



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 22

Issue 1 March - *Special Issue on Social Work with
Minority and Ethnic Groups*

Article 10

March 1995

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Recommended Citation

Jaffe, Eliezer D. (1995) "Ethnic and Minority Groups in Israel: Challenges for Social Work Theory, Value and Practice," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol22/iss1/10>

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Ethnic and Minority Groups in Israel: Challenges for Social Work Theory, Value and Practice

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Israel is a Western, democratic, pluralistic enclave in the Middle East. Multiple ethnic groups, mass immigration, religious diversity, and the current ethnic dilemmas experienced there provide ample opportunity for study. The social work role in addressing the ethnic and cultural challenges in Israel is discussed without minimizing or reducing the complexity of the issues. A closer examination of social work as a vehicle for ethnic sensitivity and understanding of ethnic diversity is required. Knowing how to work with diverse populations and ethnic conflict is imperative in Israel and elsewhere.

Ethnic and minority conflict seems to be an inherent part of social life. The study of specific ethnic and minority groups and their cultural backgrounds and coping mechanisms reflect the fact that people are very different as well as similar, that people live in very powerful competitive modern or traditional societies, and that group conflict and inequality is generally the social norm rather than the exception (Dahrendorf, 1969; Feagin and Feagin, 1979; Kitano, 1980; Weber, 1946; Peterson, *et al*, 1980; Myrdal, 1944).

Social workers deal primarily with inequities and personal problems of disadvantaged individuals and minority groups, often succeeding in removing or alleviating some of the pressures that clients face. Social work literature frequently describes practice techniques and interventions with populations negatively affected by such variables as race, ethnicity, minority status, sex group, marital status, color, physical disability, religion and nationality (Jacobs and Bowles, 1988; Schlesinger and Devore, 1991; Burgest, 1989; Norton, 1978; Chestang, 1976; Sottomayor, 1971; Glazer, 1975; Desai and Coelho, 1980). Social heterogeneity (in even seemingly homogeneous situations) and its effects on

interacting diverse populations has taken a relatively prominent place in social work theory, practice, policy and research. Special attention has been given to specific population groups such as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, Indians and specific categories of individuals such as immigrants, refugees, and people of color.

These activities reflect a greater contemporary sensitivity of social work to cultural diversity, and the introduction of sensitivity content into the social work education curriculum is a logical result, although based on earlier foundations (Cohen, 1958; Stein and Cloward, 1958; Pederson, 1976; Green, 1982; McGoldrich, *et al*, 1982; Lum, 1986).

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to ask about the purpose and outcome of this education, and the role of social work in affecting social change, diminished ethnic conflict, and alleviation of social forces which create social inequality for disadvantaged groups. Is there a relationship between sensitivity and social change? Does sensitivity change values and outcome? Does social work have a significant role for intervening in ethnic conflict and for social change? These are some of the questions discussed in this article.

The setting for this analysis is Israeli society, a Western, democratic, pluralistic enclave in the Middle East, where American, British and indigenous Israeli social work practices and principles combine to form eclectic theoretical and practice norms. Multiple ethnic groups in Israel, mass immigration, religious diversity, a dynamic Western politico-socio-economic environment, and a cohesive, committed and well-developed social work profession make Israel an ideal case-in-point for this analysis.

Ethnicity in Israel

Israel, the size of New Jersey, is a country of immigrants. Much has been written about the different "waves" of immigrants, their historical origins, the establishment of the social insurance and personal social services network, and clashes between various ethnic groups (Cohen, 1972; Inbar and Adler, 1977; Jaffe, 1975, 1977, 1982, 1988, 1992; Liebman and Don-Yehiya, 1984; Vital, 1978; Shumsky, 1955).

Ethnic relations in Israel can only be understood by a knowledge of the origins of the Jewish people, the history of Zionism and Palestine, the Ingathering of the Exiles, the Holocaust, the British Mandate period, and the creation of the State and its religious, social and economic institutions. Also important is the role and ideology of the dominant Israeli Western culture which "absorbed" masses of successive Jewish immigrant groups, including Jewish refugees from Arab lands, from Russia, former Iron Curtain countries, and from Ethiopia. Although it is impossible to deal with all of these subjects in this article, we can discuss specific current ethnic dilemmas and background factors which influence them and provide the environment for social work practice.

The two largest Jewish ethnic groups in Israel are the Ashkenazi (Western) and the Sepharadi (Middle-Eastern) populations. The latter group is referred to as the remnants of Jews dispersed in Exile throughout the Middle-Eastern, Arab lands as a result of the destruction of the First (Solomon's) Temple during the First Jewish Commonwealth Period by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.. The Ashkenazi group stems from those Jews who eventually returned to Israel from Babylonia, where they had been taken as captive slaves, and who rebuilt the Second Temple during the time of Ezra and Nechemia (the Second Jewish Commonwealth Period). Jews again were subsequently exiled to southern Europe by the Romans who destroyed the Second Temple in 70 A.D. These Jews then migrated all over Europe and then to North and South America. Most contemporary American Jews are descendants of European Jews who originated from the Roman conquest during the Second Temple period.

In the 1800's a group of pioneering European Jews came to Palestine to recreate a modern Jewish State and emancipate themselves from the antisemitism and racial and religious hatred of their inhospitable "host" countries. These Jews set up Western social, democratic, economic and educational institutions. After undergoing a metamorphosis from an agrarian communal society to a technological-industrial society during the 1930's and 1940's, they established the State of Israel when the British left Palestine in 1948. The 600,000 Western (Ashkenazi) Jews then "absorbed" 750,000 Jewish refugees (Sepharadim) from the Moslem countries between 1948 and 1956 when all the

neighbouring Arab states began a war to destroy the newborn State.

The Sepharadi population, with large extended families, deeply religious, and steeped in the fatalistic, pre-industrial culture of the Middle East, faced the intensive competition of the veteran population, which was comprised mostly of secular, nuclear family oriented, protectionist Ashkenazi founders of the State. The American melting-pot model (touted by Israeli sociologists at the time) was widely implemented and Sepharadi young people quickly adopted the Western secular model, and do so to this day (Glazer and Moynihan, 1963). Research conducted by this and other researchers shows clear preference among Sepharadim for Ashkenazi traits, often accompanied by feelings of inferiority and damaged self image (Jaffe, 1988, 1990; Avineri, 1973; Patai, 1970; Cohen, 1972). Inter-marriage between the two groups is high, amounting to nearly twenty percent of all marriages annually (Smootha, 1978). The preference pattern began around age five, when Sepharadi four-year olds already showed ambivalence about their ethnic identification. Children of Western origin preferred to identify with Western people, and so, too, did a majority of children of Eastern background prefer Western adults (Jaffe, 1988).

Today, most Israelis, including social workers, prefer to play down, deny or reject evidence of ethnic identification and a need for increasing their own ethnic sensitivity. They point to great strides in closing socioeconomic and educational gaps, political involvement of Sepharadim in mainstream political parties, inter-marriage, and a pluralistic society. Nevertheless; the Likud party lost the elections in 1992 primarily because of internal ethnic (Ashkenazi-Sepharadi) fighting and posturing, which turned off many potential voters. Western paternalism still exists, with clear objective socio-economic differences among ethnic groups. One manifestation of ethnic conflict was the appearance in 1972 of the Israeli "Black Panthers," a social protest street corner movement originating in the slums of Jerusalem, created by Sepharadi street corner youth attempting to change their dead-end lives and enhance their life chances (Cohen, 1972; Jaffe, 1975; Iris and Shama, 1972). The movement was eventually neutralized by a combination of cooptation by government social

and educational services, and by politicization and in-fighting among the Panther leadership.

The Ashkenazi-Sepharadi conflict described above has apparently "cooled off" somewhat in recent years due to increased political participation of Sepharadi Jews, a slow but perceptive narrowing of objective socio-educational gaps, and increased second generation integration into the dominant Ashkenazi society.

The Russian Immigration

In late 1989, glasnost led to rapid disintegration and liberalization of the Soviet empire, and to a welcome mass immigration to Israel of Jews from Russia and the Eastern European former Iron-Curtain countries. Within two years, nearly 500,000 Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel. Over 60% of the adults are university graduates, and within a year they spoke Hebrew, entered government vocational retraining programs, organized their own immigrant associations, and vigorously began their own integration into Israeli society. Unlike those who arrived in 1948 as refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Morocco, and other Arab countries, the Russian immigrants were almost immediately attuned to the mixed-market economy and tempo of Israeli society. They began competing with veteran Ashkenazi and Sepharadi Jews alike. The citizen response to the Russians has generally been good, with many nonprofit organizations mobilized or formed especially to help them move into Israeli society. Russian immigrants have a strong ethnic affinity with many veteran Israelis, who themselves originated from Russia, Poland and Eastern Europe before, during and after the war. The Israeli government has provided immeasurably better conditions and benefits to these latest immigrants than was economically possible during the Sepharadi mass immigration of 1948–1956. This has led to some signs of resentment, especially among the veteran unemployed population. What took the Sepharadi Jews 40 years to obtain (e.g. professional positions, status, university education and housing) will happen for the Russians in less than one-third that time, and will probably surpass the Sepharadi mobility. Moreover, the Russian immigration has now created a clear

numerical majority for the Ashkenazi population, as opposed to the situation before the Russians arrived.

The Ethiopian Immigration

For many years, a population of Jews were believed to exist in Ethiopia (Kaplan, 1992). Theories about their origin suggest that they were one of the ten lost Israelite tribes, Jewish converts, descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, or refugees from the destruction of the First Temple who fled south to Egypt and then up the Nile River into villages in the mountains of Ethiopia. Whatever the explanation, the Israel Chief Rabbinate recognized the Ethiopians as Jews because of many unmistakable ancient religious customs and rituals identical to Jewish ritual as mentioned in the Bible and existing at the time of the First Temple. Based on this recognition, the Israeli government made every effort to bring this group home to Israel. In 1977, nearly 7,000 Ethiopians arrived in a clandestine American-assisted airlift from neighboring Sudan — for those Jews who survived the long and dangerous trek out of Ethiopia (Ben-Ezer, 1985; Rosen 1991).

Further Israeli efforts continued, despite the Marxist-communist regime and civil war in Ethiopia, to rescue and bring out the rest of the Jewish community. Finally, in 1990, the cessation of Russian military and economic support and repeated losses inflicted by rebel forces, resulted in the Ethiopian government allowing (for a steep head-tax) the Israeli Air Force airlift to bring home 16,000 Ethiopian Jews within 24 hours. Today the Israeli Ethiopian community numbers nearly 40,000.

The integration of this community has been mixed thus far. There is general consensus that the younger Ethiopians are adjusting well in the educational system and in the Army, and want very much to enter the dominant society. The 1977 group has generally been accepted by most Israelis, but also experienced cultural, religious and economic problems that were still not settled when the 1990 immigrants arrived. Among these problems were the lack of rabbinical acceptance of Ethiopian Kessim (religious leaders) qualified to perform marriages and

divorce in Israel because the Ethiopians were totally cut off from Talmudic and Jewish Halachic (legal) developments and other Jewish communities after they fled Israel in 586 B.C. In 1977, the Israeli rabbinate, under pressure of prolonged Ethiopian mass demonstrations, was forced to retreat from their demand that all Ethiopian immigrants undergo "symbolic conversion" to unequivocally clear up their status as Jews (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1985; Bard, 1988; Abbink, 1984). Most Ethiopians adamantly refused and many are still in religious limbo as far as the State is concerned.

Other adjustment problems include classic culture clash between children and their immigrant parents and elders, infighting among the new leadership, problems of personal adjustment to Western culture such as secularism, technology, relations between the sexes, family roles, political activity, and self-image (Munitz, *et al*, 1985; Suellen, 1989; Dothan, 1985; Schoenberger, 1975; Kaplan, 1988; Wolf, 1969; Weil, 1988). Some of these problems are normative for all immigrant groups, but the Ethiopian situation is much more complicated because of the long historical, social, and religious separation from the rest of Jews in the world, and the intense desire to be accepted as modern Israeli Jews.

It is very important to note that the black skin color of Ethiopian Jews has *not* greatly affected their acceptance into Israeli society and some intermarriage has taken place with Ashkenazim and Sepharadim. Unlike the situation of Blacks in America, who were brought from Africa as slave labor for white importers, the Black Jews of Ethiopia (as well as all other Jewish immigrants to Israel) are welcomed home along with the other dispersed exiled Jews from other countries. The fact of common historical and religious origins eliminates pretense at racist ideologies of genetic "inferiority," "inherent ability" and hereditary "behavior traits." Since most of the Jews went into exile as prisoners or slaves, there is or was among most Israelis an immediate, nostalgic kinship affinity for the Ethiopians, regardless of color differences. The same is generally true regarding Sepharadi-Ashkenazi Jews, despite Sepharadim being generally of darker color. The Israeli case, where religious kinship works

to overcome conflict due to color differences is outstanding on the international scene, and a basic positive underlying feature of Israeli ethnic relations.

The Arab Population

While Jews constitute 84% of the 5 million citizens of Israel, (excluding the Territories of Judea and Samaria), there are also 13% Moslem and Christian Arabs and 3% Druze and other religious groups such as Bahai, Karaites and Samaritans (Central Board of Statistics, 1992). By the year 2005 the population forecast for Israel is 6.3 million.

Most Israeli (and West Bank) Arabs claim to be descendants of the ancient Philistines and Canaanites, but some American Jewish scholars believe they originate from Bosnia which in ancient times was a Roman province called Illyricum, where Christianity was introduced in the Middle Ages. When Bosnia was invaded by Turkey in 1386, the entire population was forcefully converted to Islam. When Turkey lost Bosnia to Germany at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Ottoman-Turkish Empire that same year granted lands in Palestine to Moslem refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina for colonization, including a twelve year tax exemption and exemption from military service in the Turkish army. Lands distributed were located in the Galilee, the Sharon Plain and Caesaria. Other Moslem refugees from Russia (Georgia, Crimea, and the Caucasus) were resettled in Abu Ghosh near Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, while Moslem refugees from Algeria and Egypt were later settled in Jaffa, Gaza, Jericho and the Golan. Other Arab family clans migrated south to Palestine from Syria.

The different explanations of Arab origins clashes with the Jewish historical accounts of an uninterrupted 3,500 year Jewish presence (despite the exile). These conflicting claims affect contemporary Jewish-Arab relationships where both peoples now live together in the same land. After the War of Liberation in 1948, military rule was imposed on Israeli Arabs and was subsequently abolished in 1966 when Israeli fears of Arab dual loyalty were less tense. Nevertheless, only in 1992 was the government "Office for Arab Communities" eliminated. As a democratic,

pluralistic country, and as a result of Arab lobbying, all government Ministries now deal directly with Arab citizens as they do with everyone else. Also, the present Labor government has committed itself to further equalizing the level of services to Arabs and other minorities to that existing for Jewish citizens.

Operational Definitions of Concepts

The concepts of "ethnicity" and "ethnic groups" in social work literature are used in several contexts. Ethnic groups have at least one of three possible distinctions:

- (1) peoples distinguished primarily by visible physical criteria (e.g. racial groups such as Blacks or Orientals);
- (2) peoples distinguished by common cultural heritage, language, religion or national setting (e.g. Arabs, Jews, Italians);
- (3) peoples distinguished by conquest (e.g. Blacks, Mexican Americans, Indians).

In many cases, these physical, cultural, political and social conditions may be combined in a particular group, but any single criteria may define "minority" status within a larger population (Bengston, 1979).

It is important to clarify that this article refers to Jews as well as Arabs and all other Israeli groups as cultures, and not as a race. These groups have formed as an outcome of social, historical and religious experience, rather than genetic and biological mutation transmitted through germ plasm.

In Israel there are innumerable cultural and ethnic sub-groups within the Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Ethiopian, Russian and Arab groups, based on one or more of the common-denominator criteria noted above. For example, broad religious groupings include Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. Each of these are subdivided, especially in the Orthodox camp, into hundreds of sub-groups based on such variables as common country of origin and district of origin, identification with a rabbinical dynasty, degree of orthodoxy, historical and ideological affinity, language prior to migration, etc; (Jaffe, 1992).

All societies are socially stratified, and ethnic differentiation is an inherent reflection of the inequality in the distribution of

power, privilege and prestige in such societies. C. Wright Mills (1963) summarized typologies to describe features of stratification as follows:

1. The economic order is of primary importance in determining social position, inequality, and the mechanisms of stratification.
2. Group consciousness emerges among persons in a similar stratum, and may be an important dynamic for social change.
3. Conflict and competition are inevitable between strata.
4. Ideologies and beliefs of individuals are a reflection of the individual's position in the stratification system.
5. Life histories and life chances from birth to death are shaped by position in the class structure.

In caste societies, unlike Israel, ethnic groups are locked into ascriptive forms of stratification and inequality, with no mobility allowed. Current theory, also applicable to the Israeli situation, tends to focus on a multiple hierarchy model of stratification in which class, ethnicity, sex, age and other variables are considered separate but interrelated aspects of social inequality (Bengston, 1979). The "double jeopardy hypothesis" suggests that membership in more than one of these groups increases the degree and effects of inequality (Dowd and Bengston, 1978). The Israeli situation corroborates this theory as can be seen in the hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups described below.

The Israeli Ethnic Pyramid

A stratified pyramid of ethnic groups based on status, income and opportunity structure exists in Israel with the Ashkenazi veteran group on top, Sephardi Jews next, followed by Russians, Arabs and Ethiopians. Ten years hence the Russians, Arabs and Ethiopians will most likely blend into the Ashkenazi group at the top with more Ethiopians moving ahead of the Arab population (Haidar, 1991).

This appraisal is based on objective and subjective criteria, the former indicated by income, political influence, education, ownership of goods and property, size of family, and personal well-being, and the latter by perceived ability or mobility to

achieve expectations, and a sense of alienation and discrimination (Peres, 1977; Hassin, 1985, 1992; Amir and Shichor, 1975; Peres and Smooha, 1974; Zipperstein and Jaffe, 1981). Ethnic status, in Israel as in most countries, correlates highly with social disadvantage. For some groups ethnicity has helped perpetuate disadvantage and lack of opportunity, for others the opposite is true.

In addition to the stratification typology presented above, other theories have been applied to explain the status of Israeli ethnic groups, and especially the disproportionate distribution of minority ethnic youth as juvenile delinquents. Prominent theories are the "culture conflict theory" based on immigration maladjustment (Sellin, 1938), the "ecological-influence and socialization theory" (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Cohen, 1955) based on the influence of reference groups and neighborhoods on behavior, and the "technology-innovation versus retarded social change theory" (Ogburn, 1950) which ascribes social problems and inequality to the slow pace at which social programs are introduced to alleviate the detrimental societal effects of new technology.

All of these theories have differential relevance for explaining inequality in Israel and for describing ethnic groups and sub-cultures. For the most part, however, Jewish social cohesiveness is relatively prominent in Israel due to a strong basic common historical and cultural heritage, including the Holocaust experience, modern antisemitism, and physical danger from neighbouring countries. Arabs, too, are generally united in a common culture and Pan-Arab identification based on strong religious and nationalist foundations. Kinship and national feelings are very strong in both groups, but most Israelis and Arabs have learned to live together in a democratic, relatively pluralistic Israeli national framework. Terrorism by PLO and intifada violence from the Territories has worked against improved relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel proper, despite much mutual outreach effort by members of both groups.

Both the Arab and Ethiopian groups have a longer road to travel than other groups toward equality, the Ethiopians because of their late start in Western culture and the Israeli Arabs because of the late opening to them of the opportunity structure.

Both will continue to experience strong competition from the dominant and more powerful Ashkenazi and Sepharadi groups. There will even be some resentment. But the basic democratic direction and nature of the society and its institutions will continue to enable more mobility for these groups.

Social Work Attitudes and Stereotypes

The social work profession is committed at individual, group and societal levels to work for change in order to equalize power, close Social gaps, preserve individual dignity, eliminate negative discrimination, and enable maximum participation of all individuals in the life of their society. The professional ethos suggests that social workers represent a humanistic force in society and are capable and willing to be agents for change in clinical practice and social policy.

Yet, Israeli research has shown that these goals are not axiomatic or attainable for many social workers. In fact, despite years of experience in Israel with mass immigration, many social workers are still "culturally encapsulated," willing to engage clients only on their terms (Penderhughes, 1989) or tend to adopt stereotypic explanations for behavior and prescriptions for treatment (Solomon, 1976). Keadar (1978) found that Israeli social workers, when presented with identical fabricated case material, responded with different diagnoses and intervention strategies when the material was attributed to an Ashkenazi or Sepharadi client respectively. They diagnosed the Sepharadi client's problems as environmental and deprivation related, while the Ashkenazi client was thought to have serious interpersonal, psychic problems. Consequently, intervention recommendations for the Sepharadi client involved environmental manipulation and material assistance, while the Ashkenazi client needed long term therapy and work on interpersonal relationships, and personality problems. Keadar also found that these stereotypes were the same regardless of the ethnic background of the social worker.

Almost identical findings were obtained twelve years later in a similar study of social work students at the Hebrew University (Wahab-Gilboa, *et al*, 1990). Ziv and Givoli (1986) found

that Israeli rehabilitation counselors tend to focus on individual clients without proper attention to ethnic and demographic background factors. Programmatic research by Jaffe (1990, 1990a) found that Sepharadi respondents from all ages and sectors of the Israeli population, including welfare clients, prefer Ashkenazi social work helpers significantly more than they prefer Sepharadi social workers. He also found that social workers overwhelmingly preferred Ashkenazi helpers for their own problems rather than Sepharadi helpers. Since his studies were based solely on respondent's preferences for random passport photos said to be social workers, Jaffe concluded that social workers (and all other respondents) rejected Sepharadi photos purely because of their ethnic stereotypes. It is worthwhile also to note that Ashkenazi respondents significantly preferred Ashkenazi women social work helpers. Moreover, both Ashkenazi and Sepharadi respondents described Ashkenazi social workers (based on passport pictures alone) as "intelligent, worldly, informed, and of good personality," while Sepharadi social workers were characterized as "good looking, strong, and neat" (Jaffe, 1990).

In brief, Israeli research shows strong ethnic stereotyping among clients and social workers alike, and they clearly influence differential diagnosis and intervention. This data becomes more urgent in the view of the fact that Israelis, including social work practitioners and students, tend to deny the existence of stereotypes. Even members of ethnic minorities are often reluctant to talk openly and frankly about this subject. While pluralism is the current official approach to absorption, empirical data of behavior show strong emphasis on the earlier assimilation-absorption-modernization model in Israel. Jaffe (1990) suggested that this approach often leads to internalized feelings of negative self-concept and feelings of inferiority.

Very few social work research studies have documented the actual effects of ethnic insensitivity on Israeli social work practice (Greenwald, 1992). However, this has been studied by Israeli education researchers who documented negative effects of stereotype-based discrimination in public schools. Ironically, no serious institutional or personal changes have occurred in the educational system to remedy the situation. Teachers still relate

to children with their own personal attitudes, stereotypes and values. Will this be the fate of social workers, even after "sensitization" from research findings and curriculum change? In the final analysis, when worker meets client, how much influence do personal values and stereotypes have over curriculum content? How can theory and information change values? These are vital questions for social work educators and practitioners in the post-melting pot era.

Changes in Social Worker Attitudes and Values

Real change in practice requires changes in values. Many social workers in Israel still believe that ethnic conflict and inequality will go away over the years as a result of intermarriage, better education, and Westernization of the disadvantaged. But this will not take place unless there is a change in existing values. For example, in 1978, when only ten percent of the students admitted to social work courses at Israeli universities were disadvantaged Sepharadim and Arabs, it was believed that they were simply not capable of studying and practicing social work. Subsequently, a seven year research study on preferential admissions proved this hypothesis false, but there was still reluctance to liberalize admission procedures (Jaffe, 1989). In my view, social work today may have more theory and knowledge about ethnic and minority issues and social conflict than it is willing or able to act on. While applauding the lobbying role of state and national social work organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers in the U.S. and the Israeli Social Work Association, these are limited due to relatively small membership of the organizations and because of the diverse socio-political values of their membership.

Social workers do not come to the profession free of individual, family, and reference-group stereotypes and values. Research done by Bar-Gal (1978, 1981) found that most social work students already came to University schools of social work with humanist values and a desire to help people, rather than absorbing these from the curriculum. Bar-Gal found that social work study had only a slight impact on prior values. He also noted that these values stem from students' personal, economic,

ethnic, and social background and from life experiences. The implication from Bar-Gal's research is that there is no homogeneous social ethic or consensus among social workers regarding major social, ethnic and minority issues. This unclarity of attitudes and lack of consensus does not allow for social work to speak with one voice or to operationalize its desire for playing a significant role in social change.

Perhaps this conclusion is too presumptuous. From my experience of three decades as social work educator, social activist and organizer, I believe that social change occurs most decisively and rapidly when marginalized minorities who are hurting activate themselves and create coalitions that force majority interests to solve minority problems. Social workers, who chose to help people as a profession, can never attain the power of organized minority groups. They can be coalition partners, but they cannot walk around in clients' shoes. This is how change has occurred for the Sepharadi, Ethiopian and Russian immigrants, Arabs, battered women, large families, the handicapped and many other minority groups (Kahn, 1990; Jaffe, 1983). It is also true for the problems of African-Americans, Hispanics and other groups in America.

The suggestion to be more realistic about social work's capacity to affect social change means, however, that social workers should excel at being "social warners," formulators of policy recommendations for the political echelon, engage in advocacy, and assist disadvantaged groups to mobilize their own resources and power (Korazin, 1989; Cox, *et al*, 1970; Grosser, 1976; Schneiderman, 1965). It also means that non-ethnic-sensitive practice is inconceivable in contemporary social work. Shirley Jenkins made this abundantly clear in her pioneer research on ethnic factors and practices in American and other international social services (Jenkins, 1981).

Schools of social work can play a major role in attempting to inculcate values, empathy and sensitivity to minority values (Schlesinger and Devore, 1991; Williams, 1988). Three specific vehicles are the following: careful selection and utilization of field work settings and experiences, faculty and supervisors as role models, and provision of factual information and knowledge in the social work curriculum. Schools of social work in

Israel have also become keenly aware of the impact of a heterogeneous student body on attitudinal changes, and as catalyst for generating serious dialogue among the students in and out of classes. Another important challenge for social work educators is to develop skills and knowledge that can be integrated into the curriculum specifically enabling some students to become professional change agents. These practitioners should be educated to mobilize marginalized minorities create coalitions that force majority interests to accommodate minority values.

Social Work Practice with Ethnic and Minority Groups

In recent years, the influx of over half a million Russian and Ethiopian immigrants has created a strong need and interest among Israeli social workers to understand the cultures and social background of these new clients. Hundreds of social work jobs were created by government and nonprofit agencies specifically to work with these communities and ease their integration into the country. The State of Israel several decades ago created a special Ministry of Absorption (a Cabinet position) with funding for hundreds of programs and social workers devoted to providing social services to immigrant individuals, families and groups. These include personal counseling, financial and concrete assistance, brokerage, therapeutic services and networking with the Housing, Education, Welfare, and Health Ministries. Social workers are also employed in a wide range of nonprofit organizations such as youth villages of the Youth Aliyah organization, which care for over 8,000 children, the Tikva organization which provides psychiatric social work services, the Israel Interest-Free Loan Association, and hundreds of other organizations and programs.

Major professional national conferences have been convened on social work with minority communities yielding a fruitful exchange of information, research knowledge and practice skills and approaches with different cultural groups. This has greatly influenced practice and sensitivity to methods and components of service delivery on a wide variety of specific topics such as marital therapy with Ethiopian immigrants (Ki-Tov and Ben-David, 1993), adjustment difficulties of adolescent immigrants from the former U.S.S.R. (Shraga and Slonim-Nevo, 1993), social

work intervention with religious families (Schindler, 1987), affective responses to cultural changes (Banai, 1988), work with Holocaust survivors (Graaf, 1975) and others. Inventories of innovative services for children and other groups have been published (Tadmor, 1990) and prestigious prizes are offered annually to professionals and volunteers working with immigrants and other minority groups in distress.

A popular Israeli vehicle for working with families in extreme distress involves teams of social workers consisting of the family's social worker from the local welfare office (acting as case manager), a qualified family therapist, school psychologist, and other professionals. Interventions focus on child, couple and parent systems, boundaries, communication, and relationships with community institutions — all within a framework of focused short-term interventions (Sharlin and Shamai, 1991). Interdisciplinary cooperation and brokerage activity are seen as vital to successful work with families which usually experience a multiplicity of problems. This is even mandatory regarding cases involving child placement in Israel. It has been found that interdisciplinary practice brings extensive input and knowledge regarding cultural practices and norms that may affect intervention planning and outcome.

Social Work in Fragmented Society

In the age of "the disuniting of America" (and Asia and Europe) where the mainstream, dominant society is giving ground to the celebration of ethnicity, the social work profession must find ways to help mediate cultural and interpersonal conflict (Jacobs and Bowles, 1988; Burgest, 1983). In Israel, this means primarily cessation of denial of ethnic culture differences and gaps between ethnic groups. Ethnicity must stop being a non-subject, ethnic pride should be revived as it was before immigration to Israel, and closer examination of social workers' practice performance, sensitivity and information about cultural groups must be undertaken. These goals are important for Israeli society, where the secular and religious, veterans and immigrants, Westerners and Easterners, Jews and Arabs need to improve communication and common effort to achieve their goals.

Both American and Israeli ethnic dynamics show that mobility among the disadvantaged is no longer homogeneous but rather heterogeneous, that poverty is multi-ethnic and thus lends itself to universal, government policy changes and that the dominant culture is more amenable to genuine ethnic pluralism and sharing than previously. These are positive indicators for social change which must be nurtured by everyone concerned (Kilson and Bond, 1992). Another positive factor, in my view, is the increasing role that nonprofit, third sector organizations can play in Israel, America and other Western countries, in mediating social conflict and promoting dialogue and indigenous interventions to defuse social problems. Social work professionals may be able to learn from this model and play a larger role with nonprofit organizations (Wuthnow, 1991; Powell, 1986).

The discussion of ethnic and minority relations and treatment has moved far beyond issues of ethnic "sensitivity and information." As international and local communities undergo rapid and often violent change due to political, demographic, religious and economic changes, the subject is now of crucial global importance for many nations and peoples. The migration of millions of displaced people to Western countries with high unemployment rates, following the breakup of the U.S.S.R., has led to rekindled ethnic, xenophobic nationalism rooted in unresolved historical conflicts. These present complicated problems for many groups and individuals and major challenges to the social work profession and the world community. Knowing how to understand and work with diverse populations and situations of ethnic and minority conflict may become one of the most important tasks of the twenty-first century.

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