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The role of the educational system in retaining Circassian identity during the transition from Ottoman control to life as Israeli citizens (1878–2000)

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The purpose of this article is to examine the role played by the educational system of Kfar Kama in maintaining Circassian identity: how this has been expressed in different periods and what methods have been used as agents of conservation, as an agent of change? What factors have influenced the educational system? What methods did schools choose to employ? The article examines the decision-making processes regarding the school at Kfar Kama, the role of the internal system in determining educational policy, the results of the dialogue with the national state educational system, and what arrangements have been made to enable retention of Circassian culture by the Ottoman, British and Israeli governments.

Keywords: Circassians; Israel; Kfar Kama; Rihania; multiculturalism

Introduction

In 2004, there were some 3200 Circassians in Israel, living in two villages, Kfar Kama and Rihania. The Circassians came to Israel from the Caucasus region at the end of the nineteenth century, while the country was under Ottoman rule. Since their settlement in Israel the ruling power changed from Ottoman Turkey to Great Britain and from Britain to the independent Jewish State of Israel. Although a small minority, the Circassians have retained their unique identity while not relinquishing their position in the civil society within which they live.

The Circassians belong to a group of nations in the Caucasus which converted to Islam in the eighteenth century. The name Circass was given to them by their neighbours, but they call themselves *Adiga*, meaning 'the ideal person'. Although there are several versions of their ancestry, there is agreement regarding its antiquity, its Aryan roots, its territorial area in the Northwest Caucasus and its unique culture.[1] The Circassian language belongs to the Abkhaz-Adyg family, and resembles Georgian. Until the Soviet period, the language was only a spoken one. In 1918, Arabic letters were used to write Adygian. Literature and a national newspaper began to appear. In 1927, Arabic script was replaced by Latin letters

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and from 1938, Cyrillic script has been used with adjustments using a system of symbols.[2]

The Adiga H'abza

The Adigian code of customs and traditions includes a clear system of norms, behavioural rules and laws. The *Adiga H'abza* has been passed down from generation to generation, determines personal and community behavioural rules and is binding on all members of the community.

Circassians are well known for their love of music and dancing. Circassian folklore is rich in folk legends, animal stories, tall tales, fables, riddles, sayings and proverbs, all known to the elders of the community and passed down to community members. These are an educational source to preserve Circassian customs, and historical and collective memories.

Religion

Religious belief is considered to be law which protects individuals and maintains moral order. Therefore, more than simply religion, it is an inseparable part of Circassian social organization. Until 1721, when Islam was forced on the Circassians, they were Christians (the process of Christianizing the Caucasus nations took place from the third to the sixth centuries). At present, most Circassians are Sunni Muslims who retain unique customs dating from the pre-Islamic and pre-Christian periods.

The Circassians reached the Middle East after the Ottoman army, in which they served, was defeated in a war against Russia during which the latter conquered the Caucasus. The Ottoman Turkish government allocated them land and positions in Turkey, Jordan, Syria and Israel.

The Circassians in Israel settled in three villages: Kfar Kama in the Lower Galilee, Rihania located north-west of Safed in the Upper Galilee, and Hirbat Circass in Samaria. This village was abandoned due to malaria. The largest village is Kfar Kama and its educational system will be the focus of this article.

The Israeli-Circassian identity as indicated in existing research[3] and in descriptions by interviewees rests on seven principal components: the Adiga language; the Circassian tradition – *H'abza*; the Muslim religion in its ethnocentric form; a collective historical memory; a common ethos; a feeling of brotherhood with the Circassian Diaspora; civil loyalty to the State of Israel; and strong ties to place and family.

This article examines the role played by the educational system of Kfar Kama in maintaining Circassian identity: how this has been expressed in different periods and what methods have been used as agents of conservation, and as agents of change. What factors have influenced the educational system: the government, community leaders, parents? Which cultural components have been disseminated in the schools during each time period: language, religion,

nationality, progress? What methods did schools employ: learning programmes, language of instruction, additional languages, teachers and their training? Did these suit the declared objectives? The role of the internal system in determining educational policy has also been examined, the results of the dialogue with the national state educational system, and the arrangements made to enable retention of Circassian culture by the Ottoman, British and Israeli governments.

In recent years, the issue of education in a culturally diverse society has become prominent on the research agenda in Israel, after having served as an important subject of public-academic discourse in Western Europe and the United States. Researchers indicate the importance of the educational system as one of the factors which influence life in a heterogeneous society. This is expressed in two main delineations of identity. One refers to the importance of creating and formulating the independent identity, that is, who I am, what I should be and what I must do to achieve this identity; what the unique qualities of the group I belong to are and what the importance of its ethnicity is? On the other hand, there is the effect of recognition, lack of recognition or incorrect recognition of others on the formulation of identity.[4] The story of the educational system in Kfar Kama can enrich this discussion.

The educational institution in a culturally diverse society

Circassians exist in an environment within which there are other ethnic groups. They have much in common with some of these groups and less with others. The Muslim religion is common to the Circassians, the Bedouins and the Falahs (Palestinian farmers). Circassians share with the Jews their Eastern European origin and the chronological period of their settlement in the country. Christians and Druze share a common language with the Circassians, Arabic, which has served as the language of religion and, in the past, the language of bureaucracy.

Kfar Kama has always been under the 'authority'[5] of government powers which have been foreign to Circassians. These governments have demanded loyalty and have sought cooperation. When the possibility of conflict has arisen, past governments and the present Israeli state have preferred 'resolution'.[6] Government intervention in the content of Circassian education occurred unsuccessfully for only the few years at the end of Ottoman rule when the 'Young Turks' tried to force cultural unification. Another government intervention took place when the Compulsory Education Law was enacted in Israel, creating a required core study of Jewish heritage in the Arabic-speaking educational system. But this did not abolish the existing educational autonomy of the various systems which Israel had inherited from the Mandatory government.

Educational autonomy based on 'resolution' enables a variety of educational systems to exist in a pluralistic Israel. The state inherited recognition of the autonomy of religion from the British government, and allows religious custom to determine civil areas such as matrimony, divorce and death. Israel has retained and broadened autonomy in the realm of education, including autonomy

of spoken language, and of religion. The Israeli educational system is divided into populations whose language is Arabic and those whose language is Hebrew. This wide common basis enables additional divisions among those who belong to different religious streams among Hebrew speakers, and those who belong to various ethnic groups among speakers of Arabic. This division has led to a tendency towards polarization of settlement areas, within which there is unity of religious and cultural membership, and municipal identification. In areas where polarization is not complete, the majority has established a clear regional identity, and polarization has been maintained in language. The Circassians are Arab speakers, as are Muslims, most Christians, and Druze.

The period

The study begins when the village was established in 1878 and continues up to the contemporary era. This period can be divided into two: Circassian life preceding the establishment of the state and Circassian life as citizens of Israel. Each of these can be divided into two sub-periods:

A. Before the establishment of the state the Ottoman Turks and subsequently the British Mandate controlled the area.

B. After the establishment of the state, sub-periods are determined by language of instruction: until the beginning of the 1980s instruction was Arabic, and since then Hebrew has been spoken in the classroom.

Theoretical background

Literature regarding the Circassian community in Israel includes anthropological and linguistic studies,[7] and research dealing with the Circassian nation, discussing different aspects of its culture: history, migration and the development of the regional Circassian community.[8] Other sources include a report written for the Israeli Ministry of Education, including an educational plan of action[9] and information provided by members of the community.[10]

Methodology

Oral sources

These focus on recollections by interviewees about their lives and experiences, or family stories which have been passed down. These were collected using in-depth interviews, and recollections were dealt with as oral history. Analysis is based on research dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of using memories as a source.[11]

Written sources

Documents and protocols from the establishment of the village until the present.

Research sample

The research has been based on two groups:

A. 'The elders of the village'

Fifteen interviewees: six Circassian women and nine men whose estimated ages ranged from 70 to 95. They were asked to describe their studies at school, and the development of the educational institutions at Kfar Kama as they remember them. Intervention on the part of the interviewer was minimal, so as not to harm continuity and concentration. Finally, the interviewees were asked to discuss the topics mentioned above if these had not arisen during the interview. (The interviews took place and were written up with the aid of three Circassian students/teachers who prefer to remain anonymous).

B. Individuals in official positions

Fifteen principals, teachers, and religious leaders, men and women, who had participated in the educational system were asked to discuss the educational institutions of the village on a time axis including changes which have taken place in the schools from the time of their studies to the present, focusing on the period during which they acted in an official capacity. The interviews were conducted in Hebrew.

The method of interview analysis was based on 'grounded theory',[12] which suggests a methodological way of gathering data and using it scientifically without harming the creativity of the researcher in forming categories and generalizations, and the construction of questions and comparisons which deepen the findings.[13]

Kfar Kama: general description

Kfar Kama was established in 1878 by 1150 Circassian immigrants of the Shapsugh tribe and is located in the eastern Lower Galilee. In the early years, the inhabitants of Kfar Kama tried to earn their living as they had in the Caucasus, raising animals. However, the Bedouin, who periodically attacked the village, expedited a change in their way of life and they became farmers. The Circassians preceded the first wave of Jewish immigrants who settled in the Lower Galilee 27 years later.

The educational system – the Ottoman period, 1878–1918

Community education (non-formal)

For the first 10 years, there was no formal educational institution in the village. The first school in the area was opened in approximately 1888. The school was established and operated by the 'educated' and the 'writers', the religious leaders who also functioned as advisors to the adults of the village. Education aimed at preserving traditional life in the new country (in addition to their tasks as educators, they aided in writing and reading letters).

The pupils

Anyone from the village was accepted at school, irrespective of age or personal status. Sometimes brothers of the same family were in the same class. Girls and boys were taught separately.

Syllabus

Studies focused on Arabic and religion. The girls learned the same subjects, but they were taught by female teachers. All teachers in the village taught in their homes. The children sat on the floor on straw mats and opposite each pupil there was a small bench.

Language

The Turks demanded that lessons be given in Turkish or Arabic. The spoken language of the pupils was Circassian, the only language which was used at home. Therefore, lessons were translated into Circassian.

The teachers

All of the interviewees mentioned respect for teachers and stressed that the teachers had wide authority to enforce rules of behaviour. There are recollections of strict discipline, including the use of physical punishment.

Teachers mentioned included Chal'ako Shaker and Chal'ako Ahmad (Chalaka Haj Ahmad T'choko, 1826–1888), who led the Circassians that settled in the village (whose origins were in the Caucasus, including Romali), until his death. He received his education from Turkish Mushrads (spiritual leaders) in the Caucasus.

Under their leadership, but having broadened their knowledge outside the village, were their successors, T'choku Osman (Wasman Yfend) (1857–1930) and Nash Ischak (Ischak Yfend), who was one of the first to complete higher education at the University of Istanbul in Turkey.

Formal Ottoman school

From 1905–1914, an Ottoman state school existed in the village. The school has disappeared both from memory and from the stories of most interviewees. In this school, Arabic was taught, along with religion and the basics of the Turkish language. Teachers were provided by the Turkish authorities.

The pupils

As mentioned, studies were separate for girls and for boys. Boys studied all subjects and girls studied only religion.

The curriculum

The curriculum was formulated by the Turkish government and the subjects listed were arithmetic, religion and later Arabic, reading and writing, and Turkish language. The interviewees emphasized that pupils helped each other in class. A pupil who had completed a number of chapters from the Quran would bring presents or sweets for the teacher and the other pupils.

Repetition and memorization was one of the teaching methods used. Interviewees remembered that the material was learned orally. The pupils had to repeat, to learn by heart, and to recite the next day in class. A long stick was used by the teacher to touch a pupil he wanted to hear. When the pupil did not do what was requested, the stick was used to hit lightly.

During this period, parents could decide whether to send their children to school and in which system children would study. The curriculums of study or school discipline were not relevant issues.

In summary, the data clearly shows that the educational system functioned pragmatically; two parallel systems existed, one which was required by state law, and the other, a community solution, which strengthened Circassian identity. The information regarding classes for girls, for whom there was no school requirement, attests to the centrality of the community educational system.

The British Mandate period, 1918–1948

Some interviewees remember British rule as a time of momentum in education. Differences in opinion among older interviewees are not specifically expressed, but lack of consensus is obvious in attitudes towards the state school; some ignored it or expressed vague memories in contrast with those who expressed enthusiasm at the progress and in their use of terminology describing the teachers. Community school teachers were called educators while state school teachers were termed teachers. As under Ottoman rule, the British Mandate was characterized by two educational systems: a community system under the auspices of religious leaders and a formal state school system. The choice between the two systems was up to the family.

The formal educational system

The formal school system began in the schoolhouse which had served the Ottoman system. In the early 1930s, two new schoolrooms were built in the village.

The pupils

The state school in the village was chosen by the government as a regional school for the village and for pupils from the surrounding villages. A look at the family names of the pupils who appear in the school registry indicates that there were pupils not only from the village, but also from Arab and Bedouin villages in the area. On the

registry, a number of villages in the area were mentioned: Shibliy, Kfar Sabah, Magher, Ulam, Hadith, Um el-Aleq. However, there were no girls listed as pupils.

Until 1930, pupils were divided into two classes. Each class contained various age groups. In 1932, pupils were divided into four classes. During these years, the first and second grades studied in one classroom and the third and fourth grades studied in the second. Each class sat in different rows and methods were determined by the teacher.

During 1947/48 (the year of the establishment of the State of Israel), studies were increased to include fifth and sixth grades. Other interviewees remember that parents employed a teacher for these grades. In 1946/47, for the first time, studies were held for girls in the state school. There was a separate classroom for girls who studied the first and second grades.

Language

The official language of instruction was Arabic with translation into Circassian when needed.

The curriculum

The curriculum was based on the course of studies in Arab schools. As in other Western schools, student health was a concern and students were educated in health matters. Many interviewees emphasized that a nurse from Bethlehem or a doctor from Tiberius visited the school every week.

Uniforms were mentioned with amusement by some of the interviewees. School subjects included Quran studies, Arabic, arithmetic, history and geography. From the end of the 1930s, agriculture, English, sciences, music, drawing and physical education were added. In the state school, no special lessons were devoted to Circassian heritage or language, which continued to be the general language of oral communication for the pupils (but not the language of reading and writing). The school year began in September and ended at the end of June. From the end of the 1940s, the school issued report cards on which the subjects were printed along with pupils' achievements. These report cards have been kept by many of the interviewees who completed school. Interviewees remembered that the school had supplied them with books, writing implements, workbooks and other school supplies.

The teachers and the principals

The teachers and the principals in the state school were usually high school graduates and some had higher education. Most came from outside of the village and were Christian Arabs or Muslims. From the 1940s, the school included local staff.

Interviewees remembered that during the British Mandate, parents became more involved in school life. A Parents Committee involved in various

educational issues was set up. Members of the committee visited the homes of parents to report on how children were doing in school and to congratulate the parents of pupils who excelled, encouraging continuing studies.

From the descriptions of the interviewees, we gain a unique picture of Kfar Kama as accepting multicultural education; this meant integration into the society surrounding the village, which was actually forced on the school when it was changed from a local to regional school where Muslim pupils studied as well. In addition, there were families who decided to allow their children to complete a high school education by sending them to study in the nearest city, Nazareth. The parents' understanding of the need for integration was striking as a motivating force. However, the community school continued to function as an institution in which Circassian identity was maintained in the study of language, culture and the particular Circassian version of the Muslim religion

The Israeli period, 1948–1990

The War of Independence appears in the memories of the interviewees as a difficult year of flight, uncertainty and then return to the village under a new government. Despite the difficulties, there was no significant break in the education of the village children. When the villagers returned, the children went back to school. These were the final days of the non-formal educational system under the auspices of the religious elders.

The state educational system, 1948–1977

With the establishment of the state, studies were renewed in the state school system in all classes up to the seventh grade, in accordance with the Israeli Compulsory Education Law. In 1954, the school was enlarged with three additional classrooms, a porch and toilets. During the 1960s and 1970s the number of pupils grew and wooden structures were added, most of which were temporary solutions for the lack of classroom space.

The pupils

The first year under Israeli authorities was one of organization. The school included the first to the fifth grades (the fourth and the fifth grades studied together as the fifth grade had missed a year of studies).

Girls were not included and most continued their studies in the non-formal system. From 1949, the state school served all boys and girls of the village but did not accept those who were not village residents. The school had six grades, but the sixth grade studied with the fifth grade because there were so few pupils. More students continued their education and in 1951/52, 13 boys completed the seventh grade. In 1953/54, an eighth grade was added and, for the first time, three village girls completed the eighth grade. Until then, girls had left school earlier for a variety of reasons, especially societal ones. From the 1960s, the number of pupils

who studied at the school increased and those who left school before completing eight grades gradually decreased. From the 1970s, the number of girls who completed eight grades continued to grow. The issue of high school studies was one of the problems raised by village residents raised at the Ministry of Education. Before the establishment of the state and for the following two decades, boys who wanted to continue their studies had to study at high schools in Nazareth or in Acre. During the 1960s, girls joined them, studying in Nazareth or in Jewish schools in the area, and this trend increased. At the beginning of the 1970s, girls began higher educational studies, usually at Arab teaching seminars in Haifa.

The teachers and principals

During the first years, the principals of the school came from the Arab sector. Gradually, they were replaced by Circassian principals.

During the 1950s, all of the teachers were male and most of them were from the Circassian community. A number of the teachers were not certified to teach and some were not even high school graduates.

From 1954/55, women began to teach in the village. The first women teachers were Arabs. During the 1960s, two Circassian teachers joined them. Additional Circassian women gradually joined the teaching staff.

The kindergarten

The Compulsory Education Law led to a broader educational system and, from 1949, it included compulsory kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher was an Arab woman who was aided by girls from the village. The Arab kindergarten teacher was replaced by community high school graduates and, afterwards, by Circassian kindergarten teachers.

The curriculum

The course of study in the village school was similar to the curriculum of the Arab sector. During the 1960s, it included religion and the Quran and, to this end, the study of Arabic; in addition, Hebrew, English, arithmetic and geometry, history, geography, nature, agriculture, drawing, physical education, music and handicrafts were taught. Pupils were graded in all subjects as well as on behaviour and effort.

Language

The Language of instruction was Arabic. The report card was written in Arabic and Hebrew. Hebrew studies began in the fourth grade and there were three weekly hours of instruction.

A glance at the curriculum indicates that, among the old and new subjects, there were two which were striking in their absence: Circassian culture and language. The learning programme did not include elements from the treasures

of tradition and folklore, or of the national Circassian language. There was no reference to the fact that the Arabic language, the language of instruction, was not the first language of the pupils, who spoke Circassian at home. Textbooks and the subjects studied were intended for students whose first language was Arabic. However, Circassian language and culture were dealt with in an informal educational system. This was in contrast to the Ottoman and the Mandate periods when, although no attention was given either to the native language or to the cultural heritage of the Circassians in the school system, there was also no written or oral indication that the public was conscious of their absence.

During the early 1950s, for the first time, there were attempts to set up clubs which would revive the Circassian cultural heritage. At the beginning of the 1960s, the trend towards a national-cultural revival increased. This came mostly from educated youth who had come into contact with Western, Israeli and Arab cultures during their studies. These young people felt the need to define their identities and to become acquainted with and to revive Circassian nationality. The attempts towards national-cultural renewal met with difficulties due to the small number of Circassians living in Israel and the division of the Circassians into two different villages. There were no contacts with Circassians in countries hostile to Israel; there was no Circassian centre for all of the Circassian Diaspora; there was no knowledge of the written language; Circassian history was not well known. The focus on religion and on the spoken language as the only special characteristics of the community led to confusion and obscurity regarding some of the national traditions, a lack of knowledge of folk literature; and the absence of teachers who could teach the language and the national traditions. In order to deal with these difficulties, the young people focused on learning the Circassian language as autodidacts. In 1965, a Circassian newspaper began to appear, written in Circassian and in Hebrew and called *Circass*. In the late 1970s, another newspaper appeared, *The Caucasus Journal*, and was published in Circassian only. In addition to the focus on language, attention also turned to Circassian folklore, and especially Circassian dance. Simultaneously, contacts were made with other Circassian centres in the Caucasus, in Turkey and in the United States.

In the first stages of establishing Circassian cultural ties, the formal educational system remained out of the picture. However, in 1972/73, Professor Johann Catford, an American expert in languages of the Caucasus, was invited to Israel, in a visit financed by the Ministry of Education. The school became a participant in the aspirations to revive the Circassian heritage. The first step was participation by educators, teachers and other interested community members in accelerated courses in basic Circassian writing, reading and grammar. Catford remained in Israel for some months as a guest of the then school principal, Nafsu Anas, teaching the Circassian written language to village residents. From 1976, Circassian language teaching was included in the curriculum.

The state school, 1978–2000

During the first 20 years of the state, Kfar Kama had become economically well established and a large percentage of the villagers improved their economic status. Involvement in community, regional and state affairs increased and there was a desire to increase the level of education and improve potential for integration in Israeli society.

The change in the language of instruction from Arabic to Hebrew

The issue of changing the language of instruction in the state school first arose in the early 1970s and caused a public dispute among village residents. Three central factors set the idea of changing the language of instruction in motion. The first was the difficulty of integration for Circassian pupils in Jewish high schools. The second, not directly connected with the issue of language, was dissatisfaction with the general school achievements, physical conditions, teaching methods, teachers who were 'burned out', and level of instruction. Among some of the villagers there was opposition to membership in the Arab sector. In order to improve, there would have to be drastic changes in the educational system. Changing the language of instruction was perceived as a catalyst for necessary changes. The third factor was the need for the knowledge of Hebrew which was impelled by the mobilization of the boys into the Israeli Defence Forces. In addition, employment possibilities were centred on the Jewish sector; and there was a desire to understand the mass media and to be integrated into governmental institutions in which the language was Hebrew.

In 1975, an official committee was established to deal with the Circassian educational system. It recommended that responsibility for the Circassian community should be moved from the Arab Department of the Ministry of Education to the Northern Region, and recommended considering Hebrew as the language of instruction. The head of the Regional Council, Ashmoz Abd el-Rahaman, and a committee of parents and teachers discussed the recommendations. At the same time, a survey of the residents of the village took place under the aegis of the official committee and the Regional Council. A questionnaire was distributed among the villagers who were directly involved as parents, which included an explanation of the advantages of changing the language of instruction to Hebrew. Older residents, unmarried villagers and those who did not have children in school did not vote. This was later used as ammunition by those opposed to the change. Those who favoured retaining Arabic as the language of instruction argued that Arabic was important for expertise in the Quran and, as Muslims, Arabic was necessary. Their position was publicized in a written statement issued at the same time as the questionnaire. The poll resulted in a majority of parents agreeing to the change to Hebrew.

In 1978/79, Hebrew became the language of instruction. However, consensus was not achieved. In the village, there were groups with strong religious orientation who still opposed the change.

The curriculum

The transfer to Hebrew changed the school curriculum. In theory, the change meant that the curriculum would be identical to Hebrew-speaking Israeli schools. However, in reality, the school could not ignore the unique aspects of the Circassian community. The process of corresponding between the existing programme and the required one was gradual (for example, report cards had to be adjusted to those used in Jewish schools). During the first few years, teachers added the special subjects taught in the school by hand. However, a creative process developed a learning programme which suited the special needs of the community

Culture and tradition in village education

In 1978, a committee was set up to deal with education for Circassian culture with the participation of the school principals of Kfar Kama and Rihania, representatives of the Parents Committee, Ministry of Education supervisors and the head of the Regional Council (the report, issued on 10 March 1979, was sent by Adnan Garchad to Gush Riad in Rihania).

The committee decided to publish a textbook for the study of the Circassian language. It was decided that the teachers, Chatukai Rajab and Gush Riad would assume responsibility and would themselves teach the language.[14] In 1982, the book was published and was used to teach Circassian from the fifth to the eighth grades for two hours per week.

The work of the committee ended before the task had been completed (this was due to an argument between the principal of the Kfar Kama school, Adnan, and the representative of the Ministry of Education Supervision, Salman Falach).

The discussion regarding the teaching of the Circassian language in school was the first of its kind. However, the dismantling of the committee prevented further discussion of professional issues connected with language teaching, including goals, methods and conception. In 1986/87, the study of the Circassian language was postponed from the fifth to the sixth grades to avoid the teaching reading and writing of two languages, English and Circassian, at the same time.

In order to improve the study of Circassian and to deal with issues which had not been discussed by the committee, representatives of the village requested the aid of the Ministry of Education in inviting an expert teacher of the Circassian language. On 21 November 1995, a certified Circassian language teacher arrived from Maykop, the capital of the Circassian Republic of Adygea in the northern Caucasus, with the funding of the Ministry of Education. In the 1996/97 school year, the teacher, Tau Ruslan, organized lessons in Circassian language, literature and folklore.

Teaching in Hebrew and the changes in the learning programme did not end the period of indecision in Kfar Kama. However, these issues testify to the attempt of the Circassian community to deal with the various components of their identity. There were still difficulties in deciding on the priority of each of these

components, and there has been a continuous search for the correct way to educate Circassian children.

The role of the educational system in maintaining Circassian identity indicates that the community has continually accorded great importance to education and has ensured that children study in at least one educational system. From 1878 to 2000 the educational system adopted various components which created a definition for Circassian identity while strengthening one component at the expense of others: the formal school system functioned as an agent of change. It strengthened the connection with the Western world and its customs, created a basis for general knowledge and encouraged the good students, enabling them to receive a high school education, and even, occasionally, academic education.

During the two first periods, the cultural-national component, that is, the Circassian heritage, was almost completely absent from the two educational systems. Responsibility for maintaining the traditions and the national Circassian culture was left to the family. This was also true of the Circassian language which remained the spoken language, but was not read or written. Arabic, and the language of the controlling government, Turkish or English, was the language which the children were taught to read and write.

After the State of Israel was established, there was a significant change in the status and role of education. The educational system became a centre of indecision and dispute concerning the essence of Circassian culture and ways to strengthen it. The arguments which surrounded education seemingly focused on issues of content, but they actually expressed significant differences in principle connected to the perceptions of Circassian identity. Among the salient subjects in dispute were the following:

A. *Language of instruction.* The status (including the number of hours devoted to instruction) of each of the languages: the national language, Circassian; the language of religion, Arabic; the official state language, Hebrew; the language of progress, English.

B. *The curriculum.* In relation to the Arab sector, there was an emphasis on religion and thus a strengthening of common denominators with the Muslim Arab-Israelis. In relation to the Jewish sector, there was an emphasis on integration into Israeli society with the possibility of damage to religion and tradition.

C. *School norms.* These included discipline, school dress codes, respect for the teacher, child-centred education, use of the media, trips outside the school, relationships between girls and boys.

D. *The proper teacher.* Attributes were: having an higher education, being a member of the Circassian community, being an individual who is strictly religious.

E. *Involvement in education.* Parents, regional authorities, government representatives and the Ministry of Education were involved.

F. *The suitable framework for continuing studies.* These were considered to be: within the village, strengthening the traditional components; outside the village, Arab schools, strengthening the religious component; Jewish schools, strengthening involvement in Israeli and Western society.

G. *Suitability of programme for gender.* There was identical education for both girls and boys, or different and limited education for girls due to traditional roles.

The indecision and disputes centred on the educational system revolved around two prominent axes of conflict: the Circassian heritage as opposed to Islam and progress in contrast to conservatism.

The Circassian heritage as opposed to Islam

Neither Circassian heritage nor Circassian language was formally studied in the various educational systems before the establishment of the state. The State of Israel was involved in reviving the culture and the language, and in using the educational system as a tool for reinforcement, distribution and preservation of Circassian heritage. A possible consideration for this involvement, in addition to the requests of the community, might have been to weaken the religious component which had provided a bridge to the Arab sector, and to emphasize the unique cultural-national component or perhaps an understanding (in historical context) and an identification with the desire to use language as a tool to renew and to strengthen national identity, as the Hebrew language had been used by Israeli Jews.

Progress in contrast to conservatism

Throughout the period, community education served as a system of conservation, especially by means of religion. The state school system served as an agent of change, an agent of rejuvenation. The formal educational system was influenced by Western culture and was modelled after modern schools.

The Circassian community is a minority group with a unique identity. The importance which each family had accorded to this identity contributed to the choice of an educational system for its children. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the possibility of choice was ended. The stories of the interviewees and their memories clearly fall into two groups in accordance with the components of Circassian identity which they consider important. The first group favours Western-style progress. The second places national-cultural Circassian heritage at the centre and accords importance to contacts with Circassians all over the world. The difference between the two groups is expressed in the use of phrases and words describing education; in emphases regarding a suitable

learning programme; in the image of the ideal teacher for community children; in their approach to the family and to their roles within it; to clothing, and especially to women's dress; to the education of girls; and to the language of instruction.

The Israeli Circassian community does not rest on its laurels in its approach to the education of its children. It is searching for ways of improving continuing education for its young people and is constantly and carefully evaluating the existing system in order to improve it and to increase potential for progress, while maintaining its unique heritage.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

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