely free from government supervision and control (2016, p. 76).

Bekerman further incorporates a linguistic dimension, rooted in ethnicity, into this classification. The 'official' schools are further divided into Hebrew monolingual and Arabic monolingual institutions.

Within the Hebrew monolingual state schools, two distinct streams are established in accordance with the State of Education Law: 'secular state schools' and 'state religious schools'. It is noteworthy that state religious schools within the Hebrew monolingual system do not encompass the ultra-Orthodox community.

In the Arabic monolingual school category, secular "state schools" serve the Arab-Israeli and Druze communities. The Muslim religious schools are notably absent within the state religious education stream, which exclusively serves the Jewish religious community. Christian Arab students receive religious education through an independent stream external to the state school system.

Feniger et al. presents the education system as such:
- State education which includes religious, nonreligious and Arab subsystems
- Independent, but largely state-funded education, established "mainly for the benefit of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population". This group also includes Christian-Arab education and bilingual schools (2022, p.129).

What may at first glance seem purely a structural formality – the absence of certain educational streams, vague formulations and confusion created by the governmental reports – in fact reveals the systematic exclusion of Arab and other minorities education from a normative discourse, and unequal power displays that codify and legalize the dominance of one culture over others.

2.2. Power distribution between Arab and Jewish education sectors

The above-mentioned report from the MoE argues that the educational reforms in the 60s "brought pluralism to the schools and curricula while adapting them to the needs of the

heterogeneous populations" (Azulay et al., 2013, p.9). When submitting a voluntary SDG report, today's State of Israel actively highlights its intentions and inclinations towards "reducing gaps between students from various populations and promoting the integration of the Israeli-Arab minority within Israel's society and economy" (*Israel. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.*, 2019, p.84).

Despite those claims, the education system has been systematically used by the State of Israel as an instrument of control, creating a cultural hegemony of national Jewish values (Al-Haj, 2002). The reality of its structure reflects a strong case of institutionalized discrimination, which strengthens the status quo of the Jewish educational sector, including both secular and religious schools as well as ulta-orthodox education (Agbaria, 2015).

Although Arab education is an integral part of Israel's public education system de facto, no official records formalizing the Arab educational institutions or any legal acknowledgement of the system per se can be found in the above mentioned documents. The State of Education Law division of educational streams goes along "national and religious lines" (Horenczyk and Tatar, 2004, p.194), establishing an institutional setup of the public educational system "in Jewish terms and only for Jewish students" (Jabareen, 2006, p.1061).

The only official legislative recognition of Arab minority in the educational sphere was added in the amendments to the State Education Law in 2000, Article 2, regarding the goals of education: "to acknowledge the language, culture, history, heritage and unique traditions of the Arab populations, and of other groups, in the State of Israel, and to recognize the equal rights of all citizens in Israel" (*State Education Law*, 1953, Article 2 (11)), which, however didn't enable any governance authority for Palestinian educators.

The dominance of the Jewish educational sector is evident in the organizational structure, programs, and budgets of the state education apparatus. Interestingly, the legally non-existent Arab education is directly subordinated to the state system. It is overseen by the special Arab Education Division within the MoE, which is, however, staffed predominantly by Jewish educators (Jabareen, 2006). Lacking a formal legal basis, the collective educational interests of the Palestinian community cannot be fully performed at the governance level. The Division is not only lacking independence from the government, but Arab educators are not actively involved in policy creation or program implementation processes. Remaining a

minority even in its governmental representative body, local Palestinian educational authorities have limited influence, primarily relegated to technical matters, while substantive decisions regarding budget allocation and curriculum content for Palestinian schools are made exclusively by the MoE (Abu-Saad, 2006; Agbaria, 2015). Data shows that Israel's Arab school system is allocated lower budgets at all educational levels – anywhere from 20% to 40% lower than Jewish schools, and the budget per Arab student is 78-88% lower than for a Jewish one (Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020; Reinharz, 2023).

This contrasts dramatically with the ultra-Orthodox Jewish education which, despite being budgeted by the state, is completely autonomous from the MoE with full administrative control to establish its own independent curricula and hire educators (Abu-Saad, 2006).

The government neglects to acknowledge the historical and cultural narrative of Palestinian Arabs in its educational programs, denying this minority the right to shape their learning content or partake in decisions regarding educational policies (Massry-Herzallah and Arar 2019). This lack of meaningful involvement in decision-making perpetuates enduring disparities, historically rooted in unequal public funding and educational content (Jabareen, 2006; Agbaria, 2018).

The educational divide between Arabs and Jews in Israel extends to a segregated curriculum, as indicated by Al-Haj (2005). While the curriculum in Jewish schools predominantly centers around national content, emphasizing Israel as a state primarily for Jews, Arab schools have undergone a deliberate removal of national content (ibid). Moreover, the aforementioned amendments to the State of Education Law include Article 2 with the second educational objective: "to teach the Torah of Israel, the history of the Jewish people, the heritage of Israel and Jewish traditions, and promote remembrance of the Holocaust and heroism" (1953).

2.3. Bilingual schools in the context of segregation

The authority of the state to standardize or rather institutionalize the social relations between the country's population groups is evident in the interplay between education policies and ethnicity. Bilingual and multicultural education in today's Israel exists on the intersection of those two opposing forces formalized as Palestinian and Jewish educational sectors – one of which is dominant and the other vernacular.

Meshulam highlights that the foundational aspect of the bilingual model and approach, is to illuminate and actively confront the prevailing unequal power dynamics within Israeli society (2019). The schools implementing this approach extend their challenge beyond the confines of the education system, actively working to counterbalance the inequitable power relations stemming from racism and the prolonged Palestinian-Israeli conflict, to promote peace and equity (ibid).

The ethnically mixed schools are arguably new in the context of Palestinian-Jewish conflict history. The first schools that accepted students of different ethnicities and religions appeared during the British Mandate over Palestine, and were predominantly Christian, operating on religious bases (Småberg, 2005). Currently, there are 8 bilingual schools in Israel operated by three NGOs: Wahat-al-Salam/Neve-Shalom, Hand-in-Hand, and Hagar.

The first bilingual school in the State of Israel was established in 1979 at the pioneering village of Wahat-al-Salam/Neve Shalom or 'Oasis of Peace'. The village, founded in 1970, strives to foster cohabitation between Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel. The school provides K-6 (kindergarten to 6th grade) education, enrolling students from different municipalities in the surrounding area, and as of 2019 has 270 students in total (*Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom*, 2024).

In 1997 the "Center for Bilingual Education" NGO was established by Palestinian and Jewish-American educators, and opened its first two bilingual schools in 1998. Later renamed the "Center for Arab-Jewish Education Hand-in-Hand" (HIH), shifting the emphasis from language to cross-cultural dialogue, it grew into a network of six schools in various regions with over 2,000 Jewish and Arab students:

1. Galilee: 1-6 grades
2. Jerusalem: preschool to 12 grades,
3. Wadi Ara: kindergarten to 6 grades,
4. Haifa: preschool to 6 grades
5. Kfar Saba: preschool, kindergarten to 4 grades
6. Jaffa: preschool, kindergarten to 6 grades (*Our Schools - Hand in Hand*, 2024)

Finally, Hagar NGO is located in Beer-Sheva, and is the only bilingual school in the southern part of the country. Hagar comprises two pre-schools and an elementary school, collectively catering to 240 students (*Wahat al-Salam/Neve Shalom*, 2024)

The legal status and management of these schools are complicated within the governance system explained in previous sections. They exist outside of the state and state religious educational sectors, however, are officially recognized as non-religious institutions and partially supervised and budgeted by the MoE (Bekerman, 2016). The involvement of the MoE is reflected in the schools curriculum and direct partnership of schools with the MoE authorities. Schools adhere to the standard secular state curriculum provided by the MoE, supplemented by courses reflecting their ideological principles (ibid).

While all schools employ the approach of proportionally educating their students in two languages – Arabic and Hebrew – and strive to keep the equal proportion of Arab and Jewish staff, their pedagogical strategies stretch beyond simple bilingualism. Thus, the WSNS school's methodology centers on intergroup conflict, acknowledging the inherent asymmetric power relations between Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as between Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied areas. Hand-in-Hand approach employs the concept of integrated, multicultural education to offer a transformational alternative to segregated education in Israel (Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel, 2022).

Chapter 3. Literature review

Ethnicity takes a central role in contextualizing Israeli education, particularly the division between Arab and Jewish sectors. While governance and legislation lack explicit justification for this division, empirical evidence suggests its adherence to ethnicity-based principles (Rouhana, 1997; Blass, 2017). To further examine this process, this chapter first addresses ethnicity as a social construct and its intrinsic connection to ethnic-based conflict, highlighting the existing theoretical gap. Next, it narrows the geographical focus to Israel presenting a range of literature on the education-ethnic conflict nexus. Concluding this section, the significant gap in relevant case studies on bilingual education is highlighted.

3.1. Understanding ethnicity and ethnic stratification in education

Ethnicity is intrinsically connected to the individual's identity and is understood as a socially constructed concept. Scholars argue that rather than a fixed attribute, ethnicity is dynamic and relational, emerging through interactions within and between different groups (Barth, 1969; Jenkins, 1997). Brubaker further articulates the processual nature of ethnicity, bringing in the idea of "ethnicization" that extends beyond the boundaries of specific (ethnic) groups, and can be understood as a "perspective", which leads to certain ethnicized ways of seeing or ignoring things (2004, p.17). The constructionists approach to ethnicity implies that through both internal and external processes, ethnic boundaries are created that delineate who belongs and who is perceived as the "other" within the given society (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007). The pioneering work of Glazer et al. suggested that ethnicity should be perceived as a foundational element of social stratification, advancing the development of studies on ethnic stratification (1975).

Ethnic stratification as conceptualized by Noel, involves the hierarchical organization of ethnic groups based on their perceived social status, power, and access to resources (Noel, 1968). In education it is often researched by examining the access of particular ethnic groups to educational opportunities, providing insights into ethnicity-based inequalities and educational inequity (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001). Research on education in ethnic stratification hardly avoids the notions of academic achievements, school attainment, and other educational outcomes, with a myriad of researchers documenting connections between ethnicity and academic gap disparities (see, for example, the reviews by Kao and Thompson,

2003; Warikoo and Carter, 2009). The global significance of race/ethnicity-based discrimination in education has also been stressed by a number of UN documents, highlighting the importance of addressing ethnic disparities as a critical step towards achieving global educational equity (UNESCO, 1960, 2020; UNDP, 2020).

Despite the existing research on education and ethnicity, efforts should persist in addressing educational disparities (Gaias et al., 2020). More nuanced level of research in relation to specific geographic context remains at the forefront of those studies. While the present thesis positions to study education in Israel through the lens of ethnicitization contributing to the larger body of academic research on ethnicity, its particular focus belongs to examining the ethnicity-education nexus within the setting of a conflict-ridden society such as Israel.

3.2. Education and ethnic conflict

In societies gripling with ethnic-based conflict, particular attention of research is given to examining the role of education. Since the 1990s, scholars consistently argue that education exacerbates ethnic tensions which contributes to conflict escalation (Matsumoto, 2015). A prominent study in this area is by Bush and Saltarelli under UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center (2000). They presented education's contribution to conflict as two-faceted: negative and positive, illustrating it with strategies from educational systems in Burundi, Kosovo, Palestine, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey and others (ibid). In this context, segregated education used "to ensure inequality, lowered esteem and stereotyping" along with other strategies such as manipulating textbooks and history for political purposes, cultural repression and uneven distribution of education further fuel the conflict (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000, p.14). Contributing to this framework, Gallagher's case study analysis argues that educational systems traditionally have been upholding an artificial perception of cultural homogeneity within ethnically diverse societies (2004). The "structural response" of the educational systems reflect either negative or positive ways of addressing ethnic stratification (2004, p.142). Another direction of research in this field is understanding how education affects the causes of ethnic-conflict, with main contributing works such as Davies (2005), Smith (2005; 2010), Novelli and Cardozo (2008). Referring to the 'two-faces' model, Smith points out that this overly simplistic dichotomy is unlikely to be realistic in the complex process of ethnic conflict and on the policy and decision-making levels which are highly contextual (2010). In terms of theoretical development, Rappleye and Paulson argue that the education and conflict scholarship is "stuck in its emergence", facing challenges in

establishing common theoretical foundations, effective analytical tools, and shared conceptual frameworks (2007, p.252).

Overall, the relationship between education and conflict presents quite an uncomfortable topic mainly due to framing educational development as 'apolitical' stagnating the advancement of conflict-sensitive approaches (Tawil et al., 2004; Smith, 2010). Literature addressing education in such contexts underscores the significant gap between theoretical development and practical approaches of policy-makers (Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005; Rappleye and Paulson, 2007; Willis, 2017).

The analysis of education in ethnic conflict often relies on case studies for their detailed, context-specific approach that quantitative research cannot provide (Matsumoto, 2015). Geographically, these works span across multiple countries, yet the role of education in Israel-Palestine's ongoing conflict, which currently goes through another escalation phase as these lines are being written, is scarcely mentioned in the comparative research on ethnic conflicts (ibid; Goren and Yemini, 2018).

3.3. Three dimensions of literature on education in Israel's ongoing conflict

Smith (2010) notes that in conflict-affected countries, unresolved recurring issues can become problematic if not addressed (p.3). Acknowledging the limitations of this thesis, three particular dimensions developed by Smith will guide the examination of studies on the education-ethnicity nexus in Israel:

1) Governance

2) Identity

3) Schooling content and learning outcomes (ibid)

Governance dimension

From the governance perspective, education reflects both the government's political control and its instrumental capacity to policy implementation. The particular elements of this dimension include (de)centralization of the educational system, policy-making, (in)equality in funding, and separate schooling (Smith, 2006).

The concept of "ethnic democracy" contributes to the current debates in education governance in Israel (Smooha, 1997). Smooha formulated the idea of ethnic democracy as "a

system that combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals, some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of major control over the state. Driven by ethnic nationalism, the state is identified with a "'core ethnic nation' not with its citizens" (Smooha, 1997, p. 200). In Israel, this model has implications for the allocation of educational resources, curriculum representation, and cultural sensitivity within the education system. The comprehensive understanding of the governance of education in Israel is rendered through separate case studies of Arab (Al-Haj, 1995; Rouhana, 1997; Jabareen and Agbaria, 2017; Abu-Hussain, 2023), Bedouin (Abu-Rabiʿa, 2001; 2006; Ratcliffe, 2007; Mizel, 2009) and Druze (Halabi, 2018) minorities' educational systems under the state educational mechanisms. Foundational work by Al-Haj not only provides a historical account of the governance shifts in the educational system of the country, but gradually unravels the systematic use of education as a mechanism of legitimizing official ideology and hindering development. Education, he claims, replaced land as the previous basis of an individual's socioeconomic status, changing the very nature of society's stratification (1995). Further serving this idea, a number of comprehensive analyses revealed that Israel's education structures and their development into separate tracks presented by the state as 'educational pluralism', in fact, are used merely as a tool of deliberate separation, both physical and as part of state education policy, continuing the legacy of military state governance (Coursen-Neff, 2004; Abu-Saad, 2004; 2019; Jabareen and Agbaria, 2017). Notably, bilingual education in the governance dimension of research is extremely limited. The relationship between governance and state-recognized bilingual schooling are not found central but fragmentary, addressed in existing works focusing mostly on identity and schooling dimensions.

Identity dimension

The factors contributing to identity construction are of utmost research interest in conflict-ridden societies as they can serve as the basis of societal ethnic stratifications (Smith, 2010; Yuval Davis, 2011). As in the governance dimension, identity case studies in Israel usually examine one ethnic group: mostly Arab/Palestinian identity building, with less attention given to Druze, Bedouin, Ethiopian Jews and other minorities (Abu-Saad, 2011; Saba-Sa'di and Sa'di, 2018; Gribiea et al., 2019). Specific social categories are given the most attention, among which language prevails. Language studying at schools is closely examined in identity formation of Israel's minorities as both based on Zionist Jewish values

under the hegemony of Hebrew, and on the contrary as distinct and separate from the dominant group, thus reflecting the struggle of collective identity (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999; Amara, 2002; Amara, 2016; Or and Shohamy, 2016). Works by Tannenbaum et al. (2020; 2022) and Manor and Binhas (2023) have highlighted the reluctance among policy makers to engage with identity politics through language studies and a significant gap between the practice of official teaching of Hebrew as a first language and the complex identity of Arabs in Israel, urging for adequate multilingual policy, which should be perceived as the norm rather than a problem. In this context, bilingual schools are brought to light as potential solutions of empowerment, reconciliation, and peace, for example, in single-school case studies by Svirsky et al. on HIH in Galilee (2007) and Leoncini on HIH in Jaffa (2014). According to Feuerverger, the experience of bilingual education in WSNS represents a form of self-empowerment and societal liberation for both groups (2001). Amara et.al case study on language practices in HIH schools (2009), however, revealed little hope of reaching symmetry in language teaching under the "current socio-political circumstances" (p.33).

Perhaps the most seminal in this area has been the scholarship of Bekerman, who extensively studied bilingual education under the lens of social contact theory and intergroup encounters (2004; 2005; 2016; Bekerman and Horenczyk, 2004; Bekerman et al., 2011). His works are particularly concerned with identity formation through language practices, ceremonial events, and school interaction and include a qualitative case study across all HIH schools, providing teachers, students, and governmental officials perspectives (2016). Another prominent case study is by Meshulam, whose works identify what features constitute the distinctiveness of a multicultural model as a counter-hegemonic educational project and offer comparative insights into its political controversies over race, citizenship, and societal power relations (2015, 2019; Meshulam and Knoester, 2023). Though still distant in terms of objectives, these studies are perhaps the closest to the presented thesis given their attention to power relations.

Schooling content and learning outcomes

Curriculum becomes a means to endorse specific political ideologies, religious practices, or cultural values in conflict-ridden societies. Defined in terms of 'learning outcomes', it contains numerous areas of potential controversy such as language, history, cultural practice and tradition, and geography to name a few (Smith, 2010). Those areas of controversy have

drawn multiple researchers into examining the negative portraying of the Arab minority (Bar-Tal, 2001), absence of Arab culture and history (Yonah, 2008; Massry-Herzallah and Arar, 2019), prevalence of Jewish cultural superiority and its implications for Arab identity (Okun and Friedlander, 2005; Abu-Saad and Champagne, 2006; Tannenbaum et al., 2022). The studies either compare the Arab educational stream to Jewish across curriculum content, often emphasizing inequalities in subjects teaching, or indicate the asymmetrical character of Jewish secular education.

Collectively, the three dimensions of studies on education in conflicted Israel identify the pressing problems of centralized control, discrimination, political manipulation of curriculum, influence of language hegemony in minorities identity formation, and cultural and historical neglect that continue to shape the education sphere in Israel. As exemplified in this section, there is still a very limited body of research on the power dynamics of bilingual education within the Israeli setting. The majority of the work on education-ethnicity or education-ethnic conflicts is selective in regard to specific minority communities, mostly, Arab, leaving mutual schooling an underdeveloped research area. With the important contributions of mentioned authors in the shared education field, it is evident that the works employing feminist lens in a broader sense, or intersectionality, or belonging theory in particular are needed. Additionally, this research remains largely driven by Israel insider scholarship, with fewer authors belonging to neither Jewish or Arab communities.

Chapter 4. Theory

The chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework applied in this study, unpacking the analytical concepts of belonging and politics of belonging developed by Nira Yuval Davis, grounded in intersectionality. Thereby, the study is combining a broader intersectionality theory with a detailed framework relevant to the particular case on the intersection of education, identity, and ethnic conflict.

4.1. Intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality appeared in response to the limitations of singular identity-based analyses prevailing social science until late 1980. Rooted in black feminism thinking, the concept was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw and implied that individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege are shaped by the intersections of various social categories, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more (Crenshaw, 1989; Cho et al., 2013).

While intersectionality has evolved and traveled, questions have arisen about its metaphors, the nature of intersecting oppressions, the breadth of categories involved, and the static versus dynamic orientation of research and other issues (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016). Todays' complications of using intersectionality in any field lie in it still being "a social theory in the making" (Collins, 2019, p. 40). As such, it varies in both theoretical development and methodological applications. In application of intersectionality as an overarching lens for this study, I depart from the idea of intersectionality as the meeting point of separate social categories (Rebughini, 2021). This speaks to the metaphoric use of intersectionality pointed out by Collins, as a "view of social relations as interconnected entities" (2019, p. 24).

Acknowledging the challenge of intersectionality use, McCall proposed three methodological approaches, all informed by an understanding of how intersectionality can use social categories: in anti-categorical, intra-categorical, and inter-categorical ways (2005). Among them, the intercategorical approach studies how the relationships and interconnectedness of categories affect inequalities between already established social groups (ibid). The intra-categorical approach "maintains a critical stance toward categories" within particularly complex identities of individuals and communities who fall out of traditional

race-class-gender social group formations, a process she further calls "intra-categorical complexity" (McCall, 2005, p.1774). The use of the intra-categorical method is efficient in a case study, where discussing the meaning of the social categories in building individual's identities under certain contextual circumstances becomes a central point of the analysis (McCall, 2005; Yuval Davis, 2015). For Yuval Davis, whose stance on intersectionality informs the concepts of belonging and political belonging, however, inter- and intra-categorical approaches are not "mutually exclusive" (2011, p.6). Instead of focusing on an in-depth study of categories's construction and their borders within one chosen group on a micro level of analysis (intra-categorical), and the configurations of inequalities between several groups on a macro level (inter-categorical), she suggests a combination of both. The implications of intersectionality in regard to belonging are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

4.2. Belonging

Belonging and the politics of belonging are relatively new theoretical concepts that constitute "some of the most difficult issues that all of us are confronting these days" (Halse, 2018; Yuval Davis, 2011, p.1). While they have attracted attention of scholars across multiple disciplines, there has been a notable gap in application of belonging in the field of education (Halse, 2018). The definition of belonging is broad and undertheorized, but essentially refers to an emotional attachment, feeling 'at home' and can vary in multiple ways across individuals, communities, and entire populations (Halse, 2018; Yuval Davis, 2006a). Importantly, it is multi-leveled, dynamic and shifting in its nature, and is never a fixed or attached attribute (ibid). Yuval Davis, among the most prominent scholars who studied belonging, importantly distinguishes this concept from identity and identifications as those "are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and of destiny" (2004, p. 215). In line with this argument, Anthias points that belonging and identity are not mutually inclusive: with the feeling of belonging a person does not necessarily identify with a certain group, and vice versa (2011). Importantly, as any other hegemonic construction, belonging can be 'naturalized', meaning, explained from a genealogical perspective, as a natural process, and the articulation of belonging becomes evident when it is threatened (Yuval Davis, 2004, 2006a, 2011).

In her intention to clarify the conceptual complexity of belonging, Yuval Davis provides three analytical levels (or facets) constructing different belonging(s): 1) social locations 2)

identifications and emotional attachments 3) ethical and political values (2006a). All of these levels speak to the main idea of intersectionality, namely, interconnectedness and interrelation of categories weaving the complex canvas of social inequalities.

As this work utilizes various levels of belonging as analytical tools in understanding identity formation and power relations in the Israeli context, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of each of them.

Social locations of belonging are expressed in social categories. In other words, at this analytical level people belong to and are divided into multiple groups according to their gender, class, race or ethnicity and other categories, which are: a) mutually constituted, b) located at different grids of power and c) dependent on specific socio-historical context and time (Yuval Davis, 2006a). These three important characteristics of social locations, while they speak to the understanding as intersectional, go beyond the principle of overlapping and interconnectedness. Positionality of social locations across axes of power is contextual and dynamic: thus, in certain historical moments for certain groups or individuals certain categories may be given more importance (ibid). The "added value" of Yuval Davis' approach to intersectionality highlights that the "order of stratification" and prioritization of categories is constantly shifting (Lutz, 2015, p. 42), and the intersectional analysis should constantly challenge this order (Yuval Davis, 2011). The analysis of the present case study is limited to four categories: language, ethnicity, culture, and class as the most relevant and emerged in the collected data.

Another analytical level of belonging – identifications and emotional attachments – revolves around identity as the process of narrative-building, whether individual or collective (Yuval Davis, 2006a). Identity narrative is connected to the perception – internal by a person him/herself or external by the others, defining what it means to belong to a certain group, thus revealing the group specific characteristics (Yuval Davis, 2011). Importantly, collective identity narratives often serve as a resource or influence for individual identity narratives, and can impact and shape how individuals perceive and construct their own sense of identity (ibid). This emphasizes a dialogical process of identity construction which is both "reflective and constitutive", where "authorization and contestation take place" (Yuval Davis 2011, p.16). In this context, analyzing the process of how identities are constructed reveals the mechanisms of power relations.

Finally, the third analytical level of belonging, though described by Yuval Davis succinctly, essentially assesses around which ethical and political values the previous two levels revolve (2006a, 2011). Thus, specific ideologies, discourses, and attitudes shape the boundaries of identities and categories, which paves the way to the politics of belonging (ibid).

4.3. The politics of belonging

The politics of belonging "comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways" (Yuval Davis, 2006a). Thus, Davis argues that the politics of belonging are concerned how and by whom the boundaries of belonging are defined. In other words, who decides upon which categories belonging is constructed, who is included and excluded from a particular community, and how the lines distinguishing between 'us' and 'them' are drawn. This dynamic process involves continuous negotiation of boundaries of multiple belongings by hegemonic political powers and political agents. Thus, the boundaries constructed between existing societal stratifications which refer to "differential hierarchical locations of individuals and groupings of people on society's grids of power" (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 162), narratives, and values are put under close examination. For instance, Davis argues that the intersectionality of social categories (level of social location in her framework) is often denied by the politics of belonging, that tend to 'naturalize' and 'homogenize' social categories, constructing the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups based on their equally shared set of particular categorical attributes (2006a). The "boundary problem" is a main, but not single concern of politics of belonging. Underlying the process of "dirty work of boundary maintenance" are both symbolic and representational powers (Crowley, 1999 in Yuval Davis, 2006a, p.204). All three analytical levels of belonging can be utilized by those powers in order to define what is included in a particular belonging project in a particular geographic and historic location (ibid). Projects of belonging based on social locations of 'origin' are more "racialized", define stricter boundaries, and are less open to inclusion (Yuval Davis, 2011, p.22). On the contrary, projects of belonging guided by values of democracy and human rights, tend to be more inclusive and pluralistic (ibid).

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1. Research design. Epistemological and ontological stance

The presented research is guided by a qualitative case study design, building upon an interpretive epistemology and constructivist ontology. Opposing to a positivists paradigm, interpretivism implies that the emphasis of the researcher and the study is shifted towards understanding (interpreting) certain social actions from attempts to explain them (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Therefore, by adopting a qualitative strategy, this research, rather than drawing the cause-and-effect relationships, puts multiple factors and their interactions under investigation, trying to generate deeper insights into Israeli multiethnic education and present a more complex and detailed larger picture (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

From an ontological stance, constructivist perspective understands social phenomena as constructed by actors, and not pre-existent or given (Hammett et al., 2014). Providing it is crucial within the qualitative research strategy to interpret the individuals and their diversity of ways to understand the reality, the use of qualitative research places the perspectives of the respondents in the center of analysis, empowering the views of those particularly less heard or visible, which, in the case of this study are people engaged in bilingual education initiatives (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

The contextual focus of qualitative research on Israel and the objective to reveal the complexity of the interactions between power, ethnicity, and the educational system further guides the research strategy of this thesis, which adopts a case study design. The case study is used for an "in-depth exploration of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a "real life context" (Simons, 2009, p.21). For this thesis, several bilingual multicultural schools were chosen as a single case study, and the initial intrinsic approach to the topic, formulated in the preliminary planning, transformed into an instrumental case study approach. Thus, instead of deeper investigation on particular actors of the Israeli educational system, the selected schools aim to provide broader insights of the Israeli educational system's power disbalances. Defining the case as narrowed to certain schools was connected to the sampling strategy of this study, described below.

5.2. Research methods and data collection

The data collection process for this thesis consisted of semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Framed by Hammett et al. as "conversations with purpose", interviews were chosen as a method of the study aligning both with its constructivist ontology and the desire to extract targeted, insightful responses that delve into subjective understandings and perceptions (2014, p.139). Guided by the predetermined question topics, which set the direction of the conversation, the semi-structured interviews at the same time allowed for participants' flexibility in answers and possibility for a researcher to explore the new emerging issues (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Thus, the use of semi-structured interviews, known for their conversational and exploratory nature, prove invaluable in providing detailed, multi-layered insights into topics such as identity, which, although not the primary focus, intricately intertwines with the broader themes of power relations and ethnicity explored in this study (Hammett et al., 2014).

The preliminary research plan included data collection on site, and a combination of interviews with daily participants observations, as the latter allows the researcher to directly witness the experiences discussed in interviews, offering a hands-on perspective (Peel, 2020). However due to the ongoing war in Israel and other practical reasons, the observation method was later excluded from the study, which is discussed further in limitations.

A total of eight interviews were conducted through video conferences in Zoom, each lasting from 30 minutes to one hour. Participants were given the option to choose the interview language — either Hebrew or English — at the beginning of each interview, based on their personal preference. In the end, only three interviews were conducted in Hebrew, while other participants preferred English. An interview guide was built in two languages and structured by broader key topics that reflected the thesis research question. Those included: power relations in the educational system, government's involvement in education, and opportunities for advancement of bilingual education. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the questions were designed as open-ended, and additionally adjusted for each participant depending on their role within school. Throughout the conversation flows, additional questions were asked to address specific points the participants raised (Hammett et al., 2014). All interviews were recorded upon receiving the participant's consent, and further transcribed using an AI software such as Otter.ai for English and Transkriptor for Hebrew. One interview was only partially recorded due to technical reasons, and the first half of the

interview involved note taking, while another part was recorded and transcribed as usual. The interviews in Hebrew were further translated into English by the researcher herself given her Bachelor's degree in Hebrew philology and fluency in the language.

5.3. Sampling

Purposive sampling strategy was adopted following the single case design, implying that participants of the study were selected corresponding to their direct involvement in bilingual education (Bryman, 2016). The primary criteria for purposive sampling included: 1) individuals actively engaged in, or with a history of, working in bilingual schools; 2) more than two years of professional experience in bilingual education. The second criteria ensured that if the participant was coming to a bilingual school from another non-bilingual institution, he or she would get sufficient time to become acquainted with the bilingual school's practices and curriculum which differs significantly from a typical Arab or Jewish public school, for at least one study year prior to participation in the study. Thus, selected participants would not simply have direct involvement with the subject matter but also could provide insightful rather than observational information about their professional experience.

Importantly, the search for the study participants was limited by the number of bilingual and/or multicultural schools available in Israel. Since bilingual education remains in the gray area of governmental interests, the exact number of bilingual educational institutions operating in Israel cannot be found using the MoE or other open governmental resources. In the process of the literature review on bilingual education in the country, three NGOs have been repeatedly mentioned across various research: HIH, Hagar, and WSNS. In total, 8 schools (6 of HIH, 1 of Hagar and 1 of WSNS) have been mapped as recruitment locations for participants of the study. Although several private international schools employing bilingual (but not necessarily multicultural) approach exist in Israel, those were not considered relevant for the study as they operate entirely independent from the Ministry of Education and hence are not entangled with the problems of ethnic segregation in the state educational system.

All three NGOs and the schools that provided contact information on their websites (7 out of 8) were contacted by email. The absence of a local gatekeeper significantly slowed down the process of establishing the contacts, and where emails proved unresponsive, Facebook groups and LinkedIn were used for recruiting the study participants. The search through schools'

Facebook groups and the use of work place and location search parameters proved to be the most efficient. When the first contacts were established, the snowball technique was employed at the end of the interview where participants were asked to propose suitable interviewees with similar experience (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Interestingly, this technique was more often initiated by participants themselves, who expressed genuine openness and support to the research process. The final sampled group included school principals and teachers of different subjects from across central and northern regions of Israel (Appendix 1). In all cases, the participants' children were enrolled in bilingual schooling, thus adding a certain level of parents' perspective to the study. The study aimed for gender and ethnic balance among participants, resulting in the inclusion of four women and four men, both Jewish and Arab.

5.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to data collected through interviews. Scholars refer to a thematic analysis as a spiral process, which, starting with simplifying the complex body data by organizing it into codes, further progresses into more intensive, complex analysis, expanding codes into themes and interpreting their interrelations (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Creswell and Poth, 2016; Peel, 2020). After transcribing and translating the interviews, the material was coded by the researcher without the use of any additional software. Engaging and familiarizing with data is a necessary step prior to coding, hence all the interviews were read through thoroughly several times (Peel, 2020). The first coding cycle included identifying data extracts relevant or potentially relevant to the research question and labeling those with initial codes. The second coding cycle collected the codes into categories, a process called "categorical aggregation" by Creswell, and then unified them into larger themes (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p.164). The following themes have been identified:
1) Linguistic differences and language as the instrument of power; 2) Intercultural and social integration in confronting 'the other'; 3) Motivations for school enrollment and equality of representation; 4) Socio-economic differences; 5) Institutional challenges and oversight in bilingual education. The process of theme identification was mostly inductive during the first and partially second coding cycles (Patton, 2002). As the pattern of themes began to crystallize, the theoretical lens of intersectionality and the concept of social category and belonging informed the aggregation of categories into themes.

5.5. Limitations

In alignment with recognized challenges in qualitative research methodologies as well as researcher's reflexivity, the limitations of this thesis should be further addressed.

Firstly, time and scope constraints jeopardized by the outburst of war impeded the breadth of interview inquiry. The final data results were drawn from eight interviews which constitutes a relatively limited sample. Though the intended sample criteria were met, including the equality in representation of both Jewish and Arab participants, acknowledging that the wider sample, including more schools as well as community leaders would have deepened the level of identity analysis, is necessary. While unable to include current students in the research sample due to ethical constraints, I acknowledge that their perspectives would have shifted the angle of research, required recalibration of theory application and methods used and initially, produced a different study. The presented thesis, while contributing to the existing research in bilingual education, lays the foundation of what can be further explored in this field if those limitations are delineated. Additionally, the absence of a field trip due to the ongoing war mirrors the external factors influencing qualitative research highlighted by Bryman, and emphasizes the dynamic nature of research settings (2016). The constraints of using foreign language to either researcher, participant, or both, and the choice of semi-structured interviews constitute other limitations to the collected data. Ensuring that we understood each other correctly, I asked for additional clarification where needed, and with respect to participants encouraged them to use words in their mother tongue to better capture the meaning they wanted to transmit. Often taking charge of interview directions as the process of semi-structured interviews allows, the participants tended to provide descriptive contextual information, and my lack of previous experience in data collection could have added to the process. However, as I reflect on my ability to listen, attentively and openly, stressed as an important trait in data collection (Patton, 2002), these 'misdirections' resulted in data rich on social environments and precise portraits of reality, necessary for my chosen theory.

5.6. Ethical considerations. Reflexivity and positionality

As social science researchers' responsibility stretches beyond their own to the subjects of their study, applying an ethically-sensitive approach is imperative for a researcher (Cohen, 2002, Bryman, 2016). This involves prioritizing participant well-being, ensuring

transparency, and addressing power dynamics to contribute responsibly to research outcomes. This thesis adhered to LUMID Ethical Guidelines throughout the entire research process.

In order to ensure the interviewees' right to participate freely as well as their comprehensive understanding of research objectives, processes, and data utilization, the informed consent form was created (Cohen, 2002). The form was first introduced to a potential participant in the initial email or message, and then the consent was obtained together with the agreement to participate in the study. At the beginning of each interview the consent form and data processing details were read out loud to provide space for participant's questions regarding the study and to ensure their full understanding of the rights and freedom to withdraw from participation.

Though the purpose and objectives of this thesis did not involve encountering any ethical dilemmas per se, the interviewing stage of the research coincided with the escalation of conflict in Israel on October 7th 2023, resulting in the full-scale war. The researcher was particularly mindful about ethnic divide of Israeli society, further impeded by ongoing war, which led to the decision to anonymize the participants identity, including their ethnicity, work position, and geographic location striving for the protection of participants. As noted by the participants themselves, potential implications of discussing problematic topics of bilingual education such as the events of Nakba, Palestinian rights or liberation could result in participant's losing their job if employed through the Ministry of Education.

Moreover, the researcher is reflexive of her own identity as a white Russian-speaking woman, whose ethnicity and native tongue represent the dominant group in her own country of origin. In regard to this and with awareness that the outsider's perspective is rooted in the premise of the existing power imbalance between me and the participants, I approached the interview design and interviewing process with added ethical scrutiny (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The questions of participant's ethnicity and opinions on ongoing war were intentionally avoided in the process. However, it is possible that due to my outsider's perspective to the studied context, and inability to identify with any of the participants and their lived experiences in Israel (Banks, 1998), they reflected both on the war and some were not hesitant in mentioning their ethnicity. This highlighted the trust, openness, and reliability of the interviewing process, yet does not exclude the power interplay.

Lastly, I acknowledge that the subjectivity of my own values and lived experiences influenced the presented research (Banks, 1998). While remaining unbiased and politically neutral throughout the interviews, the way I express my opinions in text and structure of this study underscores the constructivist ontology of knowledge and that the information produced by this study reflects a subjective view of social reality (Bryman, 2016).

Chapter 6. Analysis and research findings

Under the lens of intersectional analysis, narratives in qualitative data will define specific categories and their intersections, and simultaneously provide insights into identity formation in the dynamics of the specific context (Rebughini, 2021). Categories of ethnicity, language, culture, and class emerged in the thematic analysis. This chapter is divided into two larger sections: belongings in bilingual school experience and the State of Israel's project of political belonging. Within the first section each of the categories will be presented and rendered across the analytical levels of belonging: social location, identification, and ethical and political values. The second section will elaborate on the construction and intervention into boundaries of belonging utilizing the same social categories.

6.1. Belongings in bilingual school experiences: social locations, identifications, and values

Ethnicity and language categories

Contextual understanding of Israel as a multicultural, multilingual society was given an important focus across interviews, revealing how ethnic and linguistic social locations perpetuate all levels of interactions between socially divided groups (P1–P8).

As highlighted by Yuval Davis, the interconnection of categories lies not in simply piling one category with another, but perceiving those categories as mutually constructed (2006a). The ongoing observation across all interviews lied in the use of language to constitute ethnic identity and vice versa as ethnicity constituting linguistic identity. Interconnectedness and sometimes even interchangeability between language as a social category and ethnicity in bilingual school contributes to building certain narratives of identification, shifting the boundaries of distinction between "us" and "them", or, as often articulated by the participants, 'the other' (ibid).

From early childhood, through first interactions with the 'others' in kindergarten, proficiency in language influences power dynamics among Arab and Jewish students. Ethnicized language is constituted by its ability to act as a social lift for a certain ethnic group, where a higher level of proficiency in the dominant language (Hebrew) allows for better

socio-economic opportunities in the future (P3, P8). Excelling in Hebrew at school correlates with better matriculation exam results and access to higher education, which is taught exclusively in Hebrew (Feniger et al., 2022).

P2:

> Knowing Hebrew is an opportunity for Arabs, it is better [for them] and has a bigger impact on them. [Jewish] kids don't understand why it's important. Arab kids know why! It's an important tool for them to advance in social life. Jewish kids don't have any motivation or understanding of that.

Simultaneously, the use of Arabic as a social lift among Jews can serve military purposes to join the intelligence units (P3) or as reinforcement of status quo as ethnic majority (P7).

Ethnic identity constituted through language, a sort of 'linguistic ethnicity', on the contrary, is shaped by students' self-perception and self-identification, shifting their boundaries between location and identification to belong to the group they want to identify with. In a bilingual school setting, this refers to language classes, when students whose mother tongue is Arabic would study Hebrew with an Arab-speaking teacher, and Hebrew-native students would study Hebrew with a Jewish teacher, as the levels of knowledge and understanding differ for native and non-native groups. Teachers at two of the schools recall as Arab-native students, especially highly motivated or already excelling at Hebrew, strived to study Hebrew 'as equals' together with Hebrew-native students:

P4:

> [There were] a lot of situations [when] Arab speakers perceived that their Hebrew was better. They did not want to learn with the Hebrew for Arabic speakers program, they wanted to learn with the Hebrew for Hebrew speakers program. They could think of self perception and ego. But in most of the cases, the level of language was still not good enough for that.

P8:

> It was more important for the Arab kids to identify with the majority group, and to be perceived as equal with the Hebrew speakers, to learn Hebrew with them.

Importantly, the linguistic categorization of ethnic identity is reinforced by the schools themselves on the value level: 'Jew' and 'Arab' as ethnic categories are avoided in school

practice. Instead, students are encouraged to refer to each other as 'Hebrew-speaker' and 'Arab-speaker' (P4, P7, P8). The boundaries of belonging to a group hence, are defined by linguistic rather than ethnic identification, which unites, for instance, Palestinian and Druze identities into one – 'Arab speakers'. This intentional reframing of language belonging influences the student's self-narratives and construction of linguistic and ethnic identities. On the one hand, when language defines the boundary of belonging in bilingual schools, the danger of the 'other' is reduced simply to language use, which is also familiar and to some extent known to children enrolled in bilingual schooling from an early age. On the other hand, this linguistic boundary can simultaneously serve the project of political belonging of the State of Israel, where Arabs are forced to identify with the superior group through language in order to move upwards across the grids of socio-economic stratification. Thus, the borders of belonging to ethnic or linguistic groups are contested and challenged by individuals on a narrative level, by bilingual schools on the value level and at the same time intersect with social class.

Intercultural and social integration

The second theme that emerged in the interviews delved into the understanding of meeting points between two socially divided groups where the axes of division were distinctly marked by ethnicity and language. Importantly, as shown in the previous paragraph, language and ethnicity are so closely intertwined, it becomes challenging to detach those two identity modalities – linguistic and ethnic – when examining the intercultural relationships between Arab/Arab-speaking and Jewish/Hebrew-speaking groups. The linguistic dominance of Hebrew dictated by social reality and pursuit for faster ways of acquiring language skills among Arabs constructs a basis of the axis of social division and leads to cultural disconnect. Indeed, participants consistently note that the unequal balance between the two languages in everyday lived experiences exacerbates the ability to "get to know the other" (P2, P3, P5).

Some participants tied the inability of cultural conflux even in the spatially proxime locations of so-called in Israeli context "mixed cities" like Jaffa where, as one of the participants puts it, it should come "naturally" (P4). This assumption reveals how the understanding of social integration is informed not only by locations of ethnicity and language, but also a geographical dimension. Despite the mundanity of spatial segregation in Israel where the majority from each of the divided groups retains to their homogenous localities (cities or

neighborhoods), these 5 'mixed cities' are historically seen as more diverse in terms of ethnicity (Rabinowitz and Monterescu, 2008; Diala Abu-Oksa, 2020). While the context seemingly aimed for coexistence, the reality reveals individuals' reluctance to engage in reciprocal relationships, constrained by limited or zero knowledge of Arabic and complete cultural unawareness (P3, P4, P7, P8). In line with the fear of the 'other' stemming from unfamiliarity with the group's cultural and linguistic facets, building friendships and promoting intercultural engagement between kids even in the setting of bilingual schools positis an acute challenge. P2 noticed that if the kids "don't speak the same language, it's very difficult". In contrast to the classroom, where learning about 'the other's' language, cultural practice and history equally is a norm, the reality behind school doors speaks to the opposite. Participants' observations on students' friendships and social activities outside of school highlight the rare possibility of meeting with each other (P2, P3, P4, P5).

Additionally, here, gender dimension can exacerbate the difficulty to connect the students. Cultural conservatism and gender roles may shape the borders of cultural contact (P5). The observation that boys may have more freedom to establish cross-cultural friendships highlights the intersectionality of gender and cultural identity within a broader societal context (P8).

The assertion that schools function as "intercultural, interreligious meeting points" (P1, P5, P6, P8) signifies a deliberate effort to create spaces for interaction among "two nations and three religions" (P1). It becomes apparent that the schools acknowledge the multifaceted nature of identities of students, and their operationalization to actively challenge the identity boundaries is manifested through several instruments. All participants explain the necessity of dual teaching as a crucial pedagogic strategy that allows for bridging the ethnic and linguistic axes of cultural division. The inclusion of teachers from both communities, Arab-speaking and Hebrew-speaking during most subjects classes, reflects an attempt to integrate diverse perspectives into the educational framework.

P1:

> It is really important for us to have both nations represented in the class, so that they teach about something that belongs to certain people so that it will come from a first hand source, and not someone else who learned about this thing.

Along with teacher's equal representation, ethnic and linguistic equality is strived for among the students enrolled in schools (P1, P5, P6, P8). However, it is not only the cultural, linguistic and ethnic connection that is aimed for by this approach. Across interviews the struggles of equality in numbers revealed deeper concerns, driven by political mistrust between Arabs and Jews due to the historical context of conflict and, consequently, feeling of safety.

P1:

> [Parents] are afraid of a challenge: "What, you will talk to children about the war or the existing complexities? No, we want to protect our children as much as possible!" The very meeting [with the other] is challenging, and then fewer people come. It is very important for us to have an equal number of students, so it would be an equal experience. I, as an Arab, would feel comfortable in a place that accepts me, where for me and for the others there's an equal dialogue, the same as for the Jewish child. It is important to have an equal number of Jewish and Arab students, but the reality makes it very, very difficult.

Ideology and safety however are less of a concern for Arab families, who now tend to outnumber Jewish students (P5, P8). The families of Arabs students from lower social classes would enroll them into bilingual schools due to geographic proximity and lack of good quality education at Arab schools, and not out of ideological reasoning. In fact, language-driven motivations are quite common among Arab families, even from higher social classes who can afford private schooling.

P4:

> There were gaps in the motives. Almost all of the Jewish parents sent kids into school out of ideology. That it was important for them to have a mutual joint living. Most of the Arab parents sent their kids over there, wishing for them to have a better chance of assimilating into Hebrew-speaking society.

P2:

> The Jewish coming to our school are quite liberal, they don't care about the success of their kids. They just want them to be free and to study while playing and not just sitting doing homework. The Arab kids, as I told you from the beginning, are looking for future, better future. Also Arab kids are much more strict, and their families are much more [demanding]. They are asking us to have homeworks, to have exams. And the Jewish parents are saying:

"No, we don't want exams, all we want for kids is to enjoy life because childhood is a very very unique stage in life!"

Social class

Social location of class came into play when participants discussed language/ethnicity and intercultural integration. The correlation between socio-economic background and educational outcomes and attainment is nearly too much of a buzz topic in the development field, not excluding Israel (Dadon-Golan et al., 2019; Resh and Blass, 2019). Okun and Friedlander argue that it's important to differentiate socio-economic disparities rooted in historical imbalances from those caused by state discriminatory actions (2005), however, within the theory of belonging these disparities are the result of a multilevel boundary construction which is more complex rather than two-divisional.

An interesting observation of this complexity occurred in bilingual schooling context. P4, P5 and P7 pointed out that the low socio-economic levels of Arab families in their particular region led to less encouragement from families in studying the mother tongue. Studying well and "making an effort" (P3) in Arabic language subject meant focusing less on learning the dominant Hebrew, which, as previously shown, serves as a key to assimilate and succeed in Israeli society.

P4:

> [F]or some of the parents, it was more important that the kids themselves would know Hebrew better [than Arabic], because it's more practical. They are a minority. A lot of parents, for example, wouldn't read and write in Arabic, but would read and write in Hebrew on a basic level. Because when you are a minority it's much more practical to know the language of the majority, you have to do it, for contracts for [going to a] bank or work.

Thus, choosing to study a certain language constitutes an attempt to re-construct or rather break through the belonging to a certain class, and a 'minority' narrative which itself is contextual, ethnic, and linguistic.

Based on the analysis of these categories it becomes evident that at the locus of bilingual schools as a meeting point between Arabs and Jews, the diversity of students' individual and collaborative identities is fully exercised. Belonging to an ethnic minority for Arab students leads to individual efforts of breaking the belonging boundary, identifying with the majority group for practical reasons. This practicality guides the instrumental use of dominant language learning inevitably modifying the relationships within and between ethnic-linguistic location and identification. An interesting observation emerged during one interview with a Jewish participant who denied the very fact of the educational system's segregation as to "this is not a segregation" (P2). The motivation of Arabs to join bilingual school to gain better knowledge of Hebrew from the participant's perspective constituted not the power disbalance underlying language use in the Israeli context, but the norm in which language is simply a language, and nothing else.

6.2. The State of Israel's political project of belonging

The intersectional character of students' identities comprising intervening ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic belongings is neither recognized or acknowledged by the state. In fact, continuous treating each of the dimensions of those multifaceted identities as separate and distinct, reveals the educational system's inability to establish an equal and comprehensive framework for bilingual education on a macro level.

Since the Israeli educational system is highly centralized (Mor-Sommerfeld et al., 2007; Bekerman, 2016), participants discussed MoE (dis)involvement in great detail, among which curriculum and study plan were given the most attention (P1–P8). The intersectionality of culture and language belongings in students' identities marks the gap between schools' reality and MoE approach to curriculum. In MoE practice two distinct curricula are developed for state secular education: one for Hebrew-speaking schools and one for Arab-speaking schools (Meshulam, 2015). Both of them include studying the language of 'the other', however, from different ages: Hebrew speakers start learning Arabic only in middle school (around 6th or 7th grade), Arab speakers however, begin earlier, from 3rd or 4th grade (Or and Shohamy, 2016; P1, P3, P4, P6, P7). The socialization of Arabs who begin to use Hebrew from a very early age results in their educational needs being practically neglected.

P4:

> We do not have an elementary school curriculum for Arabic for Hebrew speakers. [And Arab speakers] do not have the curriculum that matches the needs of them starting to learn Hebrew from first grade class, living in a neighborhood and in an environment where they are exposed to Hebrew all of the time, and a lot of them have already been to bilingual kindergartens. So, the Arabic kids are fluent in basic Hebrew [when they start school].

It is puzzling why the state, while reporting on its education system as "promoting the integration of Israeli-Arab minority" and "reinforcing the values of co-existence" (*Israel. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.*, 2019 p.84-85), is unable to provide adequate language curriculum for both groups. The theory of belonging explains this selectiveness as a power process of "border maintenance" (Yuval Davis, 2006a). Alleged integration of Arabs into Jewish society is never a goal of the educational system as argued by the participants (P1, P4, P6, P8). On the opposite, MoE "does everything to keep us separate from each other" (P8) or "does not want bilingual schools to exist" (P4). P4 clearly distinguished the social locations of language and culture involved in the state's project of politics of belonging. This aligns with other participants' observations and existing literature on imbalance of representation in textbooks content for Arab schools (Al-Haj, 2002, 2005; Abu-Saad, 2006). MoE's construction of collaborative identity is linguistically-ethnic, where ethnicity is reduced to language: *"MoE does not know what a bilingual school is and what its needs are. It knows either to be an Arab school or a Jewish school"* (P1). Herein, the state study plan never implies either the connection between two groups, nor the possibility of multifaceted students' belongings. The linguistic-ethnic boundary is established along political axes aligning with the prevailing nationalist ideology of the Jewish state on Jewish terms (Jabareen, 2006; Yemini et al., 2014).

In regards to studies content, bilingual schools act not simply as an intercultural point, guided by the idea of shared education. Adopting the values of co-existence and respect (P1–P8) they undermine dominant collaborative identity narratives of 'us' (Jews) versus 'them' (Arabs). This emerged when teachers spoke about having to develop their own curriculum. Taking on a more challenging role as 'political agents' who opposed and resisted the hegemonic narratives (Yuval Davis, 2011) they in fact constructed alternative boundaries of belonging:

P5:

> When I was teaching history, I did not use the national MoE curriculum. We developed my own curriculum. It was location-based rather than ethnic- or nation- based. It was aimed to show the plurality of cultures that have always been living and present in Eretz Israel. [The curriculum] shows that they had, you know, different types of relationships. When addressing the Nakba, it was focused on facts. Showing and teaching about what was happening on the ground, trying to dislocate it from the narratives. Trying to let them create narratives based on the facts, based on the old maps, and the population numbers, and so forth. Trying to let them take the facts and make agreements. Like some kind of simulation.

However, the need of the state's involvement is also emphasized:

P1:
> It can't be like every school goes crazy by itself and its own staff and tries to create its own working plan. It has to be something very stable that people in power think about and not just like a team effort.

The neglect of MoE in regard to not only study plans, but to overall school operating exposes how the cultural dimension of collaborative identification is excluded from the project of political belonging. P6 noted that there was no provision for the inclusion of Muslim or other minorities' major holidays in the annual schedule of school breaks, preventing students who celebrate from missing classes. Treating Arabs as an a-cultural, a-historic minority defined by language (Arab-speaking education stream) the State of Israel reduces their ethnicity to language, thus avoiding the trap of being labeled ethnic apartheid, which is, interestingly, challenged in the International Court of Justice as this thesis is being written[2].

The lack of political will and motivation for allowing the intercultural contact at bilingual schools, captured by one of the participants, highlights authoritarian style of MoE towards bilingual schools efforts to curricula development:

P1:
> We actually really want to talk about what happened in 1948 from both the Jewish-Israeli side and the Palestinian side. And then every year we experience complications here. We have to get approval from the Ministry, and submit to them what we teach. Sometimes they approve less [than we submitted], so you have to change things in order to get the approval and still with very, very, very clear limitations. For example, there is no flag, there is no talking about the Nakba, right. It's not... they point out the flag: "no...they don't have the flag, [there's no] a moment of silence[3]".

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[2] In December 2023 South Africa filed an application instituting proceedings against Israel's conduct in Gaza to the International Court of Justice (IJC) in light of the full-scale war started after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th. The submission of this thesis on January 12, 2024 coincides with the hearing proceedings of the case in IJC on January 11th and 12th.

[3] An important ceremonial event, part of the commemoration day of the Nakba on May 15th

While P1 mentions that "there is no certainty in [obtaining this approval]", Israel's project of political belonging dictates this certainty drawing the "very very clear limitations" of inclusion and exclusion. Any social locations comprising Arabs individual self-belonging such as discussing the history of Nakba (P1–P4), drawing a Palestinian flag (P6, P7), or celebrating traditional holidays (P1, P2, P5, P6, P8), are not accepted in constructing of the Arab collaborative identity.

Concluding this section, it is imperative to mention that the bilingual schools politics of belonging project created to oppose the governmental one is not necessarily positive and accurately addresses the collaborative identities of their students.

P3:

> The truth is that we find it hard to work with [NGO that runs the school], because what they give you is not always suitable for the school needs. They are so far out leftwing, that it's impossible to implement, they are like in dreamland. And the government is in another dreamland. And the teachers are the only ones who live in reality.

The next section will further elaborate on the points made in the analysis and conclude the thesis, presenting potential directions for further inquiries in the field.

Chapter 7. Discussion and concluding remarks

Intersectionality rejects reductionism of social stratification as limited by only one social category (Cho et al., 2013). On the contrary, the interplay of several social categories is placed in the center of analysis in the present research. Understanding that "categorization is a form of domination" (Rebughini, 2021, p.159). the power dynamics are hidden in the process of constructing the boundaries of those categories, and, consequently, larger projects of politics of belonging (Yuval Davis 2006a; 2011).

In order to answer the RQ: *how do power relations shape bilingual education in Israeli ethnic conflict?* I built upon intersectionality, applying it as an overarching theory that allowed tracking for the interconnected character of social locations in a bilingual education context (Collins, 2019). I approached interview data guided by the idea that "not every belonging is important", which helped to sharpen the analysis (Yuval Davis, 2011, p.15). The power relations within the studied experience of bilingual schooling were revealed as underlying and operating across a certain set of social locations, recurrent in interviews, and in the relationship between locations and identification (either collective or individual). Since the process of constructing identity is never unidirectional, but rather a dialogue which is processual, and reflexive, it engages both individuals and the social discourse they are located in (Yuval Davis, 2006a). This dialogue constitutes an identity narrative which can further be 'attached' as a collaborative identity to a specific social group (ibid).

In this dialogue, what Bakhtin emphasized as philosophical 'the other', without whom there is no 'self' (1981 in Yuval Davis, 2011, p.16), essentially becomes specific and concrete in the reality of Israeli ethnic conflict as mentioned in another quote of Sayed Kashua: "You're either Arab or Jewish in this conflict, and there is no place for individuality" (Greenberg, 2013). To reveal the boundaries of belonging to 'the other' in Israel's collective narrative, the analysis compared to what extent social categories of ethnicity, language, culture, and class were given significance in Israel's project of political belonging. As highlighted across this research, and in line with reviewed literature, these boundaries are drawn on linguistic-ethnic lines. This creates a portrait of 'the other' as Arab-speaking, Arab-Israeli deprived of other belongings. Across location and identification levels, language is given the highest preference in defining the border of belonging, paving the way to the establishment of separate

educational institutions. Language in this state-developed belonging project replaces ethnicity as an attempt to nullify the national identity of diverse Arab communities living in the State of Israel. While Davis argues that language and culture locations are "more open to a voluntary, often assimilatory, identifications with particular collectivities", in the Israeli educational system the ethnically driven manipulation of language is less voluntary, but more forced on minority groups (2011, p.22). It is important to recognize that the boundaries created during the process of identity construction are not symmetrical. This goes in line with the asymmetry of all 'Jewish' – language, ethnicity, culture, religion, – versus 'non Jewish' where, as shown in the data and across this work, Jewish is always given a preference, whether voluntarily or forcefully. These asymmetries of inclusion and exclusion expose the existing power dynamics underlying individual and collective identity construction on both levels. Opposing this project are a few bilingual multicultural schools whose project of politics of belonging is itself "an act of rebellion" (P4).

Further research on main agents of creating a "counter-hegemonic narrative" (Meshulam, 2011, p.1) may provide clarification and hope for changing the belonging project. Already in 2002 during the Second Intifada, Amara questioned "whether, in the era of peace, conditions will be ripe for building a mutual super-identity for Arabs and Jews together" (p.250), however, twenty years later, the peace is nowhere to be seen. It is imperative for scholarship in shared education efforts to continue, to empower the voices of those who strive for educational systems based on democratic values and human rights. Given the very few theoretical and empirical approaches to this highly complex area, directions for further research are wide. Comprehensive case studies of broader scope, analyzing the efforts of individuals and institutions challenging the existing educational asymmetries, can provide insights into potential avenues for transforming the current landscape. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative studies tracking changes over time could assess the impact of multicultural schooling in contributing to a more equal educational environment amidst the cleavages of Israeli society. Last but not least, this research aspires to facilitate further feminist perspectives of bilingual schooling with a more narrow focus of marginalized communities with Arab and other minority groups.

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Appendix 1

List of participants

Participants	Region	Experience
P1	Central Israel	Over 7 years
P2	Northern Israel	Over 5 years
P3	Central Israel	Over 5 years
P4	Central Israel	Over 6 years
P5	Central Israel	Over 4 years
P6	Central Israel	Over 14 years
P7	Northern Israel	Over 5 years
P8	Central Israel	Over 10 years

Informed consent form template

Consent for personal data processing

This document is intended to provide you with information about your participation in a qualitative research study conducted by Maria Medvedeva as part of Master's thesis research at the International Development and Management Program (LUMID), Department of Human Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences.

The objective of this thesis is to explore the existing power relations in the schooling system of Israel, particularly on the example of shared education initiatives. I am interested in researching how existing bilingual and/or multicultural schools challenge the status quo of structured segregation within the state education system, what practices are used by bilingual schools in educating Arab and Jewish populations together and how their approach can be understood from a postcolonial perspective.

The participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time, as well as withdraw from the interview and research for any reason. You do not need to answer a specific question if you do not wish to do so. All information provided during the interview will be kept anonymous and will be used only for the purposes of this study. The result of the study will be shared with you upon its completion.

With this information, do you agree to participate in this study? YES/NO?

Signature of participant: _____. Date:_____