

THE CHILDREN OF THE BOOK.

**Ideology and Pedagogical Practices of Literacy Teaching
in the First Grade of Israeli Primary Schools -
An Ethnographic Study**

Ilana Zailer

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis it is argued that, beneath the surface modernity of literacy education in Israel, lie age-old mechanisms that are being used to instil into young readers an unquestioning adherence to the voice of a single cultural text.

Children in the modern Israeli State are the latest heirs of an ancient religio-cultural tradition. Throughout its 'longue duree', the Jewish community has sought its identity and striven for continued existence by dedication to ideals of literacy and to a single Text. A review of the whole course of Jewish history which focuses on the role of literacy reveals that this is the case.

Close inspection of the approach of the contemporary Israeli State to the teaching of literacy in primary schools shows that these ancient imperatives are still present and active, albeit in transformed ways. The ideology of the Israeli State, embodied in its 'Discourse of Nation-Building' shapes and moves the centralised school-system and its pedagogy. The main themes of the 'discourse' - solidarity, cohesion and defence - lie beneath the apparently neutral surface of standard reading-scheme texts. During the first hours of learning to read in school, the Israeli child is also being invited to set out on the road to being a soldier.

An ethnographic study of what actually takes place when literacy is being taught in Israeli first grades establishes that, for the young Israeli, the first encounter with school literacy is a moment in her personal and social life when she is initiated both into the ancient Text and into the modern national/political discourse. The whole process serves the requirements of citizenship, rather than those of becoming a genuine reader.

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"Societies, like lives, contain their own interpretation. One has only to learn how to gain access to them" (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973).

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time".

T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

Little Gidding, v.

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Introduction

In this study I explore the role and meanings of literacy teaching in the first grade of Israeli primary schools. I examine the inter-relationship between schooling, the teaching of literacy and nationalism. Schools are generally perceived as the institutions most responsible for literacy education in modern societies. Hence, to uncover the link between schools and specific socio-political uses of knowledge, of ideology and power enables us to better understand the thinking and the policy that shape the ways in which children become literate.

Familiarity with the role assigned to literacy in the first grade of Israeli schools leads one to suspect that something more than simple initiation into the uses of spoken and written language is being attempted.

This study argues that, for the young Israeli reader, the first encounters with school literacy are, in fact, a rite of induction into a national/political discourse of solidarity, uniformity and cohesion, termed in this thesis 'The Discourse of Nation-Building'.

A careful study of the whole expanse of Jewish history, through the insights offered by sociology and anthropology, reveals that this 'use of literacy' is by no means a new phenomenon.

The children of the modern State of Israel are the new generation of an old historical community which, throughout the "longue duree" (Braudel:1980) of its existence derived its identity and justification from its association with literacy and text. The Jews, known as the People of the Book, came to use their literacy as a means for binding the people together and, ultimately, as a cultural survival device. Israeli children, at home and in school, are located within these traditions.

The theoretical concepts underlying this thesis draw on the recognition that literacy practices are phenomena with inescapable cultural, social, ideological and political implications. (Goody:1968; Graff:1979; Scribner & Cole:1981; Heath:1983; Street:1984; Levine:1986). The meanings of 'being literate' vary according to where people are, both in time and in place. As a socially and

culturally constructed practice, literacy can only be understood in the specific context of a given society and its history. While this is so for all cultures, the relationship of the Jewish people to its literacy is a paradigmatic case. Other cultures acquired literacy for the practical benefits it offered, but for the semitic races who became Jewry, their holy texts - and those who wrote and read them - were uniquely bound up with the establishment of their vitality over "la longue duree".

Since this is so, existing approaches to literacy teaching in Israel must be viewed in the perspective of history. Only then can they be critically examined in terms of their underlying national/political assumptions and of the interests these assumptions serve. I have designed an ethnographic study to show that a traditional concept of literacy and its use to inculcate the notion of 'being a Jew' revealed in Jewish history is still present and active. It serves a newer concept of society and nationhood in present-day Israeli primary-school classrooms.

Part One: The Historical Perspective

CHAPTER ONE

The Social Context of Literacy Among the Jewish People.

1. Introduction.

The association of Jewry with sacred texts which made the Jews the 'People of the Book' stems from a view of literacy which invests a body of Writings with power to dominate and regulate the lives of individuals and of society. Direct cultivation of this view by the Jewish People began in the 4th century BC. In this period of the Second Jewish Commonwealth there appeared the People's social and religious commitment and strict adherence to a collection of texts which were recognised as canonical and became the Law of God. This at a time when the potency of the written word had long been acknowledged by hegemonic socio-political groups within the People who had embedded literacy firmly in the prevailing political and religious contexts.

The first two sections of this chapter briefly point to the social determinants that influenced the development of Scriptures in the ancient Israelite society of the 11th to 6th centuries B.C. Section three addresses the integration of literacy into an awakening national and religious consciousness. Section four examines the use to which scriptures were put, the emergence of an awareness of the power of literacy and the growth of the "literate mentality" (Clanchy: 1979) among the laity. Section five concerns the period between the 3rd century B.C. to the 5th century A.D., in the course of which the oral law (the *Talmud*) was formulated. It was this which produced the first manifestation of communal commitment to the authority of a written text. Finally section six discusses Jewish literacy in the academies of Babylon. This last phase saw the Jewish view of literacy grow into the unifying force that has shaped and ensured the continuance of Jewish culture.

1.1 The Origins of Ancient Israelite Literacy .

From studies of ancient epigraphy and palaeography we learn that the Israelite tribes adopted the art of writing from the Canaanites between the 12th and 11th century B.C. By the 11th century B.C. the Canaanite linear alphabetic script had become the standard script of literate Israelites (Avigad: 1979; Naveh: 1982).

It is plausible to assume that the Jewish priests in local shrines who maintained close connections with the Canaanite priesthood were the first to gain access to the written mode. The first priestly writings recorded in manuals the ancient rites of worship and the laws governing them which had formerly been handed on orally. The rites probably varied according to the origins of each tribe and the different influence in each tribal locality, while sharing features of the common Yahwistic tradition¹. These Manuals were called '*Torot*' (guidelines) - a name later extended to the whole body of Pentateuchal literature, known in Hebrew as '*Torah*' and dealt with matters of ritual purity and diseases.

The practice of writing *Torot* became institutionalised in the 10th century B.C. and their use began to extend beyond the priests and their trainees. Now they were being used to instruct people coming to the priests at the Temple for guidance on matters of worship.

There are no records on the process of the formal training of priests nor on the course of their instruction in literacy. Schools for priests were probably part of the Temple complex from the 10th century B.C. onwards. Priests assumed their ritual functions at a relatively late age - Levites at the age of twenty five and priests at the age of thirty (Numbers 4:3 8:24), an indication of a long period of apprenticeship necessitated by their complex duties. The period of training must have included both writing and reading. In the 10th and early 9th century B.C. the priests were the first to advocate an awareness of writing as part of their efforts to involve the people in the religious ceremonies (Demskey : 1976; Avigad : 1979).

While priestly literacy was confined to religious rituals, new practices of a more secular nature developed from the 10th century B.C. onward, when scribal literacy first emerged. The newly risen administration of the Davidic monarchy included new

positions and required new procedures and practices for which the employment of the act of writing was necessary. Literacy was used as a vehicle for implementing forms of social political control. The biblical text refers to the advent of literacy in the short passages that describe the new royal employee - the King's scribe and the King's recorder (II Samuel 21:24,25; I Chronicles 27:22).

Both King David and King Solomon benefited from the more advanced technology and craftsmanship of the Phoenicians, and used the scribes' literacy to maintain a sophisticated pattern of administration and to open up contacts with the wider world of the ancient Near East and its cultural practices. (Albright :1949, 1960; Cross : 1952; Millard: 1972; Tadmor : 1973; Mazar : 1979; Grant: 1984; Miller and Hayes : 1986;).

Literacy conventions maintained by the royal administration probably infiltrated piecemeal into various royal circles and perhaps into the social stratum of the upper class. (Gordis: 1949; Bright: 1979; Demsky: 1976; Weinfeld: 1979; Noth: 1983).

Biblical texts referring to the formal instruction of the king's sons concern provision made for King David's sons (I Chronicles 27:32) and for the sons of Ahab, the king of Israel (II Kings 10:1). It is probable that the royal princes and the successor to the throne learned the workings of the government, acquired some fluency in Aramaic, (the lingua franca of the 8th century B.C.), and went through a period of practical training. The latter is suggested in the biblical passages that concern the educational reforms of king Jehoshaphat, who in ca 870 B.C. issued a royal decree which can be interpreted as an educational act sponsored by the royal administration.

The biblical text reads "In the third year of his reign he sent to his princes ... to teach in the cities of Judah, and with them he sent Levites and priests. And they taught in Judah and had the book of law of the Lord with them and went about and throughout the cities of Judah and taught the people." (II Chronicles 17: 7-9). The passage, which encompasses several aspects of literacy and orality prevalent in the 9th century B.C., established the position of princes, Levites and priests as the official literati.

The passage indicates that the people were undoubtedly illiterate and that the king's literacy missionaries who "had the book in their

hands" acted as mediators between the written documents and the audience.

1.2 The Emergence of the Hebrew Script - 8th Century B.C.

Considerable changes in literacy conventions have been attributed to the appearance of a new school of scribes who, during the 8th century B.C., initiated a novel system of writing, later known as the Hebrew script. This script was maintained by the Hebrew scribes as the single conservative tradition of writing until the destruction of the Judean kingdom in 586 B.C. (Rabin: 1972, 1979; Naveh: 1982). The first emergence of distinctive features of Hebrew writing can be discerned in scripts of the mid-9th century B.C., and by the 8th century B.C. the script was already in common use. The new script evolved in a unique style and writing conventions; these included modification in letter forms, positional shifts of strokes in letters and alteration in stance. The defective orthography of the Phoenician script disappeared, the new Hebrew orthography rendering vowels at the end of words by matres lectionis, probably in order to facilitate reading. The scribes gradually dropped the lapidary features as the script evolved away from its Phoenician origin and Hebrew writing became progressively cursive.

The technology of cursive script developed beyond the restricted use of professional scribes. Cursive script could be performed more rapidly and enabled the use of quill and ink. Non-professionals, however, were not obliged to write in calligraphy and conservative hand, and they took the liberty to use script in a more clumsy fashion, a fact that facilitated the spread of writing in the 8th to 6th centuries B.C. (Pritchard: 1954, 1961; Naveh:1964, 1982; Avigad:1971; Millard: 1972, Demsky: 1976;).

1.3. Israel begins to define itself through Literacy.

The first signs of a tendency to define society and the nation through the use of literacy were probably enhanced by the political situation of the 8th - 7th centuries B.C. Changing political circumstances turned the kingdom of Judah in 733 B.C. into a vassal state under the suzerainty of the Assyrian empire. The ancient oriental custom of suzerainty, requiring adoption of the official

religion of the ruling power alongside the national religion, was only one factor among the many that stirred up political and cultural unrest throughout 733 to 633 B.C. The principal political body connected with both the royal court and the Temple were most probably priests who aimed to arouse commitment to national and cultural values and to consolidate national and religious consciousness.

This pursuit of a nationalistic and religious consciousness was intended to restore the Yahwistic theology of the Covenant of Sinai and materialised in the reforms of king Hezekiah and his great grandson King Josiah. Literacy was used as a social construct into which the Yahwistic theology could be instilled². The restoration of the Covenant of Sinai was implemented by both priests and prophets, who first appeared in the socio-political arena in the mid-8th century B.C.

The biblical text recounts how, during the course of repairs in the Temple in ca 622 B.C. (initiated by King Josiah), a book was found hidden under the foundations. It expressed the predominant theology of the priests, who used it to rally both the King and the people politically and religiously. The circumstances in which the book was written and its manner of conveyance to the Temple in Jerusalem and how it remained unnoticed are still a topic for much scholarly debate.(Weinfeld: 1970; Mazar: 1979, Miller and Hayes: 1986).

Notwithstanding the enigmatic circumstances of the book's discovery, the consequences of its very existence were far reaching for Israelite literacy and religion.

The discourse of the book, the first to be declared canonical called *Sefer ha-Torah* (the Book of Law), committed the people and the king to a written text and to a code of conduct. Thus was born a belief in the power of the written word and the ultimate authority of scripture, which was partly an incarnation of the Divine who revealed His wishes, not in a dream or vision or a burning bush, but through the written word.

Although concepts of literacy were already incorporated in the theology of Sinai they were crystallised and articulated in the Book of the Covenant. Hence, the text of the book was read in public in front of the people, and was given into the custody of priests, who

were ordered to repeat the performance every seven years. This new covenant committed the people to the writ of the book and "...To perform the words of the Covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant." (II Kings 22: 2, 3; II Chronicles 34:32-39).

The dominant religious view enhanced the propagation of literacy in the biblical period. Literacy was implanted into the theology of the religious cult, and towards the end of the First Commonwealth, a distinct ideology of adherence to the written words of the Covenant between the people and their God paved the way for the role that these Scriptures were to play in the life of the people.

1.4 Literacy During the 5th to 3rd Centuries B.C.

The exile of the majority of the population to Babylon brought about by the collapse of the First Israelite Commonwealth in 586 B.C. had much bearing on the public face of Israelite literacy. It is believed that the Babylonians deported mainly the upper class literati, including priests and scribes. Left in Judah were only "vinedressers and fieldworkers", as indicated in the book of Kings (II Kings 25: 12), who, presumably, were largely illiterate. Moreover, Babylon was soon conquered by the Persians (in 539 B.C.), who proclaimed the Aramaic language and script the official language of literacy throughout their empire.

From the sparse historical information on Jewish life during the 5th and 4th centuries B.C., gleaned principally from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the dominance of Aramaic is apparent. The exiles, who from 515 B.C. gradually drifted back to *Judah*, used Aramaic as their main means of communication and for many of them the Hebrew language was undoubtedly a *closed* book.

Hebrew was, however, maintained as the literary language. Much of the literary work of the period, which includes the writings of the prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) was composed in Hebrew. The historical writings of Nehemiah and Ezra, on the other hand, combine Hebrew and Aramaic, and it is assumed that the author(s) of these documents, who were probably also the authors of the Book of Chronicles, were scribes trained in the writing of Aramaic official documentation. An echo of a cultural campaign advocating the recovery of the Hebrew language is captured in the historical

accounts of the late 5th century B.C., viz the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The campaign for Hebrew literacy was probably one aspect of an intense process of acculturation, as illustrated in the book of Nehemiah 13: 24 "In those days I [Nehemiah] saw Jews who had married wives of Ashdod and Ammon and Mo'av and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Yehuda, but according to the language of various other peoples." The lack of a shared common language was an impediment in the transmission of ritual literacy and, therefore, the campaign for the retrieval of Hebrew was fought with much passion by zealous priests and scribes.

However, the above historical accounts indicate that new practices, tailored to fit prevailing cultural and social contexts were soon employed for the dissemination of literacy. The public reading of the Law of the Lord by Ezra the scribe entailed the practice of oral translation of the text for the audience (Nehemiah 8: 8). Ezra the scribe, the text relates, read the Book of Law to all men and women on the feast of Tabernacles, from day break till noon. In order to make sure that the people would understand, he and his assistants the Levites, gave an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew text, section by section, possibly with additional explanations. (Rabin (1972) Naveh and Greenfield (1984)).

From the 5th century B.C onwards the practice of translation was established as a tool of instruction in literacy teaching. Moreover, it was probably from the public reading of the book of Law initiated by Ezra, who aimed to commit both the literate and illiterate to abiding by the Law of the Scripture, that the habit of public *Torah* reading stems. The first public readings of the *Torah* were carried out by priests on Mondays and Thursdays, probably market and court days on which people came into town to transact legal and other business. From these gatherings in the 5th -4th centuries B.C. the early synagogues emerged as places of assembly and public *Torah* reading (Greenberg: 1949; Safrai: 1973; Goldman: 1975).

It is commonly accepted that from the 4th century B.C. a collection of writings acknowledged as Holy Scriptures already existed (Noth: 1958; Bright: 1979). It is also assumed that Ezra the scribe brought with him a Book of Law which he read to the people and that this book soon became the normative rule of faith and

religious practice (Weinfeld 1979). Although the nature of the Book of Law read by Ezra to the people is a query to which answers vary, it is highly probable that it contained most of the legal sections subsequently interwoven with the traditional narrative of the Pentateuch.

Primarily, the term *Torah* referred to the book of Deuteronomy only. In the 4th century B.C., however, the texts of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, which contained both legal and narrative discourses, were added and accorded the canonical status of the Books, henceforth known as the *Torah*. The formation of the scriptural canon was presumably the work of a groups of scribes who succeeded Ezra and were known as the members of the Great Assembly. The exact nature of the Great Assembly is quite vague and, with a few exceptions, even the names of its members could not be elucidated from historical sources. They had, however, a position which authorised them to collect writings which they thought worthy of inclusion in the Canon - and their authority was unchallenged. From the 4th century, the literacy of the written Law dominated and became the quintessence of Jewish life.

In the period I have been reviewing there arose the first apparatus for the furtherance of literacy as a means of unification and social cohesion. The emergence of the custom of public reading of the *Torah* served as one of the paramount practices for literacy dissemination, along with the institution of public translation of the readings.

The collection of the Canon, which probably took place towards the end of the 3rd century B.C. has been touched upon. This declaration of which sacred texts make up the *Torah* marks the end of the biblical period in the history of the Jewish people and the beginning of the era of the oral law known as the *Talmudic* period.

1.5 Literacy of the *Talmudic* Period: the 3rd Century B.C. to the 5th Century A.D.

The functions and practices of writing and reading in the *Talmudic* period derived from a distinctive doctrine of literacy that has gradually evolved from the 3rd century B.C. and was to reach its zenith towards the 5th century A.D. in the great academies of

Babylon.

Following the loss of national and political independence in 70 A.D. the pursuit of an established and organised and publicly controlled literacy became essential for survival of the culture. All literacy practices drew predominantly on the written and oral Law; individual and collective study of literacy became a form of divine service and a mode of worship. The term '*Avodah*' (literally: work), which during the First commonwealth referred to acts involved in the rituals of the Temple, was transferred to and reserved solely for the study of the *Torah*.

The *Torah*, the written law, and the subsequently accumulated oral law, which were compiled, collated and finally gathered together into a written document, emerged as a unifying force that shaped not only the civil and religious law of society as such, but also the individual's code of conduct and pattern of behaviour within the family and towards the social environment, from birth to death. Literacy thus became a prerequisite for enculturation, which for Jews was predominantly an entry into a religious culture. Surviving through literacy became a doctrine, a way of life in which all the religious and social ideas of the people found their expression. This doctrine called for rigid communal control both over the content and apparatus for dissemination of literacy.

The necessity for communal control did not imply that the individual was exempt from a personal responsibility towards the pursuit of literacy. An individual's designated role was to become part of the community of literates and to assume his religious commitment through this partnership. Fathers were thus obliged to prepare their sons for their initiation into the literate congregation. For the same reason, great value was attached to collective pursuit of literacy. The importance of group study was urged in sayings such as "The words of the *Torah* do not endure with one who limits himself to private study alone." (*Talmudic* tract Nedarim 70: 1).

The commitment of the individual to the study of the *Torah* did not mean that every Jew was fully literate; in fact, much evidence has been found to the contrary. Reference to a stratum of society that was considered ignoramus or illiterate can be discerned in the term *am-ha-aretz* (common people) ascribed to those who, according to the *Talmud* were seen as follows: "Who is an *am-ha-aretz*?"

Whoever is unable to read the verse 'Shema' ['Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one ... thy gates.' Deuteronomy 6: 4] in the evening and morning prayer and whoever has sons and does not raise them in the study of *Torah*." (*Talmudic* tract Berachot 47b).

The advocates of the doctrine of literacy acknowledged, however, the possibility of illiteracy and maintained a continuous and powerful appeal directed at the religious feeling of the people, which had to be manifested through the acquisition of literacy.

1.5.1 The Sages of the *Talmudic* Period - the Advocates of Popular Literacy.

Although the foundations of the doctrine of literacy had already been laid and shaped by the scribes who were members of the Great Assembly, it was the sages (*chachamim*) who, from the turn of the 2nd century B.C., undertook the role of masters of knowledge and literacy and were accepted as the legitimate leaders of the people. They formulated the oral law of the *Talmud*, a tradition that arose as a practical necessity for interpretation and translation of the written law, that is the *Torah*.

By the first century B.C. a body of *Talmud* material had accumulated. The pedagogical methods and techniques for study and interpretation - those of the *midrash halachah* (exegesis of the law) and of the *midrash agadah* (exegesis and interpretation of those biblical verses from which practical conclusions of law could not be derived)- were already fully mastered.

For over seven centuries i. e., the *Talmud* period, the people submitted themselves to the direct teachings of the sages who, through the saying of the Oral Law, reflected on every aspect of the people's life. It was undoubtedly due to the sages' practical observations and their experience in life that study of law became popular and, to an extent, a marketable product instead of a mere ideal. Throughout the various stages of the *Talmud* period in Palestine and Babylon, they instilled the doctrine of literacy and were its custodians.

From the very beginning, the scribes and sages cultivated the ideal of the learned man who, at every stage of his life, is absorbed in the study and observance of his religious culture. That the pursuit of study is a supreme national duty was a constantly repeated idea,

deeply integrated into the doctrine of literacy. The primary purpose of studying the *Torah* was to perpetuate the existence of the Jewish people, which otherwise would not survive as an entity.

The second goal of study was religious in scope: since literacy learning was an indispensable means to attain a true Jewish life, it was part of the doctrine. The pursuit of literacy exalted the learner above his fellow men and made him a source of pride to his family and his surroundings; thus people would say of him "Happy the father who taught him *Torah*, happy the teacher who taught him *Torah*; Woe unto him who has not studied *Torah*..." (*Talmudic tract Yebamot* 86).

The rewards of learning were described in terms of a deeper and stronger spiritual life, and the sages therefore instilled the idea that "The more *Torah*, the more life - the more schooling, the more wisdom." (*Talmudic tract Avot*).

Since the study of the *Torah* was vital to Jewish life and its reward so great, people were not only encouraged and urged to study, but also to give priority to learning over material needs. In *Talmudic* literature, the doctrine of literacy became the *halachah* - the law of literacy. Like all other *Talmudic* laws which regulated people's life, literacy laws were transmitted via an established code of conduct and within a network of institutions that gradually developed as a social necessity.

1.5.2 The Functions of Writing in the *Talmudic* Period.

Already in the early *Talmudic* period, the art of writing the sacred texts had become the dominant function of literacy, thus affording the professional scribe a status that not only distinguished him from the ordinary literate person, but certainly elevated him above the illiterate.

The writing of the holy scriptures gradually turned into a strictly structured form of art, which could not be performed by simply any literate person. As the *Torah* and the religious articles were integrated into the daily routine of the people's life, the professional scribe began^{to} be indispensable to the Jewish community. The *Talmud* did not even permit scholars to dwell in a town where there were no scribes (*Talmudic tract Sanhedrin* 17b). Scribes were poorly paid in *Talmudic* times lest they grew rich and deserted their

vocation, leaving their communities without their services. A scribe writing a *Torah* scroll, or any other sacred text, had to devote his utmost attention and care to his performance. He was forbidden to rely on memory and had to write from a model copy.

Explicit guidelines were drawn up to instruct the scribes in the ways of fulfilling their special assignments. The reverence bestowed upon the scribes, and their own feelings of commitment to their art can be deduced from the following 2nd century A.D. passage, related by Rabbi Meir, one of the prominent sages of his era: "When I came to Rabbi Ishmael to learn the *Torah* he asked me what was my occupation and I told him I was a writer of scrolls. He then said to me: my son be careful with your work. Should you omit a single letter, or add one, you would destroy the whole world." (*Talmudic* tract Sotah 20).

No wonder, therefore, that the act of writing soon became a holy act in its own right, especially where the Sacred Scriptures were concerned.

In the *Talmudic* composition known as the 'Ethics of the Fathers', (collected during the 1st to 3rd century A.D.), writing and the art of writing are included amongst the ten things created on the eve of the Shabbat (and therefore considered of semi-miraculous nature), signifying its immense importance.

The *Talmudic* sages accorded special sanctity to all letters of the alphabet, thus nurturing a theory which elevated the practices of literacy from the mundane, placing them in a context of the divine. The holiness of the script was explained by verses such as those found in the Psalms (e.g. 33: 6) that declared "By the words of God were the heavens made". The sages maintained that as letters are divine they may not be destroyed and, thus even when the material of the tablets was broken by Moses, the letters flew upwards and were preserved (*Talmudic* tract Pessahim 87b).

Interpretations were given to the letters in various passages of the Scripture: every letter was given a symbolic meaning, and even its shape and order of appearance were of significance. Even mistakes, blemishes, missing letters and other technical graphic particularities preserved over the course of time were scrutinised and commented upon.

It is assumed that early in the *Talmudic* period, 2nd and 1st

centuries B.C., writing found its way to a more general public and was a skill no longer confined to scribes. The *Talmud*, for instance, recounts common practices of correspondence among shopkeepers, who wrote down their debts on tablets. The *Talmud* literature mentions all kinds of writing materials employed by scribes and common people (Morris : 1937).

A further indication that writing was not rare is inferred from the *Talmudic* tract in which the following is recorded: "These are trusted to testify when they are grown up concerning what they saw in their childhood. A man is trusted to say 'This is the handwriting of my father and this is the handwriting of my teacher, and this is the handwriting of my brothers.'" (*Talmudic* tract Shavu'ot 7).

1.5.3 The Synagogue as an Institute for the Dissemination of Literacy.

The development of literacy was undoubtedly conditioned by the rarity of scrolls, and the institutionalisation of the means of transmission by public address and public reading of the written Law can be partly attributed to the small number of actual books available. Moreover, the fact that books and manuscripts were scarce, forced the people to rely on memory. As a result, a whole system of mnemonics developed, which held that study should be vocal and aided by chanting. It must be remembered too that up to the 2nd century A.D. only the pentateuchal and canonical biblical texts were allowed to be written at all. The vast body of unwritten material - the 'Oral Law'- had to be transmitted via public address.

The roots of Jewish demotic literacy must be sought in the synagogue, a fact mentioned in the writings of Philo, the 1st century A.D. Alexandrian Jewish philosopher. Philo describes the practices of what he called 'institutions for instruction in the scripture' (Morris, 1937; Goldman, 1975) in the following words: "Innumerable schools of practical wisdom and self control and manliness ... are opened every seventh day in all cities. In these schools the people sit decorously, keeping silence and listening with the utmost attention ... while one of the best qualified stands up and instructs them." (quoted in Goldman, 1975, 14). The reference to 'one of the best qualified' marks a significant factor in the social significance of

literacy during the period under discussion. The purpose of the gathering was the act of reading, three or four men were called up to read selected portions from the scroll on weekdays, while for the Sabbath and the monthly readings at least seven men were chosen. The fact that the practice stipulated reading by several laymen indicates the spread of literacy beyond the restricted circle of sages and professional scribes. (Safrai (1973)).

1.5.4 The Emergence of the House of Study: *Bet ha-Midrash*.

Although literacy was intertwined with worship in the synagogue, more formal systems for the provision of literacy in specialised educational institutions gradually developed. The first were the 2nd century B.C. institutes for adult education, followed by 1st A.D. elementary schools for young children. *Bet ha-midrash* literally means 'the house of study', a place where people gather to listen to the exposition (*midrash*) of the *Torah*. Exactly when the *bet ha-midrash* arose as a distinct institution is not easy to determine. The term *bet ha-midrash* occurs, however, for the first time in the writings of the scribe Ben Sira at the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. and may be freely translated in the context of his work as 'lecture hall'.

Over the course of time the *bet ha-midrash* became the authorised institution for the dissemination of literacy, and its curriculum included formulation of Jewish oral law and academic investigation into the meaning of the Scriptures.

The teachers of the 'houses of study' were the sages who, besides formulating the oral law, saw as their primary obligation the teaching and spreading of its contents. This feeling of obligation is expressed, for example, in the 2nd century A.D. *Talmudic* saying that "One who studies the *Torah* and does not teach it is like the myrtle in the wilderness whose fragrance is completely wasted." (*Talmud* tract Rosh ha-Shanah 22).

Toward the middle of the 2nd century A.D. it was regarded as normal for each community to maintain a 'house of study'. The *Talmud* sages even attributed the destruction of Jewish cities by the Romans in 135 A.D. to the fact that the citizens failed to provide payment for the teachers of the Scriptures and the Oral Law (*Talmudic* tract Hagigah 7-1: 5-7).

Although the institutionalisation of the 'houses of study' essentially aimed at the dissemination of literacy, their demotic nature should not be taken for granted. Unlike the synagogue, which from the very beginning was a popular institution into which women and children were also admitted, the 'houses of study' allowed only men. An echo of tension, and even of animosity, between a selected upper stratum of scholars and those regarded as 'common people' emanates from the *Talmudic* writings up to the 2nd century A.D.

Although the tension between the learned and the ignoramus stemmed from the notion cultivated by the sages that a man who does not study *Torah* undermines the integrity of the nation, it seems plausible that the selective nature of some of the 'houses of study' contributed to these expressions of mutual resentment (Darzin : 1940).

1.5.5. The Construction of Elementary Education and Schools.

The earliest notice making elementary education obligatory, that is, provision of a general organisation to furnish children with the basic literacy commensurate with their age, is found in the saying of the 1st century B.C. sage Shimon ben Shetah, who stated that "Children should go to school." (*Talmudic* tract Ketubot 88:11). However, it was probably not before the middle of the 1st century A.D. that established institutions called *bet sefer* (house of books) became socially controlled centres for the mediation of literacy to the young (*Talmudic* tract Baba batra 21a).

It is evident from the writings of the seven decades following the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D., that schools were essential institutions that every city was obliged to establish. The citizens were responsible for payment of wages to scribes who acted as elementary teachers. *Talmudic* sources, describing the pre-eminence or increase in population of a city, mention the numbers of schools in a city. These sources tell with probably a hint of exaggeration that in the last days before the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem there were four hundred and eighty synagogues in the city, each having a school for study of the Scriptures - a *bet sefer* and a *bet midrash* for the study of oral law. Whatever their number may have been, hidden in this

information lies the fundamental^{idea} of a network for the dissemination of literacy for all age groups and stratas of society.

From the 'Ethics of the Fathers' it may be inferred that what was referred to as guidance in the course of study reached, in fact, far beyond the technical aspects of a regulated curriculum: "At five years for the Bible; at ten years for the Mishnah, at thirteen for the observance of commitments; at fifteen for the *Talmud*; at eighteen for marriage..." (*Talmudic* tract Avot). In the mid-2nd century A.D. it was ordained that a father should bear with his son until the age of twelve (*Talmudic* tract Ketubot 50a) and by the 3rd century A.D. elementary education for children from the age of 6 up to the age of 13 had become the prevailing custom. This constituted the main framework of education. Most students were educated in the schools for scriptural study and, to a lesser degree, in higher schools in which oral law was studied. The pursuit of literacy at the elementary school level was based on the knowledge of the *Torah*, which revolved particularly around the synagogue service.

Although it is commonly accepted that elementary literacy learning was available and literacy was indeed widespread from the second half of the 1st century A.D. (Darzin, 1940; Maller, 1949; Safrai, 1973), evidence from *Talmudic* sources indicate that the process was a very gradual one. Probably even as late as the 3rd century A.D. some communities did not provide facilities for elementary teaching. This fact is learned from *Talmudic* statements, such as "A scholar is not permitted to live in a town where there are no elementary teachers".

Scholars who challenge the existence of widespread elementary education in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. not only agree that the process was well advanced in the 4th century A.D. (Morris: 1937), but also that by that time the elementary school for boys had become a publicly organised and controlled institution.

Elementary schools of the *Talmudic* period were probably part of the synagogue. The *Talmudic* literature of the 2nd century A.D. refers to the specific term *bet sefer*. It indicates that in the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D. the schools were completely absorbed by the synagogue.

The *Talmudic* references referring to the teaching of young children in the synagogue not only emphasise the growing

importance of the latter as the centre of religious and social life of the Jewish community, but also point to the degree of the community's control over the literacy provision for its young children.

This public control included such matters as the size of the class: the existence of 25 children in a locality was considered a proper number to form a study-circle and it was up to the community to provide a teacher. If there were more than 25 children, the community saw^{it} as its obligation to establish a new classroom and find an additional teacher. Support for the maintenance of schools derived from taxation, each community taxing only its financially able members, and then perhaps only those whose children attended the school (Darzin: 1940).

1.6 Literacy in the Babylonian Diaspora, 3rd to 11th century A.D.

Up to now, this presentation treats of the social context of literacy, mainly in Palestine. However, from the 3rd century A.D. the centre of literacy was gradually transferred to the Jewish communities in Babylon. Thus, in the 5th century A.D. the completion of the *Talmud* marked the end of an era and the beginning of 500 years of intensive transmission of literacy known as the *Ga'onic* period³. The core of Jewish literacy lay within the walls of the institutions known as *Yeshivot* 'great academies', headed by spiritual leaders known as *Rashei ha-yeshivot* (heads of the academies).

From the 3rd century A. D. the *yeshivot* developed as advanced institutes for professional scholars and served a multitude of students, some from countries as far away as Egypt, Tunisia, Italy and Spain. At least 400 students would arrive for a course of study in each of the main academies.

Babylonian Jewry also maintained a pattern of elementary literacy teaching which was set up along the lines of that previously discussed. From the academies, however, there sprang an institute for intensive dissemination of literacy studies among adults. From the 3rd century A. D. to the beginning of the 11th century a network of literacy studies evolved and was integrated into the formal structure of work in the *yeshivot*. Its aims were to propagate the study of Jewish law among the 'simple folk' and to motivate people to attend public addresses by the spiritual leaders of the day.

The ubiquitous concept of adult study reflects the supremacy of literacy in the eyes of the Jewish communities. At the same time it functions as a cohesive force. It also expresses new dimensions of the social context in which literacy developed.

The Babylonian academicians, in an attempt to establish points of contact between local communities and the seats of learning, initiated an organisation of extramural centres for the study of literacy, which worked under their direct guidance. These centres which were, in fact, study groups lacked the authoritative character of an academy. Nevertheless, the subjects of study all concerned the oral Law. The 'centres', called 'the assembly of *Torah* learners', rapidly grew into branch schools for adults which gathered several study groups of one locality under their roof. The groups never contained less than the obligatory ten men, (so that religious services could properly be held in the place of study). Twice a year for a month all academies opened their doors to members of the public from all over Babylon and offered them an opportunity to attend the discussions and instruction sessions, albeit as spectators only.

These sessions became known as *Kallah* (an acronym formed by the Hebrew term 'the assembly of students of the *Torah*) (Sachar:1970; Margolis and Marx : 1974; Goldman : 1975).

Contemporary historic studies estimate that, in the first half of the 3rd century A.D., no less than twelve thousand students came to the assembly day-in day-out during the *Kallah*. As the *kallah* happenings were open to the masses, these sessions had a built-in mechanism of conformity and social cohesion that gave a feeling of shared intellectual and spiritual experience for which men were ready to leave their home and family for one or two months a year (Goldman: 1975).

It is worth mentioning that the *Talmudic* sages gave permission to seekers of knowledge to stay away from home for thirty days, even against the will of their wives, to occupy themselves in the study of the law (*Talmudic* tract Ketubot 5: 6).

Courses of study called *tarbitsot* (school halls) were held for people who were not knowledgeable enough to qualify for admission to regular courses. There they could follow a more free and elective system of study. Beside the 'school halls', there were the early

morning lectures delivered by scholars in the synagogues which were directed at craftsmen and farmers who came to pray.

The Babylonian academicians undoubtedly wanted literacy to permeate all strata of the Jewish society so as to sustain the unity forged, by literacy, from the *Talmudic* period onwards. However, it may be argued that they also very consistently made sure that study be associated with an influential intellectual elite, of which they were the representatives.

1.6.1 The Last Two Centuries of the *Ga'onic* Period: 8th - 10th Century A.D.

In the *Ga'onic* period the book of prayer became an everyday commodity. The liturgy, which up to the 5th century A.D. had been transmitted orally, was formalised into a written prayerbook. It comprised, besides benedictions, passages from both the scriptures and the oral Law. The obligatory daily use of the prayerbook demanded a minimal level of literacy, in order to be able to read the prescribed daily portions of the holy writings. In this manner literacy as an integral part of the life of every male Jew was ensured. In spite of the 'enforcement' of literacy, books were not within easy reach of the layman, for whom the prevailing custom remained listening to the orations on the *Talmudic* rulings. It is plausible to assume, therefore, that the reading of the entire oral law continued to remain the prerogative of the scholar while the layman confined himself to reading the passages of the oral Law available to him in the prayer book (Steinsaltz: 1976).

Throughout the Gaonic period, as in the preceding *Talmudic* period, women were excluded from any form of study. They were however, again as in earlier periods, welcome in the synagogue where, from special galleries, they could listen to the public reading from the Scripture and to the sermons.

With the disintegration of the great Moslem empire into a number of rival kingdoms in the 11th century A.D., the Jewish communities were less able to maintain contact with the *ga'onim*. These changing political circumstances also brought in their wake the final decline of the Babylonian academies which had been the backbone of Jewish cultural life for over seven centuries.

In the 11th century A.D. two important Jewish centres arose, one

encompassing the region of North Africa and Spain and the other that of Italy, France and Germany. These constitute the nuclei of the two Jewish Mainstreams namely, that of the Sepharadic and the Ashkenasic traditions. Each developed its own characteristic course of literacy, although a common cultural core continued to exist. However, the course of literacy in the respective traditions up to the 18th century A.D. in particular that of Ashkenasic Jewry in Eastern Europe, calls for a separate discussion.

Summary.

The principal aim of the historic presentation undertaken in this chapter was to highlight the social structures and social processes which shaped the course of the development of literacy among the Israelites/Jews from their very beginning as a cultural and social entity.

The meanings of literacy depend upon the social institutions in which they are embedded. Practices of literacy cannot be regarded as merely technical achievements. This chapter as a whole was written with the purpose of identifying the social, national and theoretical structures from which the various forms of literacy derived throughout a history encompassing more than two thousand years. At the heart of these lies the increasingly urgent need to achieve cohesion in order to survive as a distinctive people and culture.

CHAPTER TWO

Hegemonic Literacy: Literacy Traditions Among European Jewry in Mediaeval and Early Modern Times

2. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the social structure and cultural performance of literacy that prevailed within the traditional Jewish society in Europe in the mediaeval and early modern periods, up to the second half of the 18th century. The discussion draws on studies of the history of the Jews in Europe pertaining to its two ethnic groups i.e., the Ashkenazim, (literally meaning in Hebrew coming from Germany), and to a lesser degree the Sephardim (literally meaning in Hebrew coming from Spain). Its main concern is with the former communities.

From the fifteenth century onwards, and especially during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, this segment of the Jewish people constituted the main demographic and cultural centre of the world Jewry. From the seventeenth century on, all Jewish cultural, ideological and political thought originated in this Jewry, including the emergence of Zionism, the Jewish secular national revitalisation movement.

It is commonly accepted among scholars of Jewish history that the survival of the Jewish people in the diaspora must be attributed to their ability to maintain a distinct system of cultural values in non Jewish surroundings - an experience of nearly two millennia which excluded the Jews from the mainstream of society.

Notwithstanding recurrent dispersion and exposure to new acculturation processes, the Jews maintained their common cultural identity and a view of shared commitment which found its embodiment in the extension of Jewish oral Law into every sphere of life.

The major cultural difference between the Jews and their neighbours was historically a religious one: Jewish communities reinforced varying degrees of distinctiveness of their faith and clearly defined the boundaries which set it apart from other religions. Such adherence to Judaism involved not only a construction of religo-cultural barriers against other religions, it also meant a

degree of voluntary segregation. (Graetz: 1895; Baron: 1942, 1952, 1972; Abrahams: 1958; Ginzberg: 1958; Katz: 1961; Roth: 1961, 1966; Agus: 1966; Dubnov: 1968; Heschel: 1972; Ben-Sasson: 1974; Sharot: 1976; Ettinger, Malmat & Ben Sasson 1976; Bernstein 1980; Davis and Finkelstein: 1984).

The degree of cultural segregation is, in fact, where Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewry differ. Until their expulsion in 1492 from Spain, the Sephardic Jews were well integrated into contemporary social, cultural and economic spheres, sharing many of their features.

It was their intellectual involvement with secular subjects which distinguished them from Ashkenazic Jewry. Sephardic Jewry, while maintaining *Talmudic* doctrine and retaining its elementary levels of literacy according to tradition, incorporated into its indigenous culture an armory of secular studies, from Aristotelian philosophy to arithmetic, geometry and music. Hebrew language and poetry flourished in Spain and later, under Spanish influence, also in Italy. (Abrahams: 1958; Zimmels: 1966; Ben Sasson: 1974; Ettinger, Malmat & Ben Sasson: 1976).

As for the Ashkenazic Jewry, from the 10th century, and up to the Age of Emancipation in the first half of the 19th century, Ashkenazic Jewry formed a unique cultural entity among European communities. It was distinct in that it adopted absolute adherence to the *Talmud* and its subsequent codification, which put immense emphasis on strict interpretation of these laws and demanded undeviating observance of the religious rituals. Ashkenazic Jewry used its institutions to transmit its heritage to subsequent generations. Within this lore of tradition there was no room for secular literacy.

From a socio-cultural perspective, there is no doubt that Ashkenazic Jewry used its culture as a social barrier against processes of acculturation. The social barrier did not only concern religion and literacy, but came to encompass such things as physical and outward appearance, as well as language i.e., the mediaeval Judeo-Germanic dialect, which came to be known as Yiddish and developed into the European Jewish vernacular, with each locality maintaining its distinctive dialect.

This process was consolidated between the 15th and 18th centuries, known as the Ghetto period, in which the archetype of the

Ashkenazic Jew emerged. His characteristic features made him the traditional bearer of normative Judaism in Europe.

On the assumption that literacy is culturally and socially mediated, I show that literacy was a potent and effective social device for maintaining this distinctive tradition.

In section one I point to the centrality of literacy in the Jewish tradition. Section two addresses the means for socially controlling day to day practices of literacy. Section three presents the traditional Jewish scholar, the *talmid chacham* as the ideal image of literacy. Section four concerns the role and function of the traditional institutions for literacy teaching, the *heder* and the *yeshiva*. Section five gives a brief overview on female literacy in traditional Jewish society. Finally section six concerns literacy as a "cultural performance" and a mode of social and cultural cohesion.

2.1 The Functions of Literacy in Traditional Judaism.

Theologically, tradition in Judaism is the name applied to the Code of Law as believed to be given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. It is also the discipline which establishes the correct practice and interpretation of the Scriptures in their broader sense that is, the *Torah* and the *Talmud*. Tradition in normative Judaism is thus far more binding than in other societies and assumes the force of moral law. Tradition is thus synonymous with the quintessence of Jewish religion. *Torah*, God and Israel are one, says the tradition; therefore, a person was obliged to follow and obey the *Talmudic* dictum. In order to follow the law he had to know it. Literacy was the means for knowing.

According to the *Talmud*, study was a divine commandment - a religious obligation. Jewish tradition nurtured the idea of personal redemption in the world to come, which was dependent on exact execution of the Jewish law, and hence on literacy. As a divine commandment literacy was both inherent in the forms of worship and a means for its fulfilment.

By using literacy as a means of worship, the Jew reenacted the Covenant between God and His People on Mount Sinai. Worship was a divine commandment, and so was study - through worship and study the covenant was perpetuated and sustained (Zborowski:1951; Bernstein: 1980).

From this perspective, it seems plausible that worship, literacy and tradition became interchangeable concepts, making literacy imperative to uphold tradition and perpetuate religion.

The preoccupation with the intricacies of holy writs and the significance of literacy as a vehicle for maintaining Jewish identity constituted "a condition of textcenteredness" or even of "text obsessiveness that held the diaspora Jewry together." (Bloom: 1982 pp.318-321). It embraced the whole of Jewish culture, which was mediated and realised through literacy. It would seem therefore that literacy was pursued as a "cultural performance" (Geertz: 1973), forming a shared world of meanings mediated by symbolic deeds, rituals and "illocutionary acts" (Austin: 1962), where "each individual knows there is an ongoing correspondence between his personal experience, understanding and expression of Jewish life and that of others." (Hillman: 1983 p .82).

The following passage, taken from the '*Mahazor Vitry*' (a compilation of Jewish law, prayer and customs written by Simha of Vitry, France in 1105) both illustrates and supports this: "... as soon after the circumcision as they desire [a quorum of] ten assemble and take a Pentateuch; and the babe in the cradle is finely arrayed as on the day of circumcision. They place the book upon him and say: 'May this one fulfil what is written in this', and they say, 'And he shall give them' and the verses of the Blessings... and they place an inkwell and a scribe's reed in his hand in order that he may be privileged to be a swift scribe in the Lord's *Torah*." (English translation Hurvitz (ed.) 1923). Thus, along with the initiation into the Jewish community (the act of circumcision), the male was brought into contact with the potent symbol of his culture - literacy. With this ceremony 'the child of the Covenant' and 'the child of the book' were integrated into one, while the adults re-enact their social role as traditional Jews.

The condition of textcentredness has been idealised depicting a society of literati deeply engrossed in accumulation of knowledge.(Heschel: 1950) In practice the divine commandment to study, to indulge in life long learning, was fully honoured only by the minority of *Talmudist*, whose entire time was dedicated to the pursuit of the written word. The ordinary Jew -the peddler, the shoemaker, the tailor- albeit pious and observant, was certainly not

proficient enough to become a scholar. But for the man-in-the-street literacy still served to preserve his "Jewishness". From the documentation of historic sources and from recent studies of Jewish social history it emerges that literacy was first and foremost a social force that controlled the daily lives of the masses and much less an intellectual exercise. (Zborovski: 1949; Katz: 1961; Stampfer: 1988).

Katz, who studied traditional Jewish society in depth, claims that the divergence (concerning dedication to learning) between theory and practice was greater than in most spheres of religion and morals. Nonetheless "the demand [to study] pervaded the atmosphere of society as one which was not to be contested". (Katz: 1961 pp.162).

It is noteworthy that all Jewish males acquired a level of literacy that enabled them to carry out the religious rituals. Yet, even the divine commandment of synagogue attendance twice daily was not faithfully implemented by the majority of Jews who, in earning their livelihood as peddlers, artisans, domestic servants and the like, could hardly spare the time, and especially not for the afternoon prayer. In the 16th and 17th centuries, allowance was made by the religious authorities for those whose occupation prevented them from public prayer, giving them dispensation to attend the synagogue only on the days when the *Torah* was read in public.

The immense significance of the doctrine of literacy and its place in the life of the individual is reflected in a distinct form of Jewish literacy known as "Ethical Wills". These are testamentary directions in which fathers (admittedly more often than not scholars of some repute) leave religious guidelines for their sons.(Goldman: 1975).

The importance of these for the present discussion lies in their value as socio-cultural documents, displaying a milieu in which a "condition of textcentredness" reigned.

One worth quoting is the 14th century testament of Solomon, son of Isaac, who is considered by Goldman (1975) as "an average Jew of the middle ages" (p. 119). In this comprehensive document we read: "These are the regulations which I, Solomon, son of the holy R. Isaac . . . have drawn up for myself that . . . I shall not eat on any day before I have studied one page of the *Talmud* or one of its commentaries. Should I transgress this rule intentionally, I must not drink wine on that day, or I shall pay half a ducat to charity ... I shall read every week the Pentateuchal lessons twice in the Hebrew text . .

. Should I intentionally omit the lesson, I shall pay two ducats to charity . . ." And further on "...This is the text of the testament I have drawn up for my children . . . Again that each shall always have in his house a chair on which a volume or two of the *Talmud*, or any other talmudical work, shall rest; so that he can always open a book when he comes home. Let him read what he can, making it a duty to read in any book he likes at least four lines before taking his meal. Each of them [of his sons] shall have the obligation to train his children to the study of *Torah*, and to strive that one shall devote his whole life to study thereof." (ibid p.120). This is a striking example in which a member belonging to a traditional society places himself in the historical continuum from which it drew its power, and which must be seen as ~~harking~~ harking back to the Covenant made on Mount Sinai.

2.2 Authorities, Institutions and Ideals for Literacy.

As in the preceding periods, literacy under European diaspora conditions derived its movement and life from the binding force of a system of institutions that used the authority of the text as a powerful tool. Moreover, legal segregation and religious and cultural isolation imposed on the communal leaders the obligation, as they saw it, to foster obedience and subordination in order to maintain the stability of society as a prerequisite for socio-cultural cohesion.

Literacy was also a powerful instrument for securing social order, class distinction and stratification. Literacy was authority, it derived its power from tradition.

All Jewish social organisations and communal agencies (charitable, religious or educational) operated on the basis of continuous traditions. Together they formed a group, acting as executive body, known as *Kehilla* ('community', plural *Kehillot*).

These executive bodies saw themselves as guardians of the tradition that united the people. They used literacy as a primary vehicle. In order to forge unity, each *Kehilla* set up law-enforcement machinery and penal system encompassing every level of literacy practice. The fact that the level of proficiency among the laity was no more than modest did not escape the community leaders. In the cities of the Rhineland, in Prague, Amsterdam and elsewhere, local Ashkenazi *Kehillot* issued ordinances regulating the detail of householders' study practice. Their authority was wide and their acts

were components of an enculturation process for bearing 'children of the Covenant' much more so than 'children of the Book' (Baron: 1942, 1952; Fienkelstein: 1964; Goldman: 1975).

Beginning in the 15th century, and growing to a well accepted practice by the 16th century, the *Kehillot* of Central and eastern Europe established special administrative committees known as the *Hevra Talmud Torah* ('The Society for the Instruction of *Torah*'), whose function it was to supervise and control education in general, and to find ways and means of providing literacy to the poor and orphans. The variety of ordinances issued by these committees gives an insight into the wide scope of their authority. The main concern of the community was to initiate the young into Jewish tradition so as to enable them to participate in religious rituals and become full members of the congregation.

Thus for instance the ordinances of several communities show the steps taken to ensure minimal literacy requirements. An ordinance issued by the *Kehilla* of the city of Metz in 1690 prescribed that fathers must send their sons to school for the entire day up to the age of fourteen. Those failing to do so were threatened with a severe sanction - the loss of the right to sojourn, which in practice meant expulsion from the city. In two 17th century ordinances, the officers of the community in Verona were instructed to see to it that no boy would be taken out of school and sent to work before the age of sixteen.

The authority inherent in the ordinances^{was} most sharply expressed in issues pertaining to the financial support of literacy. The money for the upkeep of the houses of study and elementary educational institutions came from members of the community^{by means of} a complex system of taxation and donations imposed by the *Kehilla* to subsidise literacy.

As all the rituals that had to be taxed were part of the religious liturgy performed and witnessed by the public, a mutual system of social control over the execution of the ordinance was secured. (Baron: 1942; Fishman: 1944; Finkelstein: 1964).

Charitable societies, known as holy brotherhoods appeared in the 13th-15th centuries and consolidated in the 16th. The largest and most prestigious of the Charitable Societies was the "holy Brotherhood for the Burial of the Dead (*Hevra Kaddisha*). Other

charitable societies concerned themselves with the dowering of orphan brides, the support of the poor and the sick and even with supplying firewood for individual scholars.

Although the brotherhoods came into being for practical purposes, the deep religious roots from which they stemmed soon made them vehicles for maintaining the ideal of lifelong learning. Intertwined with the original mundane goals of the brotherhoods was a system of religious and literacy obligations. Members were required to engage in daily prayer and be in regular attendance at appointed places of worship. Thus the predominant characteristic of the holy brotherhoods, regardless of their central function, was emphasis on literacy.

A different kind of brotherhood emerged in Moravia, Bohemia, Poland and Lithuania in the 17th century - the guilds of the artisans and craftsmen modelled after the much older mediaeval European guilds and having the same purpose, that of guaranteeing the economic welfare of their class.

Although only laymen, the members of these guilds, too, were attuned to the general ethos of a society that despised ignorance and regarded it as an obstacle to the fulfilment of religious obligations and which called upon every man to study as much as his understanding allowed. It is therefore not surprising that the guilds incorporated into their vocational framework the imperative to engage in study.

Organised to reinforce ideals of literacy, the holy brotherhoods and craft guilds constituted a social force for mutual control, compelling their members to adhere to the highest social values of the community and therefore to the authority of literacy (Goldman: 1975).

Although communal ordinances did not directly proscribe vocational occupations essential for earning a living, traditionally anyone who devoted more time to the pursuit of worldly gain than was warranted to eke out his livelihood was guilty of idling his time away: a transgression tantamount to the neglect of *Torah* studies (Katz: 1961).

The Book of the Pious, the major work of mediaeval German Jewry of the 12th and 13th century, advises a man to divide the week into three parts: two days for the study of the Scriptures, two

days for *Mishnah*, two days for *Talmud*, and the Sabbath day for the study of all three. One may, however, divide the day into three parts, four hours for each subject. The book further advises "...when a man discovers that he has sufficient income and also more time than his business requires, he should not say that he will make his study the lesser and his work the more important of his occupations, but he should make his study the primary thing and his work secondary." (Book of the Pious, No. 774).

It seems that the traditional Jewish society existed in a state of dialectical tension between those who set the standards for conduct and those who were obliged to carry them out. This tension was, however, partly eased by the fact that the norms of tradition accepted a practice of delegating religious obligations. A person who contributed to the upkeep of scholars, or fully supported them, was seen as sharing in the dedicated study of the *Torah* and could expect the promised heavenly reward no less than the scholar himself.

Nevertheless, on the level of principle, tradition demanded that every free moment be exclusively employed in study. Time was accorded a societal value in traditional society, as expressed by the notion of wasted time (*Bitul zman*). Social amusement, when no *Mitzvah* ('divine commandment') was involved was considered a waste of time that could have been devoted to study.

From mediaeval times onwards many familial festive occasions were exalted by religious rites, performed mostly in the synagogue. Familial events, such as circumcision, redemption of the first born, the *bar mizvah* ceremony¹ or weddings commanded an obligatory banquet (*'seu'dat mizvah'*) with strong religious and literacy connotations. These events that were authorised by rabbinic law, thus enabled scholars to participate without appearing to be wasting time. The laity would equally have the opportunity to participate in a learned discourse, as the main feature of joyous observance was the reciting of prayers, the reading of a portion of the scriptures or of *Talmudic* and *Midrastic* homilies and chanting of psalms and hymns.

Communal social events, such as the completion of a *Talmudic* tractate or the acquisition of a new scroll of the Scripture by a synagogue were also regarded as opportunities for religious banquets carrying utmost significance (Katz: 1961).

2.3 Talmid Chacham - an Ideal for Literacy and scholarship.

Although the average Jew had the basic knowledge of tradition needed for his daily conduct, he was nonetheless dependent on the *Talmid Chacham* (the *Talmudic* scholar)², who might be either an appointed functionary (the rabbi) or any *Talmudic* scholar whose knowledge qualified him to rule in disputes and queries frequently arising on religious matters, such as dietary laws, modes of worship, prohibitions, family conduct, and a host of issues concerning day-to-day living.

The layman not only trusted the scholar implicitly, but expected him to serve the people out of a sense of duty and not for the sake of material gain or public recognition. From this social situation evolved the hegemony of the literati -the *Talmudic* scholars, (*Talmiday chachamim*) who carefully preserved their supremacy as the guardians of tradition and interpreters of the *halacha* ('law').

Although the enactment of ordinances and invocation of sanctions was the prerogative of the community leaders, some of whom were not *Talmudic* Scholars, the authority of the latter was always predominant.

While in the mediaeval period the endorsement of ordinances required unanimous agreement of all members of the *kehilla*, by the 16th century the communities had given the *Talmid Chacham* exclusive power in arbitrating any doubts or disputes that arose with regard to the interpretation of the ordinances.

The close link between literacy and authority strongly influenced social status, especially under diaspora conditions where neither political power nor the possession of wealth i.e., property and lands, were open to Jews and did not determine or guarantee the order of social stratification. Scholarship, perforce, became the chief determinant of an individual's position on the scale of social order, and the institutions for its transmission played a significant role in stabilising class differences.

According to the religious tradition, the *Torah* was given to all of the Jewish people, who thereby became the children of the Covenant. The *Talmid Chacham* is the embodiment of all that people aspired to become.

The *Talmud* acknowledges forty-eight attributes by which mastery of the *Torah* was acquired, and the *Talmid Chacham* was

expected to display them all - in personal conduct, in manner of speech and in addressing people, and even in personal appearance and posture. Scholarship was not merely an intellectual achievement, but the person as a whole represented a symbol of knowledge.

Inherent in the *Talmudic* doctrine of literacy was also the assumption that access to the community of literati was open to all, the only qualification being scholastic ability, so that in this sense the Jewish society at large was, at least in theory, an open and democratic system. In practice, however, class distinction existed from the *Talmudic* period onward, with its most extreme manifestation in the division between *Talmudic Chacham* and ignoramus or layman.

In extensive ethnographic studies of traditional Jewish life in East European small towns, known in Yiddish as *Shtetle*, Zborovski (1949) and Hertzog and Zborovski (1962) propounded the existence of a distinct class division between *The Sheyne Yidden* (In Yiddish 'the beautiful Jews') and *The Proste Yidden* ('the common people'). The designation as *Sheyne* determined a combination of behaviour, manners and knowledge. The learned automatically belonged to the *sheyne Yidden*, since the most important basis for social stratification was scholarship.

Not only was the scholar the aristocrat of knowledge on whom the layman was dependent for his daily existence, it was through knowledge mediated by the *Talmid Chacham* that the layman was to be rewarded in the world to come. As a consequence, the ultimate goal of traditional Jewish society was to rear *Talmiday Chachamim*, a goal that could be attained only by the few who reached the highest institution designated for this purpose, the *Yeshiva*. And yet, the desire of becoming a *Talmid Chacham* permeated every phase of the enculturation process and constituted a major motif in the lore of traditional Jewish society. Upon the birth of a male child, the elders uttered the benediction "May he be raised for the *Torah* [for marriage and for doing good deeds]", meaning, may he become a *Talmid Chacham*. This ideal was poured into the baby's ear with the verse of his mother's lullaby "Under baby's cradle stands a snow white kid; the kid went off to trade with raisins and almonds; but what is the best trade? Baby will learn, *Torah* will he learn; holy books will he write; and good and pious shall baby remain." (English

translation Zborovski: 1949 (p. 91).

2.4 Education in European Traditional Jewry.

2.4.1 The Heder

The chief institution for literacy in European traditional Jewry was the *heder* (Hebrew for room)³ (Gamoran: 1924; Jacobson: 1939; Trachtenberg: 1939 Fishman: 1944; Ginzberg: 1958; Katz: 1961;).

The elementary curriculum taught in the *heder* adhered to guidelines compiled in 1309, known as the "Rules for the Study of the *Torah*" (*Hukei ha-Torah*), which constituted a comprehensive set of regulations addressing all aspects of formal education for the young (Gudemann, 1896). Literacy consisted primarily of reading, writing being considered an auxiliary skill that was rarely taught. (Those who did learn to write, had to master two scripts, the normative Hebrew script which was also used for Yiddish, and the *Rashi* script⁴ (Gamoran, 1924; Fishman, 1944). In the 16th and 17th century, writing was taught to two sections of the population at the extreme ends of the social ladder: the children of the wealthy, who in any case received private tuition in many subjects, and the children of the poor (the orphans), and often also the backward pupils who were unsuitable for advanced studies (Fishman, 1944). The possession of the writing skill enabled them to become scribes, a profession vital to the Jewish community's religious needs; they also served as public letter writers.

The actual teaching of literacy was performed at three successive levels. The first two the toddler's (*heder dardak*) and pentateuchal (*humash heder*), instructed the child in reading skills and acquainted him with the narrative and language of the Pentateuch, respectively. This process lasted for about five to seven years and started at the age of three or four.

The third level - the *Talmud heder* - was pedagogically the most problematic. At the age of ten, the child was supposed to begin his first encounter with the *Talmud*. At this level the child, who had already studied *Rashi's* commentaries on the Pentateuch and was acquainted with its *midrashic* view of the world, was expected to pick up the method of *Talmudic* idiom and thought-pattern by merely following more advanced students. The notion of studying the *Talmud* at all costs was criticised already in the 17th century:

the renowned scholar Judah Low of Prague commented that "They teach the boys to chirp like birds who sing and don't know what". (Trachtenberg: 1939 p.131).

The stated goal of the elementary education provided by the *heder*, especially the *Talmud heder*, was to enable students to become independent learners and to advance to higher levels without the direct instruction of a teacher. Most never achieved this goal, or even came near it. While the structure of the system was democratic in the sense that prima facie every student 'had a go' at the *Talmud*, in reality most failed and opted out. Stampfer (1988) saw in this failure one of the most important functions of the *heder* and interpreted the system as a dualistic one whose function was both to stimulate ambitions and to repress them, thus preparing individuals to accept their place in society.

The fact that study bore such importance necessitated curtailing the means for acquiring knowledge, lest its value should depreciate. Given the tradition and religious commitments of Jewish society, it was imperative to limit access to knowledge without appearing to do so. In this sense literacy in the *heder* served as a mechanism for social control.

Although sharply critical of the unsystematic pedagogy of the *heder* (as echoed in the ample academic literature on the subject), historians and educationalists agree that the chief advantage of the *heder's* method was that it related study to Jewish life at large (Gamoran: 1924; Fishman: 1944; Katz: 1961). As Katz says, "the *heder* was simply harnessed to the system of value on which the entire Jewish society was based " (1961 p. 191).

2.4.2 The Institute for Advanced Studies - the *Yeshiva* .

The institute for higher literacy studies (the *yeshiva*) was the key institution for raising, training and creating scholars, admitting only promising students. The catchment area of the *yeshivot* (plural for *Yeshiva*) included a number of localities. Famous 16th and 17th century *yeshivot* such as those of Prague, Cracow and Metz attracted students from far away, and even from abroad as a matter of course. Many students used to wander from one *yeshiva* to another in search of distinguished rabbinic scholars, as was the custom in other European universities, especially in the 14th and 15th centuries.

Normally, the entry age to the *yeshiva* was thirteen, and no entrance examinations were required, the right of acceptance being in the hands of the head of the *yeshiva* around whose personality and erudition the entire structure of study revolved.

The sole prerequisite for admittance was completion of the study course provided by the *Talmudic heder*, a condition that reminds one of the entry requirements to European universities in general. (Ginzberg: 1958).

Although students were expected to study independently according to an individualised curriculum, in essence the *yeshiva* was a formal institution that facilitated a highly structured and systematic course of study, followed by frequent reviews and tests, all governed by a hierarchical system of scholastic awards.

It was the *yeshiva* with its inspiring *Talmiday Chachamim*, its defined and circumscribed milieu, that set its alumni and teachers apart from the rest of the community. Intellectual ability was reinforced by the method of *Talmudic* casuistic argumentation integrated into the study of the text, and practised for pre-set periods, according to the curriculum. The method of *Talmudic* casuistry, known as *pilpul* ('hair-splitting') acquired an extreme form in the 16th to 18th century, in that proficiency in casuistic disputation became an end in itself and a mark of distinction of the *yeshiva* student. The urge to excel led to farfetched argumentation divorced from reality, a sophistry that led to critical campaigns by some rabbinic scholars of the time. Nevertheless, the art of *pilpul* took root and mastering it became a landmark of high intellectual attainment, by which the scholar secured his high status on the social stratification scale.

The highest acclaimed award of a *yeshiva* scholar was the title of *morenu* (Hebrew for 'our teacher'). According to Trachtenberg (1939) this title corresponded to the contemporary university doctorate degree. Even the lowest academic title, that of *haver* (fellow), was not easily obtained, and was only granted after the student had been married at least two years (the average marriageable age was 18). For the title of *morenu*, an additional minimal period of six years after marriage was required. (Fishman 1944).

The idea that entrance into the aristocracy of *literati* was reached by means of a prolonged puberty rite was suggested by Ong(1959).

The intellectual textcentred condition in the *yeshiva* under which the students lived easily fits into Ong's idea of "marginal environment" in which the 'tribal wisdom' was located in the *Talmudic* doctrine. Moreover, his reasoning that "a boy's education was basically a puberty rite, a process of preparing him for adult life by communicating to him the heritage of the past in a setting which toughened him and thus guaranteed his guarding the heritage for the future..."(p. 247) is apposite. In the *Yeshiva* the passage was achieved purely through literacy, through commerce with the text. Guarding the heritage for future generations was the *raison d'être* of the *Yeshiva's* existence. Jewish society at large not only acknowledged scholarship and intellectual hegemony as the embodiment of its highest societal values, but, by establishing a framework for its perpetual availability, guaranteed its continual existence (Stamper: 1988).

2.5. Female Literacy.

Jewish religion is a male-oriented religion. Whereas the male is ordered to fulfil 613 divine commandments, a woman is obliged to adhere to three commandments only. It is therefore not surprising that literacy was preponderantly the prerogative of the male, at least in its formal expressions and manifestations. Yet, although the majority of women did not acquire literacy skills, to assume that Jewish women were totally ignorant would be erroneous. As an enculturation agent, the woman was expected to transmit to her children -notably to her sons- the basics of Jewish consciousness, a task that required a minimal knowledge of Jewish law. It was the woman's obligatory duty to maintain dietary laws, one of the intense Jewish social control and cultural segregation mechanisms, and a powerful cultural device for cohesiveness. She also acted as the link with the outside world, especially in instances where the husband was engaged in study. It was the woman, though not fully conversant with literacy, who saw to business and was familiar with the local vernacular. She imparted her linguistic knowledge to the very young children not yet integrated into the education framework, also teaching them to pray in the vernacular (though children were accustomed to easy Hebrew verses and benedictions from a very early age).

The attendance of women at congregational and family religious ceremonies made it desirable that they had some elementary knowledge of Hebrew and, apparently, more women mastered this language than became publicly obvious; the same applies to the general extent of literacy knowledge in Yiddish and the local vernacular. Although there was no formal provision for the education of women, (a tradition stemming from *Talmudic* times), it is plausible that many girls received instruction at home, as can be deduced from the immense popularity of a Yiddish book called *Tse'edah uRe'edah* (Go, and Observe). An assortment of biblical and traditional stories and comments on Jewish life, from its publication in 1620 it was the most widely read book and the first encounter with traditional narratives for most young children. The stories, which were read aloud in a prayer-like chant, constituted the main literary Sabbath occupation of the East European Jewish women (Gamoran: 1924).

By and large, literacy as practised by the women was conditioned by several cultural and social factors which limited and set the goals of their training. The considerable degree of acculturation of the Sephardic societies allowed women relatively easy access to literacy. In 12th century Egypt blind teachers were at a premium as girls could sit before them without a problem (Ben-Sasson: 1974). Cases of true scholarship among women in Egypt of that period are known (ibid), as well as instances of learned women who were allowed to lecture to men, with the provision that they remain hidden behind a curtain (Baron: 1942). In Italy, in the 15th to 17th century women were sufficiently knowledgeable to give elementary instruction to both boys and girls, their salary being regulated by the *Talmud Torah* Society. In 1475 a *Talmud Torah* school for girls was opened in Rome and women were known as patronesses of the arts and sciences (Baron: 1942).

Among the Ashkenazic women, illiteracy was much more widespread, although sporadic cases of teaching of girls is known to have taken place in the 12th and 13th centuries in France and Germany and, interestingly enough, it was famous scholars who introduced their daughters to the study of the Law (Gudemann: 1888). In the ghetto periods of the 17th and 18th centuries private tuition among the affluent families residing in the German and Western lands was quite common. It would include French, German,

music and art lessons. In Eastern Europe instruction tended to remain confined to a rudimentary knowledge of the basics of tradition, mainly in Yiddish. Female literacy acquisition was therefore circumscribed, remaining in the realm of traditional lore. It allowed women to master the literacy of the prayer book and Pentateuch, but never that of the *Talmud* (Gamoran: 1924; Fishmann: 1944). Nevertheless, as in the *Talmudic* period, women acquired merit when they arranged for their sons to study and patiently awaited their husbands' return from the house of study. They were equally expected to create an environment conducive to study, in which the hegemony of knowledge remained in the hands of the men.

2.6 Literacy as a cultural Performance.

This chapter has been dealing with the social construction and institutions which used literacy as an integrating force to instill authority and to legitimise forms of the social order. This constituted what Geertz calls "frameworks of beliefs". What remains in Geertz's terms is "the ongoing process of interactive behaviour whose persistent form we call social structure." (1973). In Jewry such behaviours included books as ritualistic objects; rituals of study, in both the respect shown to texts and the physical habit of swaying at prayer. These combined to offer study as a mystical experience when the participant feels that..."he is at that very moment being taught by God" (Copland: 1984 p.94).

The very first contact with the alphabet and the acquisition of reading skills, for which the prayerbook was used, was one of the major rituals of traditional mediaeval Jewry. Parents and relatives fasted on the first day of school and special prayers (in Yiddish) were prescribed for the mother (Roskis: 1978).

The first-day ritual of the toddlers came from the 12th century when the guidelines for the ceremony were laid down in the '*mahazor Vitry*' (See 2.1). The preferred dates for this illustrious occasion were either the feast of Pentecost, the traditional anniversary of the revelation on Mount Sinai, or the first day of the month in which Passover is celebrated. The boy who was three or four years old, wrapped in his father's prayer shawl, was placed in front of the *Torah* scroll from which the Ten Commandments were

read aloud, after which he was presented with a honey covered slate on which the letters of the alphabet and verses from the Pentateuch were inscribed. The boy repeated the inscriptions after the teacher and was then allowed to lick the honey. Honey cakes, made by the hands of a virgin, and hard boiled eggs on which verses and the names of angels were written were usually eaten. Finally, if the family lived near a river or a stream, the child was taken for a walk along its banks, because the *Torah* has been compared to mighty waters (Proverbs 5:16) (Jacobson: 1939; Schauss: 1950; Abrahams: 1958; Ginzberg: 1958; Roskis: 1978). In the 17th and 18th centuries, honeycakes or coins were dropped on the boy's head or on the table, and he would be told that an angel from heaven dropped them in order to arouse his zest for learning. Roskis (1978) maintains that "what characterises the ... ceremony above all, is its sensual nature, The child is held surrounded with the smell of his father's praying shawl, he is carried and sits on the father's lap, there is food to lick and chew. In this ceremony a boy is introduced to an alphabet, an abstract series of signs, by means of all the senses, culminating in a concrete reward of the 'angelic coin'". (1978 p. 26).

Around the age of six, when the boy was about to begin the study of the Pentateuch, a second ceremony, symbolising the induction into the community of the 'children of the book' was held. By now, the boy was a reader and was expected to decipher every word in his prayerbook and to be ready to study the weekly portions read in the synagogue. According to historical sources (Gamoran: 1924; Fishman: 1944) and personal memoirs (Shtern: 1950), the ceremony took weeks to prepare and was mainly a recitation of a prescribed dialogue between teacher and pupil on the meaning of the book of Leviticus, the boy's first encounter with the Pentateuch.

The ceremonies of initiating the boys into literacy can be interpreted as an enactment of dedicating the sons to the service of the *Torah*, and therefore to the service of God, an echo of the biblical story of Hanna who took "...her son Samuel after she had weaned him .. and brought him to the house of the Lord and the child was young ... and she said... I present him to the Lord ... as long as he lives he will be devoted to the Lord." (Sam I: 1, 24, 27).

Research dealing with the place of book learning in traditional Jewish culture refers to the role of literacy as upholding a sense of

"time-consciousness" (Copeland: 1984), that is, the arousal of a historical feeling of unity and continuity in time and space (Zborovski: 1949; Heilman: 1983). This notion of time-consciousness was tangible in the fabric of the various festivals, notably those of Passover and the Feast of the Tabernacles which had (and for that matter still have) a strong didactic element in that they use literacy as a main component. Study was regarded as an act in which the distinction of time was blurred and blended (Zborovski: 1949). The *Yeshiva* student participated in discussions between the *Talmudic* sages of the first century and in their argumentations pertaining to rituals of sacrifice in the Temple, as if he himself was present there and then. Entering into the world of study meant to be subjected to a process of traditioning (and conditioning), and taking upon oneself the ethos and world view of those who in previous generations likewise intoned and studied the same words. Consequently, studying was a prime factor in the historical continuum that forged cohesion, thus constituting a cultural and national survival device.

Even the slightest whiff of literacy taken in during the first stages of the *heder* system sufficed to instill the rudiments of tradition into the child's consciousness. It formed the basic lower stratum supporting the communal edifice of national identity. On a higher plane, the cohesive force of literacy found its expression in the unceasing preoccupation with study as an intellectual exercise. This distinction between ritual literacy and that of the academic context had to be maintained so as to ensure the continuing supremacy of the upper strata of literati. It was precisely this distinction between the upper and lower stratum of literacy that reinforced the idea of study as an act of worship, a duty that had been laid upon the individual by a Supreme power, regardless of his personal will, and that had to be accepted unquestioningly. It was meant as a coalescing force and there is no doubt that as such it indeed succeeded.

Summary.

In this chapter I brought to the fore the traditions of literacy that dominated the Jewish Ashkenazic European communities from the 11th to the second half of the 18th century. I pointed out the distinction that existed between the literacy of the masses, which was designed to be interchangeable with tradition, and that of the

elite formed by the *Talmudic* scholars. The stated aim was to provide literacy to the populace, which would enable everyone to attend to the maxims of the Jewish faith. Furthermore, society at large was committed to nurturing the ideal of *talmid chacham*, a goal desired by many, but achieved only by a selected minority. The chapter also focussed on the social and cultural dynamics that utilised literacy as a cohesive force for upholding Jewish tradition, while at the same time functioned as a barrier against acculturation and assimilation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Myth of the *Halutz*: The Literacy Patterns in the Hebraic Schools in Palestine During the Period of the *Yishuv* (1882 - 1948).

3. Introduction.

In this chapter I consider the roles of literacy in the schools of the Jewish community in Palestine during the period of national revival which preceded the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Literacy reflected and mediated the maxims of Zionism (Jewish modern revitalisation movement), particularly its dominant socialist ideology. A characteristic feature of this ideology was the figure of the *halutz* (pioneer), the symbol of cultural renewal and the antithesis of the *talmid chacham*.

The chapter starts with a brief overview of the Jewish educational system as it was prior to the establishment of the first Hebraic schools. Section two and three concern the consolidation of the Zionist socialist *halutziut* (pioneering) ideology as the hegemonic discourse of the Jewish community. Section four deals with the reintroduction of Ivriith (Hebrew) as the spoken language of the Jewish population in Palestine, and its utilisation as a vehicle for the transmission of the *halutz* myth. Section five discusses the salient expressions of the myth of the *halutz* literacy. Section six explores the growing tension between old and new literacies. This found its expression in the creation and coexistence of three educational discourses known as the 'Trends'. In section seven I point to the impact of the Trend dialectic in perpetuating an elitist literacy, access to which was the prerogative of the son of the *halutz*, the new 'Child of the Book'.

3.1 Literacy in the Old *Yishuv*.

3.1.1 Patterns of Traditional Literacy.

On the eve of the modern waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1882, the incumbent Jewish population numbered 24,000, concentrated in the four 'holy cities' of Jerusalem, Tiberias, Hebron and Safad. This community, known as 'the old *yishuv*' (literally 'the old population') was composed of both Ashkenazi and

Sephardi/oriental Jewry. Both factions of the old *yishuv* maintained traditional schools, i.e. *heder*, and *yeshiva*.

The studies in all of these schools were confined to religious texts and the modes of instruction corresponded to those of the traditional European Jewish schools (for the Ashkenazi faction) or to those prevalent in the Sephardi version of the *heder* - the *kutab* (Gillis: 1987). The language of instruction was either Yiddish or Ladino (a vernacular of Spanish, spoken by the Sephardi population). The educational institutions were financially supported by donations from abroad, as was, in fact, the entire old *yishuv*.

The one extra language taught in these traditional educational institutions was Hebrew, as this was a *sine qua non* for attending the religious ceremonies and the reading of the *Torah*. However, as Hebrew was considered the *lashon hakodesh* (the holy language), its profane use was restricted to communications between Jewish communities which lacked a common language.

3.1.2 The Emergence of Secular Jewish Education in Palestine.

The creation of the first Jewish secular modern schools in the second half of the 19th century derived from a philanthropic, somewhat paternalistic, philosophy favoured by the enlightened and emancipated Jews of Western and Central Europe, who saw it their duty to found schools for their co-religionists in the Mediterranean region and the Levant. Starting from 1856 Jewish philanthropic organisations, such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle de Paris, the Anglo-Jewish Association of London and the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden in Berlin, founded and maintained the first non-religious Jewish schools in Palestine. These schools were established with the aim of promoting emancipation and progress through general and trade education for Jewish children (Bentwich: 1965; Kleinberger: 1969; Nachum: 1980).

The introduction of secular education into a well established traditional setting, the provision of formal literacy for girls, and the parents' responsive acceptance of the challenge of modern education led to socio-cultural conflict. The leaders of the orthodox old *yishuv* saw the secular schools as a threat to the hegemony of traditional literacy and feared an undermining of its authority. No wonder, therefore, that the establishment of the secular schools met with

strong opposition from the orthodox community and its leaders. They even intimidated prospective 'wayward' parents by enforcing the age-old ban of excommunication on those whose children attended secular schools (Bentwich: 1965). Opposition notwithstanding, the network of the philanthropic secular schools steadily spread throughout the old *yishuv*. These schools formed the nucleus of the more modern secular educational system that was to arise in Palestine some decades later. (Kleinberger: 1969).

The language of instruction in the secular schools differed according to the geographical origins of their affiliation, though it should be noted that the first instances of integrating Ivrit as a curricular subject are to be found in these very schools (Bentwich: 1965; Haramati: 1979; Elboim-Dror: 1986, 1990).

3.2 Zionism and the Concept of the New Jew.

In contrast to the philanthropic organisations, which were dedicated to disseminating French, English or German culture, the first Hebraic schools were based on the principles and ideals of Zionism. The founders of these schools were the Jewish immigrants to Palestine of the 1880's, who formed the basis of the modern pre-statehood community, the new '*yishuv*'.

From the beginning of modern Jewish resettlement in Palestine in 1882 to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, historic research distinguishes five waves of immigration, known as *aliyah* (literally 'ascendance'). Starting with the first *aliyah* of 1882-1903 and gathering momentum during the second (1904-1913) and third (1914-1923) *aliyah*, Zionist ideology, by general consensus of the *yishuv*, constituted the fundamental way of life of the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. Its credo called for the renaissance of the Jewish people, aspiring to establish in the ancestral historic homeland of Palestine a modern, secular, self-supporting and sovereign Jewish society. One of Zionism's principal rules derived from the concept of *shlilat hagolah* (negation of the diaspora), which would bring about an "anthropological revolution" (Rosenstein: 1985 pp. 10) in that it would create a new Jewish type - the Ivri - who would be the antithesis of the diaspora Jew. (Gorni 1979; Even-Zohar: 1981; Shaked: 1982). As the new Jew, the Ivri would also detach himself from religious traditions, many of which, according to Zionist

doctrine, had come into being and had been shaped by the abnormal course of Jewish life in the diaspora. Eventually the Ivri transformed into the image of the *halutz*, Zionism's most value-charged cultural symbol.

Here it seems appropriate to acquaint the reader with the main features of the Zionist socialist ideology embodied in the persona of the second *aliya* protagonist, the *halutz*, and to consider the transformation of this ideology into the *yishuv's* hegemonic discourse. The next section therefore diverts from the main theme to address these two complementary issues.

3.2.1 The Ideal of the *Halutz*

The *halutz*, the second *aliyah's* unique creation, is a cultural and socio-political symbol rolled into one. The word *halutz* is borrowed from the bible (Numbers 33:20): it was the *halutz* who led the Israelites in the desert and who was the first to heed the call to war. In the rhetoric of Zionism the *halutz* is the vanguard who 'paves the way for the commune' (as the Hebrew phrase has it).

The contrast between the *halutz* and the diaspora Jew is expressed in Zionist rhetoric in the following set of binary oppositions:-

<u><i>Halutz</i></u>	<u><i>Diaspora Jew</i></u>
revolutionary world view	traditional worldview
secular life style	religious way of life
productivity, self-support	dependence on charity
manual worker	concern for scholarship
Plain direct speech	Uses casuistical subtleties
Speaks Ivrit	Speaks Yiddish
Is rooted in the land	Is a wandering Jew.

Detachment from familiar surroundings, the absence of the nuclear family and its authority, rebellion against traditional norms coupled with the socialist egalitarian ideology all forced the *halutz* to seek in his peers a surrogate primary-relation group. The collective constituted his base for mutual engagement in joint ventures and shared experiences which ultimately built up into a form of social structure called by Turner *communitas* (Turner: 1967, 1969; Katriel

and Neshet: 1986). This is a relatively undifferentiated community of equal individuals, characterised by anonymity, absence of personal property, simplicity in speech and manner, abolition of rank, as well as other egalitarian attributes. The paradigmatic reference group of the era in question is the *kibbutz*, a collective organisation displaying all the characteristics of *communitas*. The *kibbutz* ideology intertwined aspiration for national renaissance, the demand for total social reform and the quest for self realisation; a configuration that used manual agricultural labour as its highest expression.

The *halutz* ideology did not, however, remain confined to the idiosyncratic individuals of second and third *aliyah*. On the contrary, it was readily received by the *yishuv* and became known as *halutzit*. This value-laden concept signified renewal, change and individual commitment to volunteer. In the *halutzit* ideology the individual saw himself as committed to work for the fulfilment of the Zionist mission of the collective. For instance, it was self-evident that joining the *kibbutz* was the climax of this mission, since the element of communal life carried a value in its own right.

The character sketch of the *halutz* would not be complete without including the *sabra* (native born) of the *yishuv* period. Although the word *sabra* designates any Jew born in Israel, in the rhetoric of the *yishuv* it referred primarily to the descendants of immigrants from Eastern and Central European origin. This cultural subgroup was regarded by the *yishuv* (and certainly by the *sabra* himself) as an exclusive elite within the community. The cultural dominance and political hegemony exerted by this group remained tangible throughout the first three decades of statehood (Rubinstein: 1977; Shaked: 1982; Liebman and Don-Yehiya: 1983; Katriel: 1986).

The *sabra* image is an extension of that of the *halutz*. The former possessed some distinct characteristics of its own, while the *halutz*, a child of the European Jewish communities, was the scion of the tradition he rejected. The *sabra* was the very embodiment of the uncontaminated Ivri and the epitome of the 'negation of the diaspora'. His main characteristic was rootedness in the soil of Palestine. And this, indeed, is implied in the actual metaphor of the *sabra* (the fruit of the native cactus plant).

From the fourth *aliyah* period (1924-1931) onward the collectivist value system of the *yishuv* bred vigorous youth

movements which enhanced the socialisation of the *sabra* and which were the breeding ground for the future elite of the State. The youth movements' *raison d'être* was to prepare manpower for the *kibbutz*. Joining the *kibbutz* was considered the principal act of self realisation of *halutziut*. In a sense, it also provided an extension of adolescence in the service of the Zionist ideal. Surprisingly, only a small proportion of youth-movement members actually joined the *kibbutz*, a fact that did not diminish, however, the elitist image of youth movement members (Shapira and Peleg, 1984; Shapiro, 1985)¹.

During the later part of the *yishuv* (1931-1938) the image of the *sabra* and the concept of youth movement had become indivisible: for the majority of the *yishuv* adolescents the youth movement constituted a surrogate family and home, from which one, ideally, left to join the *kibbutz* and the pre-state armed unit. In Turner's terms, youth movements and volunteer armed-units were linked by the spirit of *communitas*, as exemplified by the ethos of the *kibbutz* and *halutziut*.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that all immigrants who came to Palestine during the *yishuv*, especially those of the fourth (1924-1931) and fifth (1931-1939) *aliya*, were *halutzim* in the proper sense of the word. However, *halutziut* ideology and its organisational patterns were not only maintained and perpetuated in the social structure of the *yishuv*, but guided and shaped the future development of the *yishuv*'s population at large (Eisenstadt: 1967).

3.2.2 The Discourse of *Halutziut*

The *halutziut* ideology proved a suitable framework for the development and institution of a new symbol system and, as no counter ideology of any overriding validity was brought forward by any other political group, this ideology became the *yishuv*'s hegemonic discourse. A discourse is a cultural-political configuration of signifiers through which ideologies are inscribed (McLaren 1986 p.126). I can touch only briefly on the "social materials" and "cultural forms" (Geertz, 1973) from which the *yishuv*'s discourse was built. Zionist socialism was a secular movement that drew its doctrine from international socialist conceptions. Its very existence as the leading movement of the *yishuv* was denial of the diaspora and affirmation

of the emergent Ivri personality. Yet, the cultural elements of which the consciousness of Zionist socialism was to be constructed were retrieved from the deep levels of the 'longue duree' of collective memory (Braudel: 1980). Motifs, symbols, rituals and linguistic expressions, though selectively chosen and transformed, transvalued and reformulated, (and often appearing as the converse of tradition), leaned heavily on the overtly negated Jewish tradition.

The most striking example of reformulating traditional content to suit the *halutziut* discourse is the *kibbutz* custom of rewriting the classical Passover text of the *Haggada*. Reading this old and venerated text during the festive Passover dinner as a main symbolic literacy event is deeply ingrained in Jewish tradition. During the *yishuv* period, the text was revised and re-revised in order to incorporate all the motifs of Zionist socialism, with each *kibbutz* composing its own version of the story of national redemption and liberty. Reciting the new version of the *Haggada* became the focal ceremony of the *kibbutz* Passover celebrations, which was endowed with the legitimisation of a cultural statement (Reich: 1972).

Zionist socialism delegated the military role to the *halutz*. In the *halutziut* discourse, defence was equated with biblical and Second Temple period idioms of heroism. Second Temple period heroic figures, such as the *Maccabees* and *Bar Kochba*, were retrieved and turned into ideal role models. *Hannukah* (the festival of light), an event traditionally associated with the *Maccabees*, was transmogrified into a national feast.

The first of the myths that evolved out of the *halutziut* tale concerned Mount Massada in the Judean desert, the scene of the last stand of the Jews against the Romans in 73 A.D. The second myth, that of *Tel Hai*, tells the story of the death of the *halutz* Yosef Trumpeldor and seven of his comrades in 1920 in a fight against Arab intruders into the Galilee hamlet of Tel Hai. (Liebman and Don-Yehia: 1983).

This myth-building created a feeling of cultural and historical continuity and unity which was conducive in strengthening the *yishuv's* collective identity. In this sense, *halutziut* functioned as a mechanism for arousing and sustaining cohesion and solidarity, defined by Durkheim (1982) as "mechanical solidarity". The *halutziut* discourse became in Geertz's (1973) terms the "cultural text" of the

yishuv.

3.3 First Instances of Zionist Oriented Education.

The arrival of the Jewish immigrants during the period of the first *aliyah* (1882-1903) marks the start of a Hebraic-oriented educational endeavour on a national scale that was consciously used to create and transmit a new literacy composed along the lines of Zionist rhetoric. These settlers established the first agricultural colonies in Palestine and set up the first Hebraic schools in which the language of instruction was Ivrit (Bentwich, 1965; Elboim-Dror, 1982, 1986; Haramati, 1979). Three Ivrit speaking schools opened in 1887, 1888 and 1889 in three agricultural colonies, and the first Ivrit speaking kindergarten was established in 1898 (again in an agricultural settlement).

This modest beginning of Zionist oriented education in Palestine gained momentum with the arrival of teachers who came with the second *aliyah*, and whose appearance on the national scene marked a turning point in the history of modern Hebraic education. These teachers (from hereon referred to as 'Ivrit teachers') primarily aimed at freeing the educational system from the patronage of the Jewish philanthropic organisations and from their curricular and pedagogical influences.²

The comparatively rapid increase in the number of Hebraic schools, where the language of instruction and the curricular topics were clear manifestations of a national revival, was a direct expression of the growing influence of *halutzit* on the *yishuv* at large. Here, the concept of pioneering was personified by the Ivrit teacher, who acted as cultural vanguard or, in the terms of the day, as cultural *halutz* (Wallace: 1965; Eisenstadt: 1970; Elboim-Dror: 1986).

The second *aliyah* Ivrit teachers, who were steeped in progressive nationalism, succeeded in turning the embryonic Hebraic schools into sites for the inculcation of their ideological and cultural messages. Indeed, between 1918-1948 (better known as the British mandate period), schools, especially the elementary schools -and to a certain extent the kindergartens- played a central role in the formation of the *yishuv's* value system. They were major vehicles in the process of implementation and promulgation of the image of the *halutz* as

the symbol of cultural renewal. The *halutz* became an inseparable part of the schools' curricula and literacies.

It is no wonder, therefore, that during the period of the *yishuv* schools assumed considerable political and ideological importance which made them instrumental in the creation of a new collective identity forged by the leaders of the *yishuv* under the impetus of *halutziut* ideology.

Since schools (apart from the *kibbutz* and the youth movements) were the prime arenas for communicating and mediating the terminology and main motifs of *halutziut*, the oral and written texts of the new literacy were imbued with themes and language pertaining to the *halutz* myth. Before, however, going into the ways and means by which the *halutziut* discourse was disseminated via the school system, attention must be paid to the consolidation of Ivrit as the principal language of communication and instruction in the *yishuv*.

3.4 The Revival of Ivrit.

The *yishuv* considered the adoption of Ivrit as its dominant language to be the most conspicuous act of the Zionist revolution. Use of the ancient language was gradually transformed into a force for cohesion and unity inseparable from the *halutziut* discourse. The literature dealing with the revitalisation of Ivrit as a daily means of communication is voluminous (Rabin: 1972; Haramati: 1979; Gold: 1989, 1986). I will address only the process of the integration of Ivrit into the educational system, and focus on one manifestation of this process namely, the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* (Ivrit in Ivrit) period (1882-1914) (Gillis, 1987; Haramati, 1979; Rabin: 1977; Elboim-Dror: 1986 1990), which seems the most relevant to the present discussion.

The idea of using Ivrit as the sole language of instruction was first implemented by individual teachers in the schools of the agricultural colonies, the sites of the first Hebraic schools in Palestine. The first institutionalised proclamation of the *Ivrit b'Ivrit* ideology was heard during the First Conference to Implement the Teaching of Ivrit which was held in Jerusalem in 1891. At this meeting the participants passed the resolution to teach all curricular topics in Ivrit despite the lack of terminology for both everyday usage and

the school subjects. The establishment in 1898 of the first Ivrit speaking kindergarten, not only enhanced the introduction of Ivrit into the Hebraic educational network, it was also a prime instrument in the institutionalisation of Ivrit as the first language of the *sabra*.(Bentwich 1965). The Hebraic Teachers Association founded in 1903 set itself the task of formulating guidelines for the teaching of an Ivrit terminology for the various subjects. They took upon themselves the task of composing the first texts of study material to be used in the elementary schools.

The ideologic-political decision to make Ivrit the language of scholastic instruction encountered some practical obstacles. First, there was the elusive connection between the spoken and the written language. The typical 'founding teacher' of Ivrit, the cultural vanguard and idealist who was keen to teach the language, although able to read Ivrit easily, was not always well versed in the spoken version of the language. This anomaly affected pedagogical efforts. Secondly, the lack of modern lexis demanded the composition of new words, whose roots were culled from the ancient texts of the Bible and the *Talmud*. Words for the accumulating lexicon had to be invented every day (a process, by the way, that continues in contemporary Israel).

The lack of textbooks and of professional vocabulary in Ivrit was evident when the first Hebraic secondary school (The Hebraic Gymnasium) in Jaffa was opened in 1905. Despite these difficulties, and keeping within the spirit of the time, the establishment of this school proved that Ivrit was not only a language for "scholars and kids" (Ormian: 1973), but could be used for all branches of modern life, including science.

One of the complexities of the use of Ivrit as a spoken language was the question of its correct pronunciation. Although the *yishuv* had more or less accepted Ivrit as its daily language (Rabin: 1972), the decision to adopt the Sephardic pronunciation (which places the accent on the last syllable of the word, as was prevalent among the Sephardic community of the old *yishuv*) was far from unanimous and its acceptance was fraught with difficulties. The eventual decision by the majority of the Ashkenazi teachers to nominate the Sephardic pronunciation the correct one (now the established form of modern Ivrit) was therefore a clear demonstration of the cultural and

political overtones of what seemed a purely linguistic matter.

The tentative beginnings of the propagation of Ivri were undoubtedly strengthened by the arrival of the Ivri teachers of the second *aliyah* and the growing influence of the *halutziut* ideology on the *yishuv*'s population. These militant second *aliyah* teachers, became the agents who turned the Ivri question into a major political issue. Their action culminated in the controversy as to whether Ivri should officially become the exclusive language of instruction. The fight raged mainly in the elementary schools which were the primary sites for instilling national literacy, and reached its climax in the cultural campaign of 1913, known as the 'language war' (Kleinberger: 1964; Rabin: 1972; Bentwich: 1965; Elboim-Dror: 1986).

The final coup that determined the end of the language war in favour of Ivri was the success of The Hebraic Teachers Association's call for a general strike of all teachers and students. The campaign for the dominance of Ivri entailed much more than question of language *per se*. Not far below the surface was the struggle for hegemony by the leading ideology. The teachers supporting Ivri saw themselves as the heirs of Ben Zakkai and his disciples³, as the defenders of a revived national and cultural identity. (Elboim-Dror: 1986).

The victory of the Ivri faction in the language war resulted in the consolidation of a national oriented Hebraic school system, whose self-declared main task was the dissemination of the new Ivri literacy and its use in socialising the new generation of the *sabra* into the rhetoric of *halutziut*. This educational enterprise was enhanced by the growing number of pupils that entered the educational scene as native speakers of Ivri. Indeed, for most of the children of the *yishuv* from the early 1920's onwards Ivri was no longer the language of texts to be pursued in a one-way traffic from the written to the read, but constituted their natural daily means of communication (Rabin: 1972).

3.5 The Myth of the Halutz as an Ideological Model of Literacy Teaching.

Zionist socialism in its endeavour to create a new Jewish identity, exploited a particular type of literacy to create and sustain cohesion and solidarity. The conscious commitment of Zionism in general, and

of Zionist socialism in particular, to building a new society based on a new definition of Judaism populated by a new kind of Jew warrant an educational system specifically constructed for the transmission of its new literacy.

The *yishuv*'s educational authorities used the teaching of literacy to induct the young into the myth of the *halutz*, with the aim of sustaining and consolidating it as the hegemonic discourse of the community. Kindergartens and the elementary schools acted as the main vehicles for this propagation of myth. This can be seen in the *halutz* leitmotif running through the nursery rhymes, poems, stories and the first reading texts used in them. Take, for instance, the following rhyme, chosen from the abundant material available, which illustrates how the cultural materials enfolded in the myth of the *halutz* were exploited in composing a text for the beginning reader:

I	II
Ho Ho Ha!	I come from far, far away
Who is coming?	Where the halutzim are waiting
It is a boat with a funnel	With their staff and haversack
Where do you come from?	To travel
And what do you bring us?	To the land of Israel.

The verse carries a powerful cultural statement about the wandering Jew turning into a rooted individual, an implied new Genesis and new Exodus. Of significance is the play on words with the text borrowed from the Bible "for with my staff I passed over this Jordan" (Genesis 32:10).

Another representative example is the use of the word *ner* (candle), often the first word in many primers that were in use in the *yishuv* primary schools. The universal symbolism attached to fire and light is also found in Jewish tradition, from the burning bush myth to the kindling of candles on religious feasts and on the entrance of the sabbath. As for the *yishuv* at large, the traditional meaning of these elements had become coloured with a secular nationalistic hue, as exemplified by the nationalistic meaning that was now attached to *Hannuka* (the feast of light). Considering the interpretation given to the motif of fire in the *halutz* discourse, the choice of this word can not be called accidental, nor can it be attributed only to its gestalt in Ivrit, a shape viewed by some as an

easy introduction to reading (Gillis: 1987) (see figure 1).

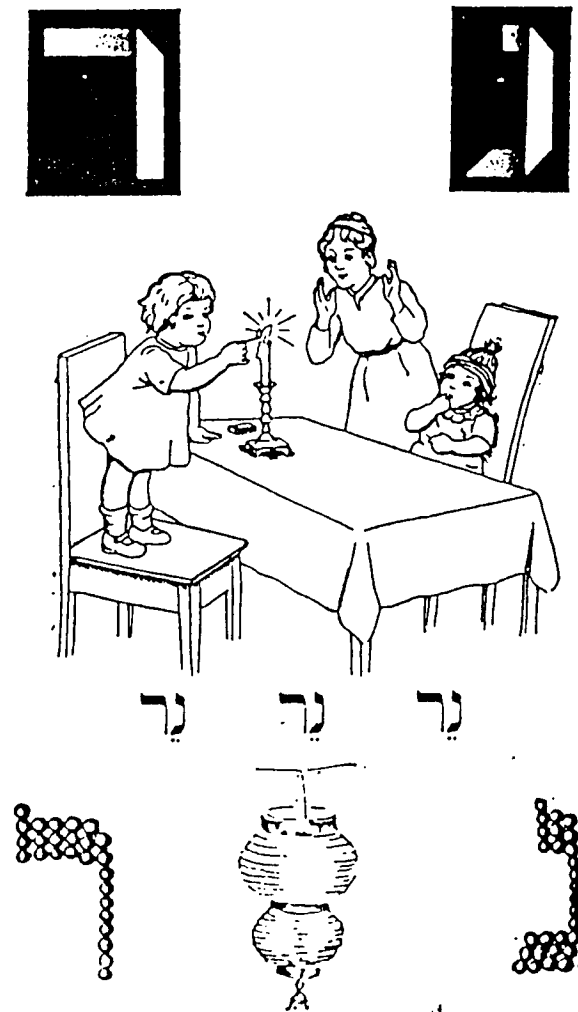


Figure 1.



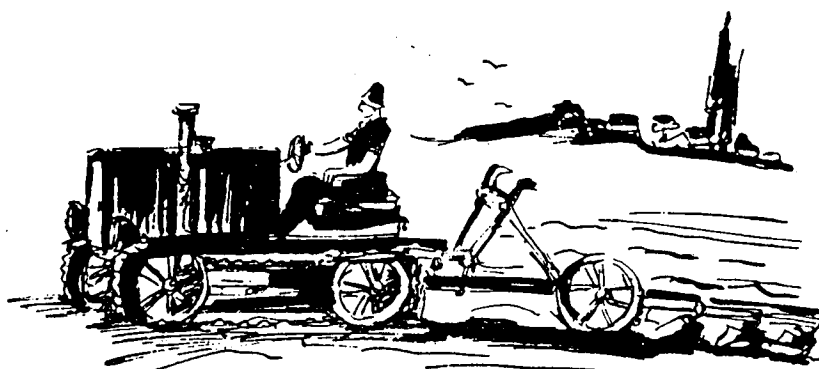
אָפּר זורע

אָפּר זורע חטָה.
 אַחרי הגשם תצמח החטָה.
 תצמח החטָה — יהיה לָחם.
 יהיה לָחם טוב,
 יהיה לָחם לָרֵב,
 לָחם לְכֹל —
 קטן וגדול.

לָ לָרֵב

לָ לָחם

Figure 3.



אָפּר חוֹרשׁ

הגה שָׂדֶה. אָפּר עוֹבֵד בְּשָׂדֶה.
לְאָפּר מַחְרֵשֶׁה. בַּמַּחְרֵשֶׁה הוּא חוֹרֵשׁ.
— קָשָׁה לְחַרֵּשׁ?
— לֹא, לֹא. יָלֵד טוֹב.
אַחֲרֵי הַיּוֹרֵה לֹא קָשָׁה לְחַרֵּשׁ.
אַחֲרֵי הַיּוֹרֵה הָאֲדָמָה רַבָּה.

מַחְרֵשֶׁה

אָפּר

שָׂדֶה

Figure 2.

A major motif is that of the 'redemption of the land and importance of agricultural work'. 'Redemption of the land', as preached by *halutziut*, was more than a mere association with agriculture proper, symbolising, as it did, the total break with exilic life. The *halutziut* rhetoric stressed permanence, rootedness, belonging and, above all, the need to descend from the sphere of spiritual aloofness to the physical and concrete. A symbolic ritual in this context was the planting of trees, a metaphor that became entwined with festivals that re-enacted reunion between man and nature.

In the primers of the *yishuv* father and child were depicted (both in words and pictures) as farmers (i.e. *halutzim*), busy with things that farmers do: ploughing fields, gathering hay, planting trees, cultivating orange groves, milking cows, shepherding sheep, and the like. Figures 2 and 3 show texts devoted to the teaching of a basic vocabulary (as is apparent from the sight words at the bottom of the page - figure 2) or to the teaching of a vowel sound (Figure 3). The content of the text is a direct expression of the *halutz* myth and focuses on the motif of 'being a farmer'. During 1923-1939 the socio-demographic texture of the Yishuv began to change from rural and agricultural to urban and industrial. Fewer and fewer of the children using the primer would have contact with the mythic scene in the illustration.

To enlighten the reader, the sight words in Figures 2 and 3 read (from right to left): 'field' אַרְצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה, 'farmer' הַחֹפֵּץ, 'plough' הַשֵּׂדֶה הַשָּׂדֶה, 'bread' הַלֶּחֶם, 'abound' הַשָּׂדֶה הַשָּׂדֶה.

Many texts in the primers aimed at instilling into the minds of the young the maxims of Zionism and its rhetoric. Prose and poetry in these books were, in fact, ideological and political proclamations: texts that focused on the activities of the Jewish National Fund (one of the *yishuv's* leading executive bodies), or stories that narrated the vision of the leader of Zionism.

A notable feature of the texts taught in the primary schools was the preoccupation with old and newly created national myths. The myth of *Tel Hai*, for example, appeared in nearly all primers in one form or another. The young reader is introduced to the heroic protagonists and to the motifs of heroism, valour, self-defence and survival.

The primers also focused on the reformulated versions of the festival cycle, the content dealing mainly with the *halutziut* based version of these festivals. Since school children were the major performers in public assemblies held by the *yishuv* leaders, and since the myth of the *halutz* occupied a principal place in these gatherings, a school-related lore centring on the reformulated festivals and national-oriented ceremonies came into being. Thus texts articulating the myth of the *halutz* made their entrance into the *yishuv* at large and became part and parcel of a new national lore.

The teaching of literacy in the secular Hebraic schools of the *yishuv* is an interesting example of what Street (1984) calls an "ideological model" of literacy, whose meanings transcended the pedagogical aspects. This assertion is well supported by the McNair report, published by the British Governmental Commission of Enquiry into the System of Education of the Jewish Community in Palestine (1945). The following makes the case clearly:-

"Before attempting to understand the system of public education which has been established by the Jewish community, it is necessary to realise at the outset that education means to the Zionist Jew something more than it does in England or in other countries. It does not mean merely the process of forming the character, training the mind and developing the aptitude of a child so as to make him a complete personality and a useful member of society. It claims to affect nearly every aspect of the child's life, and is more teleological than English education is or tries to be. It has also emotional content and is regarded as one of the chief instruments in the building of the Jewish National Home" (clause 15 p.5)

3.6 The Tension Between Conflicting Literacies.

The overriding importance attached to maintaining a national educational system was confronted with the reality of the conflict between the ideologies of the secular and the religious factions of the Zionist organisation. These conflicts were especially fierce with regard to the role of religion in modern Hebraic education and eventually led to a division of the national educational system into three politically affiliated streams, known as the 'Trends': the General Trend, the least ideologically inclined, which reflected the voice of the growing middle class of the *yishuv* and its quest for scholastic

achievement; the Religious Trend,(affiliated with the religious *Mizrachi* party); and the Labour Trend, under the patronage of the Labour Party. This division, seen by some researchers of the Hebraic national education system as "an anomaly" (Bentwich, 1965 p.24), reflected the political and ideological tensions that characterised the struggle to define the social and cultural shape of the developing national identity, in which education assumed an overwhelming importance.

For 33 years (from 1920 to 1953), the first five years of statehood included, the three different educational trends, although residing under the umbrella of the Zionist organisation and, later, of the *Va'ad Le'umi* (The National Council: the representative executive of the Yishuv), and although basically adhering to the core curriculum of 1923 (Nardi: 1945; Nachum:1980), were independently responsible for delivering formal education. Each Trend had its own administration and inspectorate, its own interpretation of the core curriculum and its own network of kindergartens and elementary and secondary schools⁴

The Trend schools were more than mere institutional places for imparting skills and knowledge. They were primarily cultural sites, actively involved in the selective ordering and legitimation of specific world views. Indeed, the splintered structure of the educational system as it existed between 1920 and 1953 clearly reveals the dialectic between the traditional versus secular (*halutz*) literacy. The Trends therefore symbolised the growing tension between the propagators of each of the literacy modes as to which should become the hegemonic voice of the developing national identity. A careful examination of the different curricula which should be read as political statements rather than pedagogical expressions, gives an insight into the varied meanings and purposes of the particular literacies used in the Trend schools (Bentwich: 1965).

The slogan of the General Trend is to give to its pupils a Nationalist-Zionist education combined with the progressive ideals of Humanity. The General School "endeavours to implant in the hearts of its pupils a love for work and a love for the soil and agriculture; it devotes an appreciable part of its syllabus to a knowledge of Palestine and the study of the revival and upbuilding of the country."

(excerpt from a memorandum submitted by the *Va'ad Le'umi* to the McNair Commission of Enquiry in 1945 p.8).

Although identifying with the Zionist cause, the Religious Trend aimed at perpetuating the age-old Jewish way of life with its traditional literacy and ritual observance. Accordingly, its curriculum placed special emphasis on study of the traditional literacy i.e., *Torah* and *Talmud*, at the expense of scientific, technical and artistic subjects.

The curriculum for the elementary Religious Trend schools stressed the fact that "... the children are trained to observe religious tradition by teachers who are themselves orthodox ... From the fifth class onward 8 - 10 weekly periods are devoted to religious subjects, especially the *Talmud*." (Nardi: 1945). The orthodox Jewish child of the yishuv, like his counterpart in the traditional Ashkenazi *heder*, started his *Talmud* studies at the age of ten.

The Labour Trend was affiliated with Zionist Socialism and set out to instill the halutz ideology. It aimed at establishing a community which strives to realise the ideals of the society of which it is part guided by the aspiration to change the existing social order, ..." (Gordon and Ackerman: 1984; Reshef: 1985) The Labour Trend perceived the school as a *beit chinuch* (house of education), an Ivrit term that transcends the limitation implicit in the conventional scholastic concept of *beit sefer* (literally 'home of the book' which, in Ivrit, is the term used for 'school'). In the *beit chinuch* a learning community combined physical labour and socially-oriented pupil activities with the more formal academic studies.

Contradictory as it may seem, the Labour Trend schools "... devoted considerable attention to Bible studies ..." (McNair, op. cit. pp 8), albeit in a text-identified manner that emphasised national independence and heroism, two issues that, as previously shown, constituted major motifs of the *halutzit* ideology.

3.6.1 The Myth of the Halutz versus the Literacy of the Talmid Chacham .

This brief overview of the different uses of literacy leads to the conclusion that Trend system was an institutionalised expression of the conflicts and controversies that characterised the *Yishuv's* search for a national identity.

From this dialectic two models of literacy emerged, both sprouting from the same roots and both aiming towards the same goal, yet each adhering to a different ethos and worldview.

The resultant tension between the two literacies was not simply a difference of opinion regarding the techniques of the teaching of reading (Gillis 1987) : it was an expression of the distance that existed between the Jewish (conservative) and the Ivri weltanschauung, between the traditional and innovative, between the tongue of the ancient scriptures and its use as a new language which linguistically and culturally strayed from the straight and narrow of its heritage, between a school system that urged its pupil to become *talmid chacham* and an educational lay-out that predominantly socialised its young toward the ideal of the *halutz*.

Each, the *talmid chacham* and the *halutz*, represented in people's consciousness an ideal model whose status was legitimised by certain strata of the community. Each also served as a role model for identification with an ideology admired by many, but realised by few. But, whereas the *talmid chacham* spent his life in sedentary study in the *yeshiva* surrounded by an aura of knowledge, the *halutz* carried with him the charisma of *hagshama* (fulfilment) -which he realised by joining the *kibbutz*.

Moreover, both characters in their role as guardians of their literacies helped to maintain the power and hegemony of selective ideologies, the one as expressed by the Ashkenazy East European traditional Jewry and the other as realised by the new secular Ivri of the *Yishuv*. Thus, by sustaining the myth of the *talmid chacham*, traditional Jewry re-enacted its own particular existential entity, and by fostering the myth of the *halutz*, the *yishuv* equally re-enacted a sense of belonging, while exploiting tradition as an "actively shaping force" (Williams, 1985 pp 58).

It may be concluded that, while exploiting similar, at times even identical, didactic methods for the implementation of reading and writing Ivri, the meaning of "being literate" propagated by the Religious Mizrahi Trend entailed the teaching of precisely those aspects of Jewish life that the General and Labour Trend schools were, by and large, determined to ignore. The unavoidable result of this divergent ideological interpretation of the pedagogy unavoidably led to there being more than one practice of literacy and to more

than one meaning of literacy. For the Mizrahi school child being literate meant adherence to traditional Judaism (albeit in a Zionist-oriented framework); for the Labour Trend pupil it signified preparedness to realise the ideology of *halutziut* within a predominantly secular and modern environment, and for the General Trend literati it embodied exposure to the notion of scholastic achievement which gradually permeated the educational discourse of this Trend, though, again, under commitment to the national Zionist socialist ideology.

It seems paradoxical that in this process the Mizrahi Trend, the transmitter of the East European *talmid chacham* ideology, gradually became associated with the non-elitist social strata of the *yishuv* i.e., Sephardic and oriental Jewry. The other two Trends, despite their intrinsic differences personified the elitist -Ashkenazi- literati. These were educated in the Hebraic national school system and indoctrinated with Zionist lore by the youth movements. They spent most of their formative years being actively engaged in *halutz* oriented defence organisations (Shapiro: 1985) and finally became the prototypes of the *sabra* ideal.

Despite repeated public declarations by the clearly delineated Ashkenazi faction about the egalitarian character of national secular education, its elitist aspirations are supported by hard facts.

3.7 Ashkenazi Literacy and the Oriental Child.

A striking feature of the Ashkenazi faction was the negligible number of its children who were illiterate as compared with the considerable proportion of non- or semi-literate oriental Jewish youth of the same age groups (Brill, 1938; Bachi 1943; Ben-Yishai, 1943; Nardi: 1945; Ostreicher: 1948). Among the many issues that preoccupied the *yishuv* regarding its educational policy, the phenomenon of the unschooled child was the least attended to (Peled: 1979; Nachum: 1980). True, the deep entrenchment of the *yishuv* in educational matters led, despite the lack of a compulsory education law, to a high rate of school attendance, especially at the elementary level. This state of affairs was, however, largely confined to the Ashkenazi segment of the population who viewed education as a powerful unifying force in the attainment of national revitalisation. In my opinion, therefore, statements claiming that elementary

education during the *yishuv* period may be called universal as it embraced 90% of school age children (Bentwich, 1965; Kleinberger, 1969), or those alleging that illiteracy or reading failure were only found among a few poor neighbourhoods settled by non-European Jews. (Feitelson, 1973), must be subject to careful interpretation. Data published in the late 1930's and in the 1940's dealing with the non-Ashkenazi segment of the population of the *yishuv* uncovered high rates of illiteracy, school drop out and other characteristics of educational backwardness that contributed to the widening schism between them and their Ashkenazi counterparts (Brill: 1938; Bachi and Ben-Yishai: 1943). According to the official estimates of the McNair Commission of Enquiry (op. cit.), between 3000 and 20000 children of elementary school age either did not attend school at all, or had only a very limited and unsatisfactory school experience. Similar figures are mentioned in reports examining the state of education during the second half of the *yishuv* period (Nardi: 1945). More insight as to the extent and acuteness of the problem can be gained from detailed contemporary statistical data concerning the educational scene in Jerusalem in the early 1940's (Bachi and Ben-Yishai: 1943; Peled: 1979).

A common denominator in all these studies is the sectarian nature of the educational network, in that it excluded the oriental child from the dominant educational discourse. The schools of the *yishuv* period were loci of cultural acquisition for the Ashkenazi *sabra* which, in conjunction with the informal channels for the transmission of the *halutz* myth (i.e., the youth movements), gave him/her access to the hegemonic community of the readers of the *yishuv's* cultural text. As such, and despite diverse interpretations of the national discourse, the schools maintained a continuous relationship with the hegemonic -Ashkenazi- section of the *yishuv* and with its authoritative discourse (Green: 1971; Halper: 1977; Peled: 1979).

Not so in the oriental community; here, the schools had a discontinuous relationship with the citizenry, a situation that is frequently found in a society where the school system is in the hands of one particular dominant culture, and part of the population it serves is not in accord with dominant ideology⁵.

It is evident that the ethnic background of the teachers was an important factor in transmitting the dominant ideology. Schools

formed, "loci for cultural sanctioned learning" (Le Belle 1972 pp 520). Legitimised access to the sanctioned literacy was given, first and foremost, to the offspring of the propagators and adherents of this literacy namely, the Ashkenazi *sabra*.

A further outcome of this elitist behaviour of the upholders of the *halutziut* ideology and myth in school was that the literacy of the Ashkenazi *sabra* was also the means of access to strategic and powerful positions in the *yishuv*. Thus, the oriental child, apart from being deprived of the scholastic and pragmatic contents of schooling, was also barred from what was considered 'politically and culturally sanctioned'.

Despite the Zionist socialist platform of egalitarianism and its overt aim to cut across ethnic lines, the oriental segment of the *yishuv*, by virtue of its not really being part of the Zionist enterprise, was considered marginal and remained at the fringe of the political and educational scenes (Eisenstadt: 1950; Lissak: 1969; Patai: 1970, 1973; Smooha: 1978; Peled: 1979).

To sum up, the dominant ideology of socialist Zionism and its hallmarks of *halutz*, *kibbutz*, and youth movements served a double purpose: through its norms and values its bearers legitimised the authority of the existing hegemonic Ashkenazi elite, at the same time suppressing the issue of the urban oriental educationally deprived children by turning it into a "non-issue" (Peled: 1979 pp. 164). By clinging to the *halutz* myth, an elitist segment of Israeli society guarded -and to a great extent still guards- itself against cultural and ethnic contamination. In this they further consolidated the dialectic between the elitist 'children of the book' that is, between those who are still metaphorically reading the myth of the *halutz* and those who were -and are- not given access to the myth.

Summary.

In chapter three I moved on to the twentieth century, and provided an insight into the emergent secular national oriented educational system among the Zionist settlers in Palestine in the period that preceded the establishment of the State of Israel. The chapter addresses the leading ideology of the era, *halutziut*; the revitalisation of Ivrit as the spoken language and the formation of a national oriented literacy. This literacy consolidated around the

newly formulated Jewish consciousness incorporated in the images of the *halutz* and his native born son, the *sabra*.

The chapter ends by pointing to the institutionalisation of a prestigious literacy that voiced the ideology of the dominant and hegemonic Ashkenazi faction of the pre-State Jewish population, from which, for all practical purposes, the oriental (Sephardi) child was excluded.

Part Two: Literacy in the Service of Nation-Building

CHAPTER FOUR

The Nation-Building Discourse.

4. Introduction.

In this chapter I discuss the role of two powerful institutions, the Israeli Defence Force (I.D.F.) and the State Educational System, in sustaining a national/political discourse of solidarity uniformity and cohesion referred to as the 'Discourse of Nation-Building'. In sections one and two I address the main problems of the Nation-Building discourse. I point to the ideal image of the I.D.F. soldier who is shown to be the chief bearer of this discourse. Section three provides an over view of the centralised Israeli education system and discusses its role as the State's agent for the institutionalisation of the Nation-Building discourse. In section four I point to the interlocking functions of the schools and the I.D.F in preparing young Israelis for their first out of school assignment - conscriptive service in the army.

4.1 Central Problems in the Nation-Building Discourse.

The hope of building a nation is not taken for granted in Israel, a country that from its establishment in 1948 has been faced with existential problems in all spheres. The focal ones, which revolve around social, economic, cultural and political issues are set out here.

- The socio-economic and cultural gap between the two ethnic groups of the population: the numerically dominant oriental part of the population, which originated in the Islamic countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and the culturally hegemonic Askenazi segment which came from Europe and the Americas. This gap is a direct result of the mass immigration of the 1950s, which tripled the Jewish population of the yishuv (from 650,000 in 1948 to 1,762,700 in 1957) and swung the ethnic balance in favour of the oriental section.

- The growing rift between the secular and religious segments of

the population. The major bone of contention, which even surmounts ethnic differences, is the exemption of the ultra-orthodox youth from military service, which is compulsory for the Jewish population above the age of 18.

– Continual economic hardship and socio-cultural conflicts as a result of waves of mass immigration (the influx of the 1950s, Ethiopian Jewry in the early 1980s and currently the unexpected exodus from Russia).

All these problems are, however, overshadowed by the Israeli-Arab conflict. Israel, living under the permanent threat of openly declared enmity and physical extinction, is constantly preoccupied by the need to secure survival. In the atmosphere of unceasing need for alertness, the constant threat of war and the sense of living under siege, national security and self-defence count as central values of Israel's society. These values cut across socio-cultural and ethnic lines and transcend political and ideological differences, the shared feeling being that "... Adult citizens must be prepared at any given moment to make great sacrifices in the name of national survival." (Lewis: 1977 p.238)

The central issues of security and of the right of the collective to exist are thus the perennial problems to be kept in the forefront of national consciousness. The fact that conscriptive military service is part and parcel of daily reality in Israel adds something tangible to the state's existential goals, whose main metaphors of unity, solidarity, defence and survival are repeatedly echoed in its discourse. The Israeli State's Nation-Building discourse, then, is preoccupied with mediating solidarity, unity and cohesion of population: necessary attributes for a state facing a hostile environment.

Consciously perceived, planned and legitimised induction of all segments of society into this discourse of Nation-Building is an undertaking shared by the state's principal agents of political bureaucracy.

An example of the powerful impact of this collective induction is Israel's radio ("The Voice of Israel") and television services, both operating under governmental control. Listeners and viewers are constantly exposed to programmes aiming to impart a shared mythology, a common history and a binding participation in

contemporary events, in an attempt at promoting national consciousness, collective sentiments and a sense of belonging and commitment to the 'tribe'.

Another example is the public commemorations of national events, such as IDF (Israel Defence Forces) Memorial Day, Independence Day, Jerusalem Day, Holocaust Day. These, and other public ceremonies which do not have a religious or traditional connotation, and are organised by the state, have been ritualised and are being used as a means for implementing the Nation-Building discourse.

Such occasional means of transmitting the Israeli Nation-Building discourse clearly have their influence. However, two great institutions - the army and schools - serve this purpose continuously and effectively.

4.2 The IDF soldier as an Agent and Symbol of Nation-Building.

Ben-Gurion, the founder of the IDF, perceived the army as a central force "...that would mould the shape of the nation...integrating Jews from different countries, educating the young generation and serving a model of excellence, civic spirit and pioneering." In the collective discourse, the IDF has been described as the "school of the nation" (Azarya: 1983 p.99) and the Israeli soldier as the successor of the *halutz*. The IDF was always seen as more than a military force. It was called upon to undertake such national enterprises as the adoption of immigrants, fighting illiteracy, especially among adults, dealing with school drop-outs and marginal youth, the propagation of Ivrit and the founding of new kibbutzim. Thus, the role of "nation builder" (Azarya 1983) shifted from the hands of the *halutz* to those of the soldier, his "almost sole legitimate heir" (Lissak 1980: p.3)

This soldier/*halutz* image is supported by the fact that the IDF was largely shaped by officers from the kibbutz with Zionist socialist backgrounds (Schild: 1973). Among the elite groups of army life, the percentage of kibbutz members is high (Shappira and Peleg: 1984). This fusion of *halutz* and soldier has its roots in the ideology of the pre-state defence organisations. Assigning the tasks of Nation-Building to the army is inherent in Ben-Gurion's

philosophy of using it and transforming it into the "workshop of the new Israeli society". (Azarya: 1983 p.99).

As a by-product the concept of soldier/teacher became interlocked with the image of the soldier/*halutz*/nation-builder. These mainly female soldiers/teachers, besides being engaged in adult literacy projects (Metzer: 1983) and in teaching Ivrit to new immigrants, also teach in the lower grades of primary schools. This is particularly prevalent in development towns, where the problem of teacher shortage is frequently solved by using girl soldiers. They wear uniform (standing orders) during school hours. (This illustrates the many levels of interaction between national security and literacy and leads one to consider how the interplay is perceived by young children whose first encounter with school literacy is provided by a soldier in uniform).

Military service provides a unique individual-community relationship, in which the personal-collective, private-public and military-civil polarities become diluted. Not only are individual and community mutually dependant, service in the IDF is an occasion when the individual sees a reflection of himself in his peer group as he examines and re-enacts what is entailed in being an Israeli. In Israeli reality, being a guardian and defender of the state equals a "cultural text", that is, a framework within which people define their identity and convey its meaning to themselves and others (Geertz: 1973). In this framework, military service, which touches nearly every citizen irrespective of ethnic background or social or cultural level, functions as a rite of passage into the national collective. Military service is thus commensurate, symbolically, with the religious/traditional rite of acceptance in the Bar-Mitzva ceremony. In the Bar-Mitzva as maintained by Green (1971) the memory of a long history of belonging to a people is called forth in a manner that transcends differences of interest, geographic boundaries or economic and political distinctions. This feeling of belonging enables participation, by every individual, in the shared life of the community, without any distinction between public or private assets. With this symbolic comparison in mind, it suffices to add that, for the average young secular Israeli, service in the IDF is a

more powerful and meaningful experience of defining his own subjectivity, both as a Jew and as an Israeli, than the Bar-Mitzva rite.

The function of army service as a rite of acceptance into the collective is perpetuated by the obligatory yearly military reserve duty. This brings a considerable part of the population into close contact with the military discourse, and inevitably carries army lore into civilian life (Lissak: 1980; Azarya: 1983).

Some researchers have opined that the IDF occupies the place of the pre-state prestigious *halutz* oriented youth movements, and that it is representative of the new generations of Israelis (Azarya and Kimmerling: 1980).

For many low status socio-economic groups military service is a significant rite of passage. They use their military stint as a means of being admitted into mainstream Israeli society. And, ironically enough, it is more often the army than the schools which enables underprivileged groups to gain entry into a higher level of society (albeit military) and fulfil quite prestigious roles which, though not requiring high intellectual achievements, are nevertheless vital for the army system (Lissak:1971; Adler: 1976; Gibli: 1981; Metzger: 1983).

It should be noted though, that by and large the army functions more as a unifying agent, a cohesive, rather than an equalising apparatus. Its effect in promoting social mobility is limited (Azarya and Kimmerling: 1980).

In summation, the IDF soldier has crystallised into the people's new role model of defender and builder of the nation. As defender, he is the antithesis of the exilic Jew, and as such symbolises discontinuity with all things diasporic, standing for rebirth of a new national identity. At the same time he is the heir of the biblical and second temple warrior (a comparison much cherished by Ben Gurion;(Liebman and Don-Yehiya: 1983). As builder, the soldier is the successor to the *halutz*. His image has therefore consolidated into the vanguard of Israel's new cultural concepts. As part of the Nation-Building discourse, the soldier has become a symbol of unification and cohesion.

4.2.1 Military service as a Channel for Mediating the Nation-Building Discourse.

The IDF operates along a well-delineated course in stimulating solidarity with and commitment to the national goals. For example, at their induction the soldiers are sworn in at historically and nationally value laden sites (e.g. Mount of Massada, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem). The act is designed to reinforce the sense of sharing in a common heritage. It is not only the site but also the contents of the ceremony that reiterates mechanical solidarity. The ceremony culminates in the handing of a copy of the Bible to each new recruit. The swearing-in rite can *be seen* as a metaphoric expression of the ancient covenant, but it must also be regarded as a cultural statement on the relationship between the traditional text, national security, cohesion and survival.

On their training exercises and hikes, the new recruits take in historic sites or archaeological digs on their way, again with the aim to strengthen and deepen the notion of continuity between modern and biblical times. These occasions are also utilised to further acquaintanceship with the flora and fauna of the country, a process that already starts in the first grade of the elementary state schools. All these activities are intended to awaken and instill a sense of belonging to a specific cultural entity.

Paradoxically, military service also acts as a differentiating tool. The service marks the distinction between those who are an integral part of the collective, share its experiences and its rhetoric and those *sectarian* groups who pursue a separate collective discourse. Thus, orthodox Jewish youth who are initiated into traditional literacy in its uncontaminated form by means of an independent school system, are also exempt from military service. The confrontation between these guardians of traditional literacy and the Soldier, symbolising Israel's survival, is to be seen as a confrontation between sections of Israel's society at large and its fundamental dilemmas of identity and existence.

4.3 Education in Israel: A controlled system Serving Nation-Building.

4.3.1 The School as Agent for Transmitting the Nation-Building Discourse.

The role of schools in the service of nation-building has been discussed in studies on the anthropological perspectives of education (Cohen: 1971; Diamond & Gearing: 1971; Safa: 1971; Johnson: 1980). As agents of a dominant political bureaucracy, schools are geared towards implementing standardised responses to the symbol-system sanctioned by the state and, as argued by Cohen (1971) "...shaped towards making these symbols an integral part of the young minds, so that responses to them in adulthood will be uniform when the state feels that it needs to use them to gain acquiescence or mass participation in an activity of the society."(pp. 113). Perceptions of education in Israel conform to this statement.

In 1953 the tripartite Israeli educational system, so carefully constructed, was abolished. In its place are two kinds of state schools, the secular and the religious, established as a result of a political compromise which granted semi-autonomy in education to the national religious party. Each division, the secular and the religious, provides its own educational-implementation apparatus and uses separate curricula and textbooks. Both also maintain their own inspectorate, teaching staff, teachers' training colleges and educational supervision. In addition, the ultra orthodox faction and the Kibbutz Movement have their separate school systems¹.

As national education systems go, the Israeli one is small. At the time of writing there are 2315 state schools (including the secular and religious divisions). Of these 1548 are primary schools for the 6-12 year age-group. 291 are middle schools (12-15 years old) and 516 are secondaries (15-18). The Compulsory Education Act 1949 makes parents responsible for regular attendance of their children at a recognised school, i.e. one approved by the Ministry of Education. Parents may opt for state education (secular or religious), or can choose to send their children to an independent ultra-orthodox institution (Kleinberger: 1969, 1975; Ben-Baruch and Newman: 1982; Simmer and Simmer: 1990).

4.3.1.1 Centralisation of administration and policy making.

A central and bureaucratic administration is located in Jerusalem, headed by a Minister and run by a director-general. It has a central planning unit and a budget whose allotment, received by the Ministry of Education, is second only to that of the Defence Ministry. The role of director-general carries considerable power concerning all executive aspects of the educational policy.

The policy making apparatus is also centralised and administers a uniform curriculum prescribed by the Curriculum Division. An illustration of the centralised character of policy is the annual decree whereby the Ministry of Education lays down the focal theme to be pursued by all schools at all class levels during a given academic year.

The control system is centralised and operates through a well established network. Head teachers are subject to authoritative direction and constant supervision by the ministerial inspectorate. The latter prescribes the most minute details of the syllabus, the timetable for every grade and subject, permissible means of maintaining discipline, and conditions for pupils' promotion to the next grade.

All major inputs are centralised: teachers, recruitment, salaries, curriculum development, approval of textbooks. (The use of non-approved texts in class is forbidden by ministerial decree). It is of interest here that the department of instructional television, a unit within the ministry, has gained a considerable autonomy in setting up its own educational policy - far beyond mere translation of policy-rules into operational terms.

Evaluation of the system is centralised, as are its feedback mechanisms. Matriculation exams are administered on a nationwide scale after 12th grade. A nationwide testing machinery operates to discover schools categorised as having a high proportion of underachievers and a 'minimum competency test', based on set standards, is administered to 3rd graders. In 1989/90 the Ministry issued a statement of minimum requirements in reading comprehension and maths at elementary level which are binding on all teachers (Razel: 1984).

Educational objectives are centrally directed in a way which,

according to Kleinberger (1975 p.226) approximates a "totalitarian" rather than "liberal" style of educational legislation. As in Kleinberger's analysis the content of Israeli education is specified in minutely prescribed curricula and syllabi. Methods of instruction, designed to achieve uniform and binding aims, must follow the official approach using only textbooks authorised by the State (Ibid). It is clear, from all this, that the highly-centralised system does lean towards a totalitarian pattern, in Kleinberger's sense at least. Moreover, it has developed its policy within "an educational inner circle of power" (Inbar: 1986 p. 276). This comprises senior administrators, academicians, public figures, representatives of teacher unions and politicians. They have all known each other for a long time, and as a result of the small size of the country and the centralised style of its education, have had constant opportunity to remain in touch. While not all have a formal standing within education, and their educational views often diverge, the group inevitably leaves its mark on educational policy.

4.3.1.2. The Impact of Centralisation on Classroom Practice and School Management.

The daily conduct in school of the head teacher and staff reflects the centralised style of the system. Israeli head teachers "...are in many ways not very different from business executives or army officers, ...essentially conservative...not particularly concerned with innovation and change." (Pur and Gordon: 1982 p.234).

In 1980, the Ministry of Education granted schools an option to enhance "partial autonomy" (Director-General Bulletin, 1980). But they are advised to do this under the supervision of an authorised team of educational administrators, university professors and experts and take part in a nationally-organised enterprise described by Pur & Gordon (1982) as "diversity by decree". The classroom discourse is equally centralised. Repetitive patterns of frontal instruction cut across the realms of the curriculum and damp down personal teaching-styles. Teachers are perceived as transmitters of information and agents of a central institutional authority rather than negotiators of meaning.

The Israeli classroom has an interesting reciprocal teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil pattern of interaction. Teachers, generally, are collective-oriented. This fosters a rhetoric of 'teacher - question', 'pupil - correct/wrong answer' which leaves little space for interpersonal pedagogic exchange. The teacher's centred, group-directed approach constitutes him the sole possessor of knowledge and authority in the pupils' eyes (Adar et al: 1969; Harrison: 1981; Harrison and Glaubman:1982; Amir and Ben Ari: 1984; Sharan and Rich: 1984; Katriel and Neshet:1987).

4.3.2. Educating In The Nation-Building Discourse

It is obvious that a strong bureaucratic system makes it reasonably easy for policy-makers to impose their ideologies on an entire population (a task administratively even further simplified in a small country). Schools do not operate in a vacuum, as is seen from the *Yishuv's* tripartite education system (see Chapter 3 3.6). Rather, they are situated within the larger universe of ideological and political meanings and beliefs sanctified by the dominant faction of society. In the discussion on Trends I have shown that schools are not neutral institutions; on the contrary, they are "... ideological and political terrains out of which the dominant culture in part produces its hegemonic 'certainties.'" (Giroux: 1989 p.134).

It is possible, then, to identify the priorities (ideological, political, social) that guide the Israeli policy-makers in their choice of the pattern of schooling, and to question whether these priorities are congruent with what count as 'hegemonic certainties' of the dominant Israeli culture.

From the formative stages of statehood, schools have been viewed as instruments for instilling a uniform cultural and national identity. The compulsory Education Act of 1949, the State Education Law of 1953, and the subsequent authorised educational policies - 'unity via uniformity' (1945-1963), 'compensatory education' (1963-1968) and the theme of 'integration' (from 1968 onwards) - all have in common the striving towards an undifferentiated national outlook - central strand of The Nation-Building Discourse. This has its roots in the state's official policy of absorbing the many ethnic factions into a

new entity of 'Israelis' (Eisenstadt: 1952, 1955, 1967, 1970; Curtis and Chertoff: 1973; Adler: 1984, Kahane: 1981; Adler and Kahane: 1984; Amir, Sharan and Ben-Ari: 1984).

The enactment of the State Education Law in 1953 was a paradigmatic instance of the process of mobilising schools for Nation-Building. It led to the abolition of the Trend system, which was referred to by the then Minister of Education as "an ideological civil war organised by the State". (Robinson: 1963; Kleinberger: 1969,1975; Schachter:1972; Reshef:1981; Liebman and Don Yehiya: 1983 Steinberg: 1988). In its place came a uniform and centralised state-school system (albeit within the constraints of its secular/religious subdivision) that dispensed a uniform educational discourse calling for identification with the Israeli State and its institutions.

The harnessing of schools to attain a national goal was justified by the historian Dinur, incumbent Minister of Education when the State Education Law was passed in the Knesset (parliament). "The state is ultimately responsible for the ways through which the development of the young generation will be directed and realised... The state has no right to deliver ... the responsibility of the state's future to anybody but itself, because educating the state's citizens means to guarantee the perpetuation of its existence... it is the state's duty and obligation to educate its citizens to a complete identification of each individual with the state, with its future, with its survival." (Peled: 1979 p.164). Dinur's speech reveals ideological and political 'certainties' that proved to be the backbone of the nationalised educational system and of its centralised machinery.

Inherent in a uniform curriculum is the demand for standardisation in performance and response, as well as a call for homogeneity throughout the entire schooling network. Below this surface-layer lies the political 'certainty' that there is only one correct way to fulfil one's civic duty, only one standard response to the imperatives of the state. By turning schools into sites for instilling nationally-desired sentiments, the state assures its authority and control, while losing sight of the needs of the individual pupil.

The notion that schools are the state's ideal agents in the

enterprise of commanding 'unity through uniformity' is substantiated by the words of Dinur's successor, Minister Aran (1959), who claims that the major issue of state education is whether the educational system serves the goal of the state (Peled: 1979).

Here, attention must be drawn to the fact that adherence to the voice of the state transmitted by schools is, in reality, adherence to the voice of the dominant Ashkenazi elite. The socialisation of oriental Jewish children in the demographic revolution of the 1950s was inevitably carried out according to Ashkenazi precepts. An example of the ensuing tension is the statement by Ortar, the Ministry's chief psychologist in the 1950s, "The elementary school curriculum is constructed upon culture contents taken from patterns prevalent among Western middle-class families, and oriental children, both native and immigrant, often fail in their studies because they lack some of the culture conditioned education and emotional instruments required for a successful assimilation of study material of this kind"(1953 p.271). Ortar concludes that the school syllabus, which reflects the cultural ideals of the nation, cannot be adapted to the mentality of these children. Their inability to assimilate it is an indication of their future inability to contribute to the efforts of the wide social and cultural groups to which they will belong as adults. (ibid). Ortar's assertion echoes the voice that dominated the Israeli socio-political scene, at least during the first three decades of statehood.

I conclude that, exploiting schools to disseminate and sustain the Nation-Building discourse demanded the exposure of oriental Jewish children to a very particular and selective version of its rhetoric. . Schools, as argued by Giroux: "... establish the conditions under which some individuals and groups define the terms by which others live, resist, affirm and participate in the construction of their own identities and subjectivities" (1989 p. 134). The cultural transformation of oriental Jewish children, so as to enhance their identification with the state, was undertaken in the name of Nation-Building. It also served the educational policy-makers in their efforts to secure total control over the content of formal education and render it consistent with their political and ideological positions. This whole issue, with all its

implications for the State's use of literacy in Israeli schools, merits separable consideration. I return to it in the next Chapters. For the first three decades of statehood, these educators were representatives of the Labour Party and espoused the pre-state leading ideology of *halutziut*. This is clearly articulated in the State Education Law of 1953: "... to base elementary education on the values of Jewish culture and the achievement of science, on the love of country and loyalty to the State and the people of Israel, on training in agricultural work and craftsmanship... on training for *halutziut*..."(Kleinberger 1969).

The Education Law is not only a statement on the role of schools within the national discourse, it also explicitly endorses the image of the *halutz*. This concept was extended to include any organised activity that would strengthen the unity of the state, so that it embraced the field of education, immigration, absorption, scientific and technological development, and defence (Liebman and Don Yehiya: 1983; Keren: 1985). It was tacitly assumed that the schools would be bearers of the extended *halutzit* ideology as an integrated part of the Nation-Building discourse.

Educating in the Nation-Building discourse also reflects the '*talmid chacham*' and implies the notion of exploiting intellectual potential to the fullest. This is seen as imperative for the country's preservation. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister - member of the second aliyah, and therefore a *Halutz* - declared that "... the State of Israel ought to set itself a goal of providing all of the young generation without exception ... elementary, secondary and higher education - that means giving every Israeli boy and girl an academic education ... let every industrial worker, every farmer, every cobbler, every clerk, every mailman in Israel become a university graduate." (Government Yearbook, 1962). What emerges from Ben Gurion's proclamation is not simply the notion that qualitative excellence in all spheres of life is vital for surmounting an overload of social problems. Once again the formula Scholarship = Survival appears: the age-old existential principle that has held the Jewish people together for so many centuries. Schools have been called to transmit both the ethos of the *halutz*, i.e. by promoting integration and equality, and that of the ancient *talmid chacham*, by urging scholarship as a

prerequisite for consolidating national unity and promoting cultural uniformity.

The School and the Army are two major institutions that play prime roles in socialising young Israelis, with far-reaching consequences for their future. Children in Israel share "... from a very young age the knowledge that as they turn eighteen and are drafted into the army, much of society's existential burden will be their immediate and personal concern." (Katriel and Nesher: 1987 p. 885), (Lewis: 1977).

We must now consider the point at which these two institutions, and their inter-related purposes, meet and merge.

4.4 School to IDF - A Continuous Rite Of Passage Into Adulthood.

Compulsory military service is a direct continuation of the secondary school stage and precedes, for the majority of adolescents, any other vocational or academic training. It is to be regarded as an integral part of the growing-up process. In the realities of daily life in Israel, this transition is no mere metaphor. High school graduates, especially those assigned to prestigious high-risk combat units, often have to join the army the self-same week they sit for their last matriculation exam, sometimes even on the following morning.

Paradoxically, all recruits participate in purpose-designed education assignments that have a very school-like flavour and seem like an extension of formal education. These built-in programmes focus on topics such as Jewish and Israeli history, geography and current affairs. Platoon commanders are expected to reserve a weekly period for talks with their soldiers on current affairs of general interest. The IDF's educational unit periodically conduct these talks. The weekly 'talk periods' resemble the school 'social period' a universally ritualised activity of Israeli education which starts in the first grade and goes on right to the end of secondary school. In this sense the mechanech (fem. mechanechet = lit. educator; the home class teacher) may be regarded as the predecessor of the IDF commander, since the aim of these social periods is to discuss with the pupils issues that do not directly concern the curriculum. These discussions are seen as an instrument for promoting the level of social cohesion in the

classroom. Here, too, teachers are supplied with a stream of booklets setting out guidelines and furnishing instructions and advice on how best to conduct the 'social hour' (Gordon and Ackerman: 1984; Katriel and Nesher:1986).

The rationale underlying this extension of the school discourse into army surrounds is that both institutions are instrumental in the enterprise of social and cultural integration and in binding together Israel's multi-ethnic population¹² the work of Nation-Building. The mediation of a single cultural discourse which will become an integral part of the youth's collective memory and associations and marks his identification as an Israeli, is intensified by the characteristics of the IDF as a "total institution" (Goffman: 1968 pp.18) and by the centralised pattern of the school system and its universal curriculum (Schild:1973; Azarya and Kimmerling: 1980; Azarya: 1983).

Thus at two impressionable periods in their lives, the later echoing the former, Israeli citizens share experiences of school and the army with their age-group. The authorities recognise the psychological complexity of both roles (schoolchild and soldier) as collective experiences for almost everyone (Yitzhar:1981; Or, Liran and Meyer:1986).

In conclusion, schools play a significant role in the process of preparing youngsters for their first out-of-school shared experience, that of being a soldier.

In the process of promulgating the Nation-Building discourse schools function as sites for playing out the three roles on which the state's existence rests: the scholar (modern counter-part of the *talmid chacham*, the *halutz*, and the soldier.

Whereas training for the halutziut and promoting a high level of scholastic achievement are explicitly expressed in the State's educational goals and can be classified an overt message, socialising towards the future task as guardian of the collective is not directly articulated, and may thus be called a hidden message of the educational system. This is mediated by the schools' structural and symbolic dimensions as displayed in their centralised organisation.

Centralisation epitomises the process and means for propagating the schools' hidden message and its products: by

means of a shared and uniform curriculum and a conventional language of instruction, carried along the lines of standardised normative rule-governed performances. Centralisation facilitates conformity and adherence to the aims and imperatives of the schools' hidden voice - and by way of analogy, to the state's hegemonic voice of solidarity and unity. Centralisation is therefore a metaphor for all social mechanisms that strengthen and empower the collective, so as to secure its future existence and physical survival.

The hidden messages are also conveyed through the texts and processes of teaching/learning literacy, which are the subject in the next chapters.

Summary.

This chapter discussed the role of school and army within the Nation-Building discourse. It has shown that from the formative stages of statehood, schools have been mobilised into the service of Nation-Building and have been used as the State's agent to instill and implement its single message. It is suggested that the school system, while overtly leading the children towards identification with the cultural and ideological image of *talmid chacham* and *halutz*, tacitly socialises the children to identify with the State's current symbol of national existence and national continuity - the soldier.

CHAPTER FIVE

Literacy and Literacy Teaching among Oriental Jewish Children: Responses To a Crisis in The Process Of Nation-Building.

5. Introduction.

In this chapter I show how the literacy crisis brought about by an influx of Jewish oriental immigrant children in the 1950's was perceived as a threat to national unity. Childrens' reading failure was attributed to their cognitive deficit. The apparatus of formal schooling was expected to compensate the Jewish oriental child for her alleged lack of ability in abstract thinking. Section one addresses the literacy crisis and its educational aftermath. In section two I present the logic underlying the State's compensatory educational policy. Section three discusses the reading policy implemented by the advocates of the phonetic approaches to reading which were taken to be the most effective for teaching culturally disadvantaged children to read. In section four I point to the socio-political reasons for sustaining the literacy gap between Jewish oriental and Jewish Ashkenazi children.

5.1 Literacy Failure as a Threat to National Unity.

In an article on the effectiveness of reading-programmes in Israeli schools, Bloom (1966) cites two of the country's leading reading experts. The first, D. Levanon was motivated by the sentiment that "... it is a disgrace for a Jew not be able to read ...", (p304) while the second D. Feitelson, was guided by the pragmatic consideration that "No one must fail" (p306). Implied in the first assertion is a quest for excellence in literary performance having roots in the tradition of the *talmid chacham* currently reflected in the State's official goals of education. The second assertion implies the need to furnish every child with at least a minimum level of reading competence. This notion of 'minimum reading competence' is at present the underlying motive directing the Ministry's official reading policy. The school is to prepare pupils to pass the minimum

competence reading-test administered throughout the country at the end of the 3rd and 5th Grades (Razel: 1984).

Encapsulated in this philosophy is Israel's focal educational problem: the consistent gap in scholastic performance between children of Askenazi and those of oriental origin. The former personify the ideal of literacy attainment - the Academic Scholar. The second portray school reality - the Underachiever.

Research evidence indicates that, on average, the oriental Jewish child lags behind his/her Askenazi counterpart by one or two years (Thoredik: 1973; Lewy and Chan: 1974; Lewy and Davis: 1974; Lewis: 1979; Horowitz: 1980; Lewy: 1981; Minkovitz, Davis & Bashi:1982). An ongoing attempt to lessen and ultimately close this gap, (an enterprise in which the State has invested more public funding than in any other field except defence), has not yielded much success. The gap has remained relatively static over the last four decades. The latest survey of literacy teaching in the first grades (Spektor and Katz:1990) reveals that 15-20% of the oriental first-graders are considered by their teachers as non-fluent readers by the end of the school year. This trend continues throughout primary school, as has been brought to light by a variety of country-wide tests since 1983. It appears that about the same percentage of pupils have reading-comprehension problems at the end of their primary school years. According to Spektor & Katz's survey (op. cit.), 70% of the schools allocate specially designed weekly periods for promoting reading comprehension for all the children.

With the establishment of the State and the mass-immigration of the early 1950s (largely of immigrants from non-Western cultures), the growing failure of oriental Jewish children had become a matter of national concern: it posed a huge threat to the entire enterprise of building the Israeli nation into social and cultural cohesion and unity.

The extent of reading failure among oriental Jewish children was made public in the early 1950s (Feitelson:1952,1953; Ortar:1953; Simon:1953; Shumsky:1955; Smilansky: 1957; Frankenstein:1963, 1970, 1972, 1979;). Surveys and tests yielded the data that 50% of pupils in the 2nd and 3rd Grades and 36% in the 4th Grade of

primary school did not possess basic reading-skills (Simon: 1953, 1957; Adiel:1968).

At first reading failure was attributed to the difficulties entailed in the process of immigrant absorption per se. In those formative stages of statehood, the educational network of the former *yishuv* was physically incapable of absorbing the masses of immigrant children. The education authorities were trapped between the need to comply with the Compulsory Education Act (1949) and the unforeseen growth in number of pupils, especially in the five-to-eight-year age group (Gillis: 1987). As a result, the primary education provided to the immigrant child was of meagre quality. Classes were held in huts and ramshackle buildings, auxiliary equipment was scarce, books were in short supply and, most important of all, there was a serious lack of trained and experienced teachers. It was at this stage that female soldiers followed accelerated teacher-training programmes and were sent to schools in the immigrant areas.

Coupled with poor schooling-conditions were problems deriving from the different cultural backgrounds of the immigrants and the crucial problem of the language barrier. Knowledge of Ivrit was nearly non-existent. The little that was known was confined (mainly among males) to the vocabulary of the prayerbook and the Scriptures. Research has shown that, in 40% of oriental Jewish families, both parents were illiterate (Feitelson:1952; Simmon:1953). Thus, in the 1950s the first encounter with Ivrit for most of the immigrant children was when they went to school. For many, it was also their first experience of literacy.

Policy in tune with the Nation-Building ideal, required a movement towards cultural homogeneity and educational equality. But some senior educators suggested a "speeding-up" of reading and writing acquisition among oriental Jewish children so that "... if the (oriental) child were to drop out of school, at least he would have the basis of formal education, like reading and writing ... and would be able to be responsible for his own further education." (Simon:1956 in Gillis: 1987 p.192). Towards the end of the first decade of statehood the extent of reading failure among oriental children was

more than a problem that could be solved by equipping the children with 'basic skills'. It threatened to become a national crisis. A survey conducted in 1957 in the newly developed oriental Jewish immigrant communities revealed that, on completing nine years of schooling, 35-40% of the pupils "... are unable to read and understand a simple book, to write an understandable letter, and lack clear concepts of their country and the world around them." (Simon: 1957 in Dror: 1963 p. 170).

The Oriental Jewish immigrant population is no minority group. It constitutes more than half of the Jewish population of Israel, and oriental children account for 60% of state school rolls. The policy of 'unity via uniformity' aimed at realising cultural and national cohesion. Alarm expressed over the low level of literacy among such a large section of the population brought this policy under heavy criticism. The literacy crisis was clearly perceived as a threat to the Nation-Building. The situation became more dangerous and explosive because educational backwardness started to be identified as highly overlapping identifiable ethnic traits. This can be seen in the argument put forward by the then Minister of Education, "What we gain by immigration we continuously lose by lowering the educational level ... these students have not reached the minimum standards required for citizenship in a democratic country... European Israelis will be in the upper half of the social pyramid, whereas the wide base of skill-less and deprived will be kept by citizens originating in the Moslem countries (Dror: 1963; Eban: 1978, Peled: 1979).

This led the education authorities to search for, and eventually adopt, a cultural explanation for the children's scholastic failure. It was based on the findings of the Szold Institute for Research in Behavioural Sciences (these derive from concepts of cultural deprivation borrowed from the American ethno-social research literature), (Dror: 1963) and its tone was set by Frankenstein (1963, 1970, 1972, 1979). Oriental Jewish children, the theory runs, have a deficit in abstract thinking ascribable to their ethno-cultural background and the patterns of thought prevailing in their culture. Unlike the Western pattern of thought, which is 'differentiated,

scientific, rational and abstract', oriental thinking is characterised as a undifferentiated primitive mentality. The latter is said to be dominated by emotions, fantasies and intuition and to be lacking in the pre-requisites for critical abstract thinking. Hence, the intelligence of oriental Jewish children is impaired. Moreover, their parents are unable to provide intellectual stimuli and act as models for habits of conceptualisation and abstraction.

In school, the oriental Jewish child's impaired intelligence will be displayed in a lack of curiosity and motive for learning, and in weakness in the ability to conceptualise and to use formal operations (e.g. in grammar, syntax, math and literary analysis). (Ortar and Frankenstein: 1953; Smilansky and Smilansky: 1967; Minkovitz 1969; Frankenstein: 1972; Smilansky: 1973; Laufart: 1983).

5.2 The "School without Parents" - The Logic of the Compensatory Education Policy.

In the deficit-rehabilitation paradigm, schools were perceived as substitutes for disadvantaged families. Their function was to compensate children for a deprived background. (Smilansky and Nevo: 1974). The idea that schools are 'family surrogates' was first presented by Frankenstein. In one of his seminal articles ("School without Parents" 1963), he argued that the importance of primary schooling increases in direct proportion to the failure of many parents to act as integrating forces in the development of their children.

While developing this view, Frankenstein was highly critical of the type of teaching found in the primary schools, which he designated "feminine". He attacked a preference for play methods and for concreteness over intellectual discipline and abstraction, as well as the efforts invested in creating a friendly atmosphere of freedom and tolerance, rather than a climate of intellectual tension. He advocated a teaching-style which he defined as "masculine", i.e. spiritual and rational, based on the presumption that learning is not play. Paradoxically - it characterised the oriental Jewish child as being uncritically dependent on authority and legitimised such dependence by transferring it to the teacher.

Frankenstein's theoretical assumptions soon became the guide lines for a generation of educational researchers and practices in Israel. His theories were considered substantiated by empirical research (Feitelson: 1953; Ortar:1953; Ortar and Frankenstein: 1953; Adar: 1956; Smilansky: 1957; Eiger: 1977; Feuerstein and Richelle: 1981). Ready acceptance of Frankenstein's conceptual framework led to the institutionalisation of an elaborate theoretical structure accompanied by many well-funded programmes and specifically designed policies. All this corresponded to an "educational ideology of cultural deprivation." (Halper: 1977 pp.267). With a considerable proportion of the state-school population 'culturally deprived', the entire apparatus of formal schooling must be re-shaped by a policy of 'compensatory education'. (Peled: 1979, Smilansky and Nevo: 1979; Horowitz: 1980; Nachum: 1980; Reshef: 1981). The slogan 'unity via uniformity' was replaced by that of 'fostering the disadvantaged'." This has since been a leading ideal in the State's educational discourse, with its focus upon all children of Afro-Asian origin (Ogbu: 1978).

The compensatory policy was implemented on two levels: the administrative-organisational and the pedagogical. All primary schools were organised into three categories: disadvantaged, partially disadvantaged and advantaged. Among administrative measures were ability-grouping in main subjects and a lower pass-standard for tests at the end of primary school, known as norm B. On the pedagogical side, things were geared towards allowing for a better performance among the disadvantaged. Thus, in 1967, differentiated curricula were introduced, with a modified version for disadvantaged schools. In reality, it meant reducing scholastic demands on oriental Jewish children.

Evaluation of the policy reveals that it was designed to produce an immediate effect of equality of opportunity by modifying the statistical appearances, but not the substance, of the oriental Jewish child's school performance (Kleinberger: 1969; Halper: 1977; Lewis: 1979; Nachum: 1980.) Although it set out under false colours, having political rather than educational goals, the policy was uncritically accepted. This was due in part to its being offered as a scientific

response to an educational problem based upon neutral facts revealed in empirical research, and in part to its perceived value as a way of meeting a popularly recognised need.

The compensatory policy became a powerful tool in the hands of the educational establishment. It relieved the Ministry of Education of responsibility for the failure of more than 50% of the primary-school population. Further, by committing oriental Jewish children to a process of compensation, remediation, rehabilitation and cultural enrichment, the Ashkenazi establishment could endorse and impose their own system of cultural values upon the 'underprivileged'. They actually created and sustained the very deficits said to be discovered by ideology-free empirical research in the oriental Jewish population. Consider, for instance the logic of Ashkenazi reasoning in coining an Ivrit term for oriental Jewish underachievers: *te'unei tipu'ach* (lit. 'those in need of fostering'). According to Elefant (1973) underlying the expression is the belief that various educational means can restore to such people what their environment has failed to give them. (Smilansky: 1958; Adler: 1968, 1970, 1976, 1976b; Adler and Kahane: 1975, Smilansky & Nevo: 1979).

At the same time, by adopting a compensatory educational policy and acting as surrogate family, the Ashkenazi establishment could impose its own views of reality by utilising schools as vehicles for conserving and inculcating its cultural hegemony. This will also sustain the State's Nation-Building discourse and submit the children to the dominant voice of the State.

5.3 The 'Compensatory Education Policy' and the teaching of reading.

At this point it is necessary to examine the direct effect of the 'fostering the disadvantaged' ideology on the process of teaching reading. It was precisely the high rate of reading-failure among oriental Jewish children that had spurred the move towards a compensatory policy.

The applications of the 'deficit-rehabilitation' theory in the field of literacy can be quickly summarised: *It is said that*

oriental Jewish children have difficulties with abstract thinking, *that* they do not easily understand that words in books have meanings

(Smilansky: 1966); ^{That} (When they come first to school they are not ready to perceive reading as a way of extracting meaning from text (Smilansky: 1958). Hence, a preliminary phase of instruction is needed before oriental children can tackle reading itself. This phase should either take place in the kindergarten, or be somehow integrated into the reading-process itself, (since learning to read must begin with the first day of school, as contrasted with kindergarten). ^{it is said that} (the knowledge which oriental Jewish children bring with them into school is not adequate to their needs as school-learners. ^{Therefore} In teaching reading, teachers must not rely on such knowledge, ^{they} they must teach in a way that does not leave too many "free spaces" (Feitelson: 1953; Dror: 1963, p.173) since there is no-one outside of school to help the children fill them. ^{On such logic, then,} it follows ^{that} teaching oriental Jewish children to read involves use of special kinds of texts suited to their ^{perceived} cognitive ability. Hence, the use of poetry is not recommended; It may confuse the disadvantaged child and encourage her to guess, thereby undermining self-confidence (Feitelson: 1978). ^{And so on.} Oriental Jewish children ^{we are told} love simple stories that are easy to grasp. They are not attracted to landscape description, abstract thought or subtle reasoning; ^{They} They like clear-cut characters who are either good or wicked. Even their humour differs from that of 'normal' children (Caspi and Sthal: 1972 p. 306). ^{As for methodology}

While learning to read, oriental Jewish children should not be exposed to written symbols not yet encountered (Feitelson: 1966). Hence, books should not be used. Much better to provide a daily or weekly page of text which can be assembled into a longer form as teaching proceeds. ^{Further we are told that}

oriental Jewish children will learn to read more easily if they are taught by direct, systematic methods administered in a structured framework. They will not succeed so well if they meet non-direct approaches, as used in progressive classes (Smilansky: 1957, Bloom: 1966, Smilansky and Shephatia: 1973, 1977, 1982; Goldgraber: 1980). ^{In this system of thought}

Learning to decode is the key to reading. ^{It is said that} with oriental children this is best achieved by using a phonetic approach in which the phoneme-grapheme is taught in a step-by-step sequential order.

The assumption of it is to

(eliminate the need to abstract letter-sounds and reapply them to new words, as in the 'whole word' (analytic) approach, ^{seen} This is easier for children with difficulties in abstract thinking. Given the idiosyncrasies of written Ivrit, the phonetic approach is ^{seen} not merely the best for disadvantaged children, it is ^(seen as) the only method for effective and successful acquisition of reading.

The main proponent of the phonetic approach is Feitelson:1953, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968a, 1968b, 1974, 1976, 1982, 1983, 1984) who, since the 1950's, has left her impact on the theories and practices of literacy teaching in the Israeli primary school. Her influence on the primary school scene was considerable, owing to the fact that for many years she was one of the main policy makers in the Ministry of Education. Feitelson's theories of reading and writing instruction anchor in the "unique linguistic features of Ivrit" (1973).

Feitelson formulated a programmed reading-method for the culturally disadvantaged, which adopted instructional strategies that take account of the language's particular character (see appendix).

Thus, according to Feitelson, given the orthographic system which demands that the beginning reader pay attention to every minute detail "be it even a single dot" (1973 p. 434), and given the oriental Jewish child's supposed difficulty with abstract thinking; it is imperative that children learn every possible combination of vowels and consonants. In a highly structured and controlled method, Feitelson introduces first the vowel sound, then the consonant, and finally combines the two symbols into a phoneme.

By employing this technique, Feitelson claims, the children are given meaningful words and message to read without being exposed to an overload of information which the culturally deprived would not be able to handle.

Feitelson was much concerned with the child's immediate success. She therefore instructed the teachers to follow a set of rigid rules that seemed to her essential to attain this goal; guessing was not allowed; printed material for further reading contained only words that the pupils would be able to decode; teachers were advised to proceed and teach new vowel and consonant sounds only when the whole class had mastered the last sound learned. A notable aspect

was that every step of the children's progress was checked by the teacher and those children who showed signs of difficulty or had missed some lessons were immediately helped.

A true believer in the phonetic teaching system, Feitelson vehemently criticised the whole-word approach, which she described as imported methods, suitable for Britain and the United States. She related the massive reading failure of the oriental disadvantaged children to such methods. Feitelson's criticism of the whole-word approach was continuous with the great debate (Chall: 1976) between the proponents of the whole-word approach and those who advocated the synthetic-phonetic method, which for most of the first half of the century, left its mark on the early teaching of reading. With respect to the strife between these two factions, the opinion of Dombey (1986) is worth mentioning: she says: "The texts produced by these opponents bear marked similarities." "Both imply a conception of learning involved in initial reading as primarily an externally controlled and perceptual matter. "(p. 16)

Drawing on Dombey's contentions, it is argued here that by using the linguistic features of Ivrit, Feitelson facilitated a pedagogy that made the oriental Jewish child a passive participant rather than an active partner in the process of becoming a reader. Using the linguistic features of Ivrit imposed a process which left the oriental Jewish child linguistically, cognitively and socially disempowered. By disseminating practices recommended by Feitelson, the Ministry of Education was able to maintain a facade of valid reading-attainments. Indeed, as recalled, it was Feitelson who based her methods on the premise "that not one must fail" and, who asserted that by using her phonetic approach, any Ivrit speaking child can learn to read within twelve weeks.

It were precisely these sentiments of national concern wrapped as scientific pedagogies, that must have appealed to the educational administration.

By adopting the claim that the phonetic approach is the only technology that would make the Ivrit speaking child into a skilled and efficient reader, the didactic messages conveyed by Feitelson were transformed into a "chauvinist" statement on the function of

literacy in the process of Nation-Building. For implied in these messages was the notion that the instrument of rapid literacy acquisition would transform the disadvantaged into integrated members of the communities.

Clearly, Feitelson's argumentation reflects the tenets of the technocratically-biased approach to the teaching of literacy promoted by the contemporary reading psychologists. This technocratic view facilitated use of 'scientifically-proved' pedagogies, systematic diagnoses and the use of standardised tests and remediation.

It is not easy to fault 'scientific' approaches to education when these are supported by empirical research data. Thus, defining the policy in terms of unbiased neutral facts, defused criticism. To the contrary, the growing influence of scientific research, especially in the field of applied psychology, was reflected in the decision making processes of the educational establishment. Consequently, the public at large, the oriental faction included, could be reassured that by developing scientifically approved pedagogies the ministry has the best interest of the children in mind: that of the oriental child, who is showered with specially designed advancement pedagogies, and that of the Ashkenazi pupil, whose scholastic needs are maintained and furthered.

5.3.1. Practical Results.

In compliance with compensatory education theories the Ministry addressed the 'literacy crisis', with all its negative implications for social and national cohesion by implementing a standardised approach to literacy instruction. It was supposed that it would ensure that the majority of oriental Jewish children would master the mechanical skills of reading. The narrow criteria adopted for judging success made it easy for the Ministry to designate disadvantaged pupils as 'readers' at the end of the first school year (Adiel: 1968, Gillis: 1987). By placing up to 30% of children, who failed even this standard, in segregated teaching-groups, an apparent level of success could ^{השגה} maintained throughout primary school years. Systematic removal of non-readers from their home class was justified by the compensatory-rehabilitation policy. It was said to

show the unrelenting commitment of school and State to raising the literacy level of the disadvantaged children in school populations. (Adiel: 1970; Smilansky and Nevo: 1979).

Since the 1960s, the teaching of reading in Israeli first grades, in both secular and religious State schools, draws on the psychological and pedagogical rationale of the four sets of structured material for teaching beginning-readers introduced in 1960 as a response to the needs of oriental Jewish children. Three of these used the phonetic approach while the fourth relied on an 'analytic-synthetic' approach. They were designed and tested in classes over a two-year period (1957-59) by independent research-teams in collaboration with the Szold Institute. It was found that the results favoured the phonetic approach, especially where children of the lower socio-economic classes were concerned. (Two of the original programmes - initiated by Feitelson and Levanon - are still in use, the latter in religious state schools especially). (Smilansky:1957, 1958, 1966, 1967; Dror:1963; Bloom:1966; Feitelson:1973; Goldgraber: 1980).

The Ministry's declared policy called for the effective teaching of reading to all disadvantaged pupils within the shortest possible time. The call for rapid acquisition of initial reading-skills was justified by the need to raise the disadvantaged child's self-esteem and motivation. Learning to read quickly, it was argued, would give the child a sense of progress thus enhancing her integration into the educational climate of the class. I contend that, in reality, the pace of teaching was set by a mixture of national/political factors which assume particular importance where the percentage of oriental Jewish pupils in religious state schools is concerned. Although these comprise only 20% of the Israeli school system, they house two thirds (over 70%) of the oriental Jewish child population, defined as 'disadvantaged' (Minkovitz, Davis and Bashi:1982). In order to lessen the impact of the dangerous emerging equation 'religious state school = oriental Jewish disadvantaged = low level literacy', the children were pressed to become fluent readers very early in the school year.

Speeding up the process of acquiring basic reading-skill was congruent with the prevailing practice in religious state schools

generally. The latter always demand early mastery of reading as it will enable pupils to read the prayerbook in class, and prepare them for the reading of the Book of Genesis and other religious texts soon after their entrance into school. Pushing the children towards early reading-acquisition appeared justifiable and legitimate, since it appealed to parents on both sides of the ethnic divide.

The oriental Jewish parent was shown that, besides effectively teaching his child to read properly, these schools did not fail to provide the appropriate religious education. The Ashkenazi orthodox parents had to be equally satisfied, albeit for different reasons. They had to be convinced that the school's preoccupation with the reading-problems of oriental children would not interfere with their own child's progress or hamper her religious education, and that state religious schools would not be stigmatised as scholastically inferior.

Although never admitted publicly, even today the pace of teaching reading-skills in state secular schools is contingent upon that dictated by the state religious schools. Under the aegis of the unified curriculum, secular state schools are equally directed to begin teaching the Book of Genesis at the start of the 2nd Grade. Here too, both 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' children are expected to become fluent readers within a very short time, so as to be able to follow the sacred text presented in its canonical form.

The irony of it all is that the programmes recommended primarily for advancing the culturally deprived have become a marketable commodity that was soon adopted by school administrators and first-grade teachers, irrespective of their pupils' background and ability.

5.4 Scholars and Scribes: the Literacy Gap Sustained.

The main point in the last Chapter was that Israel's official educational policies are premised on the notion that schools are the State's agents for disseminating and instilling the discourse of Nation-Building.

In this chapter, I have shown how, in that perspective, the gap between Ashkenazi and oriental Jew in relation to literacy was perceived as a threat to cultural and national unity.

Aware of this potential danger and realising its political implications, the Israeli education authorities pursue a policy of integration and compensation that is officially directed towards minimising the ethno-social scholastic gap in literacy. Taking into account the particular historical, cultural and socio-political complex that makes up Israel, a compensatory policy means exposing the oriental Jewish child to the Ashkenazi discourse or, in less subtle words, in this process, the oriental Jewish child is disempowered and deskilled and her voice silenced, while the hegemony of the Ashkenazi voice is sustained, perpetuated and reproduced; the process of disempowering one fraction of the population is justified by the need to empower the collective (the State) to achieve and maintain national consensus and national cohesion. It follows therefore that the teaching of literacy assumes the task of gatekeeping whereby the Ashkenazi child, by virtue of belonging to the dominant culture, is afforded access to and becomes competent in, reading, using this competency to become a scholar; the oriental Jewish child, on the other hand, though exposed to the same pedagogy and text will only be allowed to act as 'the scribe'. Consequently, in the name of Nation-Building, the teaching of reading in the primary school tacitly contributes not only to maintaining, but eventually to widening, the ethno-social gap between the Ashkenazi and oriental Jewish segments of the Israeli population.

The suggestion that, despite the proclaimed policy of meritocracy, the teaching of literacy in the primary schools is indeed a vehicle for sustaining the oriental Jewish child's future role as a 'scribe', is substantiated by the following facts: although constituting 60% of the primary school population, the number of oriental Jewish pupils in secondary schools that grant a matriculation certificate accounts for not more than 30%, and only 10% of them actually pass the matriculation exams (Minkovitz, Davis and Bashi:1982). This scholastic gap exists in only the purely academic sphere. In the vocational schools and among the early school leavers, oriental Jewish youth is over-represented (Lewis:1979; Swirsky:1990). One can not but agree with Lewis:1979 that "...in training adolescents to fill various positions in the Israeli economy, it would seem that the

educational system has assumed the auxiliary function as a gatekeeper, funnelling middle class Ashkenazi youth towards middle-level and elite positions, while certifying working-class oriental youth to join their fathers in blue-collar trades". (p. 108).

Kahana(1980), speaking in the same vein, has shown that 65% of the secondary school population attend the vocational stream, most of them native-born children of (oriental) immigrants. He further contends that..."this is probably one factor contributing to the spread of frustration and marginality among these pupils ... the seeds of the feeling of resentment and unfairness among second generation immigrants may well have been planted in the school system." (op. 31).

Chapter Two of this thesis showed how the viability of traditional Jewish society was determined by the literate performance of its members. While maintaining a highly controlled network for the dissemination of popular literacy, traditional Jewish society enabled its members to become literate only to the extent that would ensure the internal strength of its socio-cultural fabric.

Access to higher levels of literacy (which, for example bred the *talmid chacham*) was open to only a small number of privileged, who could then be identified as the bearers and guardians of the society and its texts.

I suggest that a similar process of "cultural production and reproduction" (Bourdieu: 1971; Bourdieu and Passron: 1977) is taking place now in the modern centralised authoritative regime of the Israeli educational setting. Although overtly facilitating policy of integration and compensatory education authorities covertly sustain the position of the oriental Jewish child as an underachiever, prodding schools to reproduce the class-distinction that perpetuates the elitist status of the Ashkenazi academic scholar.

Admittedly, the educational system grants small groups of oriental Jewish children permission to become Ashkenazi in miniature and share some of the cultural literary assets that are jealously kept in the hands of this dominant group. (Adler, Kahane and Avgad: 1975; Klein and Eshel: 1975; Lewy & Chen: 1976; Smilansky and Nevo: 1979; Chen, Lewy and Adler: 1984; Iram: 1985;

Schwarzwald: 1985; Stahl:1985; Katz and Ben-Yochanan: 1988; Horowitz: 1989; Swirsky: 1990.) By doing so, the educational policy-makers demonstrate their proclaimed meritocratic ideology without openly violating it. All the while they hold on to their exclusive ownership of knowledge and the means for its propagation.

The State's educational stance - using school as a means for maintaining national cohesion and in the process cultivating many 'scribes', while seeking to achieve a high level of scholastic excellence for only the selected few - can already be identified in primary school. Failure to achieve the minimum competencies is perceived as a threat to and as a symbol of potential weakening of the social fibre of the collective. To counter this undesirable phenomenon, the six year old 'underachiever' is taken out of the class at the first sign of difficulties, to be given remedial teaching that at least will equip him or her with 'scribal literacy' skills. The 'price' that the individual (read 'oriental Jewish') child is expected to pay in this process is expressed by 'Horowitz (1980) in her discussion of integration in the middle school, as follows: "Different ethnic groups can only reach common ground by way of encounter and contact, and even if it transpires that encounter and contact have a price in terms of academic achievement, or even self-image, this does not mean that an ideological preference for integration and cooperation over segregation does not justify the price that has to be paid. Segregation, when all is said and done, is hardly compatible with Nation-Building" (p.144).

Summary.

This chapter has shown how the 'literacy crisis', brought on by large scale immigration of oriental Jews, has called forth a theory of cultural deprivation and policy of compensatory education. In the attempt to institutionalise a shared national outlook and instill a national commitment in accordance with dominant discourse of the state, the teaching of literacy was given a standard structure. It was a process of control that empowered the collective by disempowering the oriental Jewish child who was designated 'culturally disadvantaged'.

CHAPTER SIX

Learning To Read In The Service Of Nation Building : Current Pedagogy And Texts In The Israeli First-Grades.

6. Introduction.

The main argument in this chapter concerns the pedagogy and the texts of the reading schemes, the principal tool of the Israeli first grade teacher. I contend that these schemes are not objective neutral exercises designed to impart 'basic reading skills'. Rather they expose all first graders to a single unified culturally encoded message that affects children's identity and self consciousness. In Section One I discuss the concept of *gibush* (cohesion) and the overt ways in which it is implemented in Israeli classrooms. Sections Two and Three examine the State's official literacy policy. Section Four points to the social/ideological aspects of literacy teaching in the first grades. In Section Five I subject six texts selected from widely-used reading schemes to the art of *midrash* (interpretation) and identify their multi-layered meanings. In Section Six I argue that learning to read in the first grade is the first instance of tacitly promoting *gibush*. This is exemplified by discussing the television series 'No secrets...' to reading which is shown to express symbolically the voice of the State.

6.1 The concept of *Gibush*.

Explanations were offered in the last chapter for the ways in which literacy is used by the dominant Israeli ideology. They serve to narrow access to learning while giving an appearance of acting even-handedly. All this corresponds to certain socio-cultural

theories of "cultural production and reproduction" and of "cultural deprivation". (Bourdieu:1971; Bourdieu & Passeron:1977; Lewis:1977, 1981; Ogbu:1978; Apple:1979, 1982). Within their limits these are valid. However, I contend that the way in which Israeli children are taught literacy serves an even deeper purpose within the Nation-Building discourse - one that is far less conspicuous, since it lies concealed within the texture of Israeli society. At the heart of this purpose is the commitment to survival through 'reading a shared text'. It appears, in fact, that Israeli society - Ashkenazi, Sephardi, oriental and orthodox Jewry - is using literacy to capture minds for a certain view of what that society is about and what their role within it should be.

The suggestion that the Israeli classroom functions as a ritualised site for promoting mechanical solidarity and social cohesion has already been advanced in an ethnographic study by Katriel and Neshet(1986). They maintain that the ethic of social cohesion (in Ivrit, *gibush*) can be traced back to the communal utopia of socialist Zionism, whose echoes can still be heard in the dominant social and educational ideologies of the present day. Promoting *gibush* is seen as instrumental in sustaining the spirit of 'communitas', that typical attribute of the *halutz*, and in producing "... a pattern of sentiment that supports the utopian mythology that still animates Israeli official rhetoric." (Ibid, p.231).

These researchers argued that the attainment of social cohesion in the classroom is a generally recognised educational goal and is shared, in varying degrees, by all participants in the educational scene. They defined a cohesive class as one that features an undifferentiated collectivity, co-operation, shared sentiments, solidarity and a sense of togetherness. All these factors are perceived as signs of a high degree of integration and inner strength. In the above-mentioned study, the authors concluded that, beginning halfway through primary school, the children are being socialised into the rhetoric of *gibush* according to a prescribed set of social and educational practices, officially recommended by the Ministry of Education.

Gibush can be generated, they maintain, indirectly as a by-

product of intensive engagement in extracurricular social activities (outings, parties). It can be produced directly by explicitly attending to the quality of social relations in class (through taking part in "relational talks" and formulating publicly shared rules of conduct, set in the form of an explicit "social contract"). The attainment of *gibush* demands an ability to overcome individual differences, an ability thought to develop with age and school experience as children ascend the educational ladder.

For Katriel and Neshet, promotion of *gibush* is relegated to the social domain which is considered to be independent of the cognitive aspects of schooling. "Learning", they say, "is rarely seen as sufficiently involving and engaging to serve as an impetus towards *gibush*" (1986 p.226). I shall show that this is far from being the case.

However, these findings serve to bring to the fore the prominence of *gibush* as a distinctive cultural expression of mainstream Israeli society. The term is used frequently in a variety of informal and formal social groupings (friendship circles, youth movements, the army, places of work). Schools, by virtue of their being society's initial socialisation agents, offer the classroom as a practice-ground for the widely accepted ideal of *gibush*. What is emphasised in the study by Katriel and Neshet, however, is the intentionally-prescribed mode of this induction of the young into a form of sociality regarded by the State as ideal. The young participants are fully aware that the concerted efforts to promote *gibush* are a deliberate process. This is well illustrated by the words of an interviewee in their research, a tenth-grader, who succinctly said "We are programmed into it". (Ibid p.224)

I contend that literacy itself is the prime means of fostering *gibush*. From their first day in school, the children learn to read a uniformly shared text, presented to all the children at the same time and at the same pace, a text intended to elicit identical reading-behaviour. I maintain that these classroom practices are the first symbolic expressions of *gibush*, and that they are tacitly and unconsciously facilitated by the manner in which the children learn to become readers. It follows, therefore, that they are socialised into

a state-mandated rhetoric of cohesion long before intentional, overt activities of *gibush* are initiated - at the social level - in the intermediate classes, as Katriel and Neshet argue.

I shall argue that the antecedents of the *gibush* of later social life are identifiable in the schooling enterprise as early as the first grade of primary school. There, they are primarily mediated through the pedagogy of literacy teaching. By using literacy teaching as a vehicle for instilling conformity, collectivity and solidarity, teachers adopt an age-old Jewish mechanism of cohesion, disguised as modern didactic technique. In legitimising schools as sites for promulgating 'Nation-Building', literacy teaching becomes "... a pedagogy of chauvinism dressed up in the lingo of the Great Book." (Giroux:1989:144).

If this is the aim, what means are used to achieve it in practice? This question is addressed in the remainder of the chapter.

6.2 The Literacy Teaching approach in the Israeli Primary School.

Definitions and practices of literacy are often taken for granted in education and are perceived as absolute psychological and pedagogical certainties, rather than as selective or merely typical expressions of a particular technology. How children learn to read in school may thus affect their general understanding of the meaning underlying literacy practices and thereby mould their literate identity. The choice of a particular model of reading instruction implies a definition of literacy, of its purposes and uses. For, embedded in the model itself are suppositions (be they implicit or explicit) about the powers and limits of literacy, the desired competences to be transmitted, the body of texts to be read (and those to be kept away from certain readers), the effective norms for defining a literate behaviour, and the organisational pattern in which the actual learning takes place.

Practices of teaching reading in the Israeli primary school classroom derive from models of literacy whose assumptions were formulated by the Israeli reading experts of the 1950's and 1960's under the strong influence of American behaviourist learning theory (Chall: 1962). These assumptions, have since been sanctioned as the

normative discourse on the teaching of reading. They are commonly shared by the majority of Israeli educational policy makers, administrators, practitioners and, parents. Accordingly, it is accepted as normative that:

(i) Reading is primarily a visual-perceptual process, involving printed unit/sound relationships. In this process, the decoding of graphic elements into linguistic units precedes comprehension (Ministry of Education : 1978).

(ii) Meaning is something arrived at after many separable skills (of decoding and comprehension) have been learned and practised according to structured hierarchical sequences. In the light of this reasoning, it is believed that like decoding, comprehension comprises a hierarchy of subskills which must be systematically exercised (Adar et al.: 1986; Ben-Yosef et al.: 1986).

(iii) All reading skills (be they decoding or comprehension skills) are measurable. Successful mastery of all reading skills is demonstrated by the learner's level of reading ability, verified through grade-level achievement test scores (Ministry of Education : 1988).

It is further believed as normative that:

(iv) Children have to be taught to be literate. It is, however, generally agreed that children are not ready for this task before they go to school that is, before the age of six (Smilansky & Shefatia: 1973; Feitelson et al.: 1982).

(v) Reading ability is best acquired in schools in which the teaching is systematic and controlled.

(vi) Children can not 'read' before they have reached a satisfactory standard of proficiency in the basic skills (Feitelson et al.: 1982).

(vii) Learning to read is an easy task as "...the skill can be acquired through a relatively simple learning process." (Minkovitz, Davis and Bashi : 1982 pp.445).

(viii) The acquisition of reading must therefore be completed before the end of the first year of schooling (and preferably by the end of the second term) (Ministry of Education : 1978).

(ix) Failure to acquire reading skills by the end of the first grade hampers children's progress in school and..."greater efforts should be

made to provide the slower pupils with reading skills as early as possible, because reading problems will pose a serious obstacle for these children in the learning of the other subjects beginning in the second grade (Minkovitz, Davis and Bashi: 1982 pp. 446).

(x) When reading is taught according to a sequential hierarchy of skills the location and diagnosis of reading failure is easier, and can be detected early.

Not surprisingly, the systematic engineering of a network for disseminating these 'certainties' started under the auspices of the centre that monitored the compensatory and rehabilitative pedagogies (Adiel: 1970; Smilansky & Nevo 1979). The centre's 'army' of specially trained reading experts and supervisors were encouraged by school inspectors and headteachers to train teachers in advantaged schools throughout the country. Training the-mainly first grade-teachers meant, in practice, transmitting intact to them what Apple (1982 p. 14) defines as "a prepackaged instructional regime" of literacy instruction. By the end of the 1960's this regime was already well on its way to become, and soon consolidated into, a standardised commonly shared code of literacy teaching.

6.3 Teaching Reading with a Reading Scheme.

When reading is viewed as a hierarchy of skills, its teaching in the first grade proceeds according to a structured skill oriented approach. This requires activities directed at mastering the basic decoding skills. The teacher's main tool of instruction is a reading scheme i.e, a grade-levelled vocabulary-controlled assembly of drills and related 'texts' formulated according to the rules of the phonetic-synthetic, whole-word (analytic) or eclectic approach. (The latter is recommended to Israeli schools as "providing a wider range of word recognition strategies based on the representative elements of the two approaches" (Wohl: 1986).

In the previous chapter I have already drawn on Dombey's (1986) analysis of these approaches to reading. Dombey confirms that both approaches derive from a "behaviourist conception of initial reading", which seem to her "inherently unsatisfactory in their limited view of human learning and of relevant linguistic

knowledge" (p. 17).

A closer examination of the reading schemes used in the Israeli first grade reveals that they all share the following key elements:

- carefully selected, hierarchically and gradually introduced consonants and vowels, often of great similarity, with the *a* (X X) (as in father) vowel sound always being the first to be introduced; mnemonics are frequently used for the teaching of the vowels;
- the vocabulary comprises short words of a regular pattern (mostly in the third person singular and in the past tense);
- at the beginning stage, words remain confined to those vowels and consonants that have been learned in school. Implied in this practice is an assumption that the more it is possible to reduce the amount of visual input the child is exposed to in her initial decoding experience, the better she will be able to focus on the task at hand;
- the majority of words are nouns, or verbs, with only a thin scattering of adverbs and adjectives;
- there is a high frequency of word repetition within each of the texts, a practice that is supposed to be instrumental to building up the pupils' sight vocabulary;
- sentences are kept short, in the beginning phase being composed of two to four words at the most;
- grammar is highly deviant from the normal, in that the use of pronouns is avoided;
- illustrations are frequently used to supplement or substitute words, mainly nouns, that contain consonants or vowels not yet introduced;
- the teaching of writing is integrated into the reading schemes, and consists primarily of copying assignments, followed by exercises and drills on isolated aspects of penmanship;
- Until they finish their scheme the children receive a daily reading portion which matches their level of decoding.

Gradually and systematically in their first encounters with written language the children are exposed to a uniform sequence of vowels and consonants. The resultant reading vocabulary is thus a single, officially manipulated and controlled register, which is best defined as 'the first grade register'.

Halliday (1978) defines a register as a "...set of meanings that is

appropriate to a particular function of language, together with words and structure which express these meanings ... the meaning potential that is accessible in a given social order" (p. 105). The imposition of a first grade standardised register by means of the authorised schemes guarantees that the experience of becoming a reader will turn into a conventional and communal experience of all novices in all schools.

Since mastery of the decoding skills is the main criterion by which the first grader's reading performance is judged, and since the teaching of reading is divided into a sequence of stages, proceeding to the next one is conditional on competent and successful performance in the stage being studied.

According to a survey on the methods of literacy teaching carried out by Spektor and Katz(1990), the Israeli teacher has 36 authorised reading schemes at her disposal. The survey concludes that in practice, however, 80% of the teachers use one of six reading schemes that have been found the most effective (by the teachers).

Eventually, the efficacy of a scheme is measured by the length of time needed to accomplish mastery of the basic reading skills. The optimal desired time here ranges between five and seven months from the beginning of the school year. The efficacy of the scheme is also measured by the percentage of children who at the end of the initial reading-process, reach the Ministry official reading achievement standards for the end of the first grade. These are concerned with the following reading competences:

- an ability to read, aloud and silently, a short text presented in a form and language with which the child is familiar;
- an ability to read short sentences that instruct the child to perform simple assignments (draw a circle around an illustration on the page, draw a line between two identical objects pictured on the page, and the like);
- an ability to decode every possible combination of the sound/symbol correspondence;
- an ability to decode with the aid of the vowel signs (the diacritical marks) every word in Ivrit, including isolated, decontextualised words (Ministry of Education: 1978).

The last of these official requirements, implies correct pronunciation of words without, however, the need to comprehend their meaning. This warrants some elaboration on the role of the Ivriṯh vowel sound in the process of becoming a reader.

As was argued by Feitelson (1973), owing to their gestalt (size and location), the vowel-signs pose difficulties for the young reader. And, yet, the proponents of the skill-oriented approaches ascribe enormous importance to the decoding of the vowel signs, which are perceived as a key strategy for the Ivriṯh reading process (Venezky : 1973 Navon and Shimron : 1981, 1982; Shimron and Navon : 1982; Feitelson and Razel : 1984; Shimron 1984; Breznitz : 1987). For all practical purposes, all reading material in modern Ivriṯh (newspapers, books, personal and official letters, subtitles on television) is written, printed and read without the diacritical marks. The only exceptions are the Bible, the prayerbook and other sacred literature, and, on the more mundane level: poetry, literature for young children and special newspapers for adult learners of Ivriṯh.

As to schools, although all the very first printed material is issued with diacritical marks, by the fourth grade these have been gradually eliminated. This forces the reader to rely on her lexical, syntactic and semantic knowledge of the language. In other words, it is only during the initial stages that the child is trained to use a method that emphasises visual-perceptual aspects and sounding-out of vowels as main strategy of reading, and this is mainly so because of the pedagogical convictions on which the reading schemes are based.

However, as Freire (1987) has shown, in literacy matters the obvious is never as obvious as it seems. Underneath the circumscribed, rule bound didactics, hide what Heath (1981) calls "socially constructed and stipulated 'norms' of literacy and norms governing 'methods' for learning those norms."(pp. 27). It is therefore necessary to look at the "culture specific ways" in which the tradition of the Ivriṯh vowel signs is rooted, in order to understand their function in the process of learning to read.

6.3.1 Masorah (tradition) - The Vowel Sign in its Historical Context.

The vowel signs in Ivriṯh constitute part of a graphic system of vocalisation and accentuation known as *masorah* (the traditional annotation of the text of Scripture; the word derives from another Ivriṯh word *messer* or *massar* = to transmit). Undoubtedly, it originally had roots in traditions concerned with the writing of the (sacred) text using full or defective orthography. As evidenced in the *Talmudic* literature, the spelling handed down in tradition (*masoret*) i.e., whether to write with or without the *matres lectionis*, is decisive. The *Talmudic* sages had organised lists for remembering words written with or without the *matres lectionis*. These lists were the beginning of the *masorah*, which started as short notes on exceptional forms of spelling annotated in the margin of the book. The prerequisite for writing the *masorah* systematically was a change from the use of scrolls to a more sophisticated form of a codex, which took place not later than the 8th century A.D.

The Scriptures were thus the first texts that required additional signs as reading aids. The function of the signs was to guide the educated reader as to the manner of punctuation and modulation of the verses. By the tenth century A.D. the vowel sign system had assumed its imperative, unequivocal form and has since remained unchanged, except for slight variations. It was accepted not simply as a norm, but as a sanctified norm. There is no doubt that the purpose of the *masorah*, whether oral or written, was the precise and clear preservation of the sacred texts.

Although gradually applied to non-biblical texts, such as liturgy and poetry, most of the literary works in Ivriṯh written between the 10th and 18th century make no use of the vowel signs. The practice of teaching the vowel signs in the *heder*, a place where, after all, the children learn to read the Scriptures, started apparently also quite late, although the precise date is not known. What is known is that by the 13th century teachers were already instructed to use the vowel signs systematically as mnemonics, so as to simplify the task for the young reader (Morris : 1964). The application of the vowel signs to secular, mundane Ivriṯh texts was commonly practised only from the 19th century. It is clear that contemporary literacy-teaching, with a pedagogy apparently established on the basis of scientific findings, in

reality derives from traditions prevalent in the *heder* (Gillis : 1987).

The Ivrit language applied the verb 'to call out' (קָרָא) to the practice of reading (קְרִיאָה). Reading of the Sacred Text is always an act of oral performance and entails correct pronunciation of every single word. This deeply seated tradition obliges a Jew to read the sacred text aloud, even when alone, and even when the words are not comprehended. Thus, knowledge of the diacritical marks is essential for fulfilling a demand which, to an extent, assumes the function of a "cultural performance" (see. Chapter 2 2.6).

A full appreciation of the deep cultural meanings of norms for precise pronunciation and of their relevance to the pedagogy of literacy teaching in contemporary Israeli first grades, is gleaned from the guideline 'Reading and Language Curriculum in the State Religious Primary Schools'). In this official document, which sets the norms for the literate performance of the religious child, it is explicitly stipulated as the school's responsibility to teach every child to be a "...fluent reader, who is able to correctly pronounce every word of the Sacred Texts (prayer books included), even if not all the verses and passages read are comprehended."(1986 p.17).

In learning to decode and to use the vowel signs as their main reading strategies, all first graders act out the ancient *talmid chacham* traditions. The diacritic marks are necessary for reading the Book of Genesis, the first shared text that cuts across the division of the two educational frameworks (State and State Religious).

Within the setting of a modern institution, equipped with the tools of modern technology, the reading schemes prepare the Israeli child to re-enact the age-old rite of passage into the study of the *Torah* and thus, albeit symbolically, turn him into the successor of the East European child attending the *heder*. It is therefore reasonable to maintain that learning to read in school by means of the reading schemes is primarily "learning to read culturally". This will be substantiated in the continuing discussion.

6.4 The Social and Ideological Aspects of Literacy Teaching.

I have shown that the Ministry's official line on the teaching of reading is premised on the assumption that inculcation of skills by

means of purpose-constructed didactic material will result in a quick and efficient acquisition of assessable reading competence. As a corollary, through a systematic page by page instruction, teaching in the first grade is directed towards increasing the pupils' familiarity with a surface level of the written language.

Learning to read, however, in its initial stages, has more to it than being exposed to an extremely controlled and prescribed perceptual processes or to superficial transactions with the printed page. Learning to speak is more than acquiring phonology, lexis and syntax. It also means learning social conventions, modes of thought and the patterns of interaction prevalent in the social environment in which the language functions. Similarly learning to read is an extension of the modes by which -through language- children perceive and make sense of the world around them (Halliday : 1978; Freebody & Baker 1985; Dombey : 1986; Baker & Freebody: 1989). Since language is the main channel through which children learn to act as members of a society, instruction in reading aims to generate and induce certain social practices and norms and is not limited solely to imparting skills. Cook-Gumpertz (1986) elaborates this: "We expect literacy to provide not just technical skills, but also a set of propositions about using knowledge. Literacy is not just the simple ability to read and write; but by possessing and performing these skills we exercise socially approved and approvable talents; in other words, literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon."(1986 p.1).

However, unlike the acquisition of spoken language, which is an ongoing exchange of meanings between the individual and significant others (Halliday op. cit.), the acquisition of written language i.e., learning to read in school is an institutionalised activity, confined within the narrow limits of educational policies and mediated by means of teacher-proof reading schemes.

It is therefore necessary to show how the linguistic repertoire and literary forms of the reading schemes, assembled to exercise and enforce the mechanics of reading, also function as vehicles for covert messages. Further, it is necessary to explain the role of pedagogy and the internal logic of the reading schemes in constructing in the first grader a vision of her culture and of herself

as a reader of, and within, this culture. This sort of explanation forces us to go beyond viewing processes for acquiring literacy as a simple case of handing on and internalising a set of functions as skills. It compels us to consider both the symbolic aspects and the content of what is taught and learned (Ferdman : 1990).

Freebody and Baker (1985) showed how the texts in basal readers display particular pictures of the world, of its normal forms and routine assumptions, and how the use of language in these texts is instrumental in the process. These researchers explored linguistic and textual categories depicted in the basal readers, such as the most common words and frequency of their appearance in the text, different usage between male and female descriptions, modes of conversation between various speakers. They concluded that the linguistic content of young children's readers reveals them to be "stepping stones", not only towards learning to read and learning to understand what is read, but also towards learning how the institution of school takes upon itself the authority to define sanctional concepts of 'literacy' and 'childhood'.

Similarly, in order to establish a connection between ideological content and the structure of curricular texts, Luke (1988) provides a comparative story grammar analysis of popular American and Canadian basal readers ('Fun with Dick and Jane' and the 'Young Explorers Reader'). He demonstrates how the narratives in the American primers present a particular social reality which was presented as "natural" and as the only possible pattern of childhood within the dominant culture. In comparison, the Canadian texts set out to convey an ideological statement on the value of Canadian identity and nationality. In other words, through the texts the children acquired the "...semantics of being Canadian" (ibid p. 149). These empirical research findings are reinforced by the critical inquiry into the relationship between literacy instruction and the formation of cultural identity, especially within ethnically diverse societies.

Since cultures differ in what they regard as their 'texts' and in the values they attach to them, different cultures will also differ in what will be viewed as literate behaviour (Heath 1982, 1983; Street:

1984; Schieffelin and Gilmore : 1987; Ferdman, 1990).

Up to this point I have been considering the modes by which literacy and the teaching of reading are explicitly defined within the Israeli educational scene. Implicit in all pedagogies, however, is a vision of society (Freire: 1978; Giroux : 1981). The choice of a particular pedagogy reflects not only a society's definitions of literacy, but also in what manner these definitions incorporate cultural, ideological (national, political) priorities. How the children learn to read in school affects their general understanding of the meanings underlying literacy practices and moulds their literate behaviour and literate identity. This calls for an inquiry into the tacit messages that reading-schemes are intended to impart.

6.4.1 The Reading Scheme as a First School Text.

According to Halliday (1978), a text is the linguistic form of social interaction. Whether spoken or written, a text is an exchange of meanings that constitute the social system. Meanings always represent a choice. However, they are a selection from the total set of options, or what Halliday defines as "meaning potentials" (p 109). A text is therefore the actualisation of these meaning potentials and, hence, a process of semantic choice.

These definitions apply to the matter in hand. The texts of Israeli reading schemes which I shall present are indeed composed for the overt purpose of instructing first-graders in basic reading-skills. I contend that they are also institutionalised, prefabricated and state-sanctioned selections of meaning-potentials presented to children as school text-books. Thus, the children's first experience with literacy is also their first encounter with these social products, which carry the aura of the source of knowledge and authority. School texts (and text books) are artefacts purposely designed for mediating the curricula, that is, socially selected and socially controlled bodies of knowledge, defined as 'valid' by each society according to its own set of normative social rules (Bernstein: 1971; Keddie: 1971; Young: 1971; Anyon: 1978, 1981, 1983; Apple 1979, 1982(a), 1982(b), 1983; Bernstein, 1971; Giroux, 1989; Williams, 1989). Although taken by the participants in the educational enterprise to be objective and

functional, school textbooks are means for instilling ideologically prescribed messages which reflect the interests of the hegemonic social group. As claimed by Luke (1988) "...insofar as all school texts are models for transmitting systematic bodies of ideas, attitudes, values and competencies they could be said to constitute a means of ideological incorporation ... pedagogical texts, written for the teaching of literacy are a special case of the teaching of paradigmatic knowledge and competencies."(pp. 205-6).

Roth (1984) agrees that in selecting what to teach and how it is to be taught and evaluated, schools reaffirm what the culture values as knowledge. As social and cultural products, school textbooks, conceived and written by groups of experts (academicians, curricula developers, experienced teachers), display what Williams (1989) has defined as "a selective tradition" (p. 58).

Because the Israeli reading schemes are seen primarily as techniques or didactic devices for imparting basic word attack competencies, the content of the texts to be read is the least attended factor on the teacher's instructional agenda. The text in the reading schemes serves the technique. However, their seemingly banal and naive sounding words and sentences are as ideational and as ideology-laden as any other form of school text.

As the reader may recall, all text books in Israeli schools have to be authorised by the Ministry of Education. This administrative procedure of scrutiny and control is by no means free of ideological hues, especially in connection with books that are to be used in both secular and religious state schools. As an example of official intervention over dual use of the texts we may note that some of the male figures are depicted with their heads covered, which is the custom among orthodox Jewry. The context and content are thus rendered 'suitable' and appealing to the educational ethos of the State Religious schools.

In the centralised Israeli educational network, the State sanctioned reading schemes, are also a manifestation of a State-mandated dominant culture. Paucity of lexic and syntactic structure notwithstanding, it is obvious that the schemes' textual form and rhetoric are tools for imparting this culture's messages. The choice of

themes and topics images and situations, and the order and mode of presentation in which these appear confirm this view. The most obvious examples are the choice of repetitive key words, overtly intended to reinforce word-attack skills and sight vocabulary. The illustrations provide an identifiable ideational sign system in which idiosyncratic items, such as clothing, act as culturally encoded cues, rendering them servants of the text's tacit meanings. Not only the choice of themes and lexis, but even the minor linguistic units of the schemes function to give selected meanings. Accordingly choice of the first consonants and vowels, on which the combinations of the very first words taught are based, can be presented as an ideologically bound act.

A fine example of the hidden messages children are exposed to very early in their encounter with literacy is the choice of the consonant ψ (sh) as one of the first consonants taught in all reading schemes without exception. When combined with the vowel sound \underline{X} (a'), the consonant becomes the first syllable of the word $\underline{X}\psi$ (*shalom* (שׁלוֹם)). The *sha* ψ sound is also used for introducing the pair of words *shana chadasha* $\eta\psi\tau\eta$ $\eta\psi\psi$ (new year), which point to the Jewish high holidays, normally celebrated in September, and thus coinciding with the beginning of the school year. It is also the first syllable of the word *Shabat* $\eta\psi$ (the Sabbath). These four words are the first instances of written language with which the children start their reading career. In each case, the choice of the consonant ψ (sh) predicates the introduction of a value laden word. In Halliday's terms, it is plausible to contend that the choice of the consonant (in which the choice of the word is implied) is an actualisation of meaning potentials and thus is "...the product of numerous micro acts of semantic choice" (1978 p.150).

This micro act of semantic choice is paradigmatic of a process whereby the pedagogy comes to serve an ideology. The choice of the linguistic unit delves beneath the surface level of mastering sound/symbol correspondences and the blending of words, to tap into the children's cultural and national identity. That culturally encoded meanings can be identified at every level of the lexico-grammatical units in the reading schemes becomes clear when

analysing the texts.

6.5 Midrash: Narrative interpretation of Narrative.

Although not following the conventional 'once upon a time' pattern, and devoid of recognisable poetic attributes, tropes, metaphors, figurative speech and other characteristics of children's literature, the text in the reading scheme tells a story nevertheless: events take place, people interact, and meanings are generated. In view of such a construction, I maintain that, despite the linguistic constraints mentioned above, these texts are to be read as narratives. To read them as narratives, means to treat them as polysemic, intertextual (Rosen, 1984) and, in the words of Barthes in 'S/Z' (1975), however limited the text may be, as "plural".

I will use the practice of *midrash* (Kermode, 1979) as an analytical tool in exploring the network of plural codes hidden in the narratives provided for Israeli first graders in the form of reading schemes.

Midrash derives from the Ivrit word *darash* (literally: to examine, investigate, inquire, explore, expound, interpret). The *midrash* is, as suggested by Kermode (1979) "a narrative interpretation of a narrative", a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narratives (p. xi). As further defined by Kermode, the *midrash* enables the interpreter either to rewrite the story or to explain it in a more acceptable version. Whatever mode is used, whether by fictive augmentation and change, or by commentary, its object is to penetrate the surface and reveal a secret sense, to show what is concealed in what is proclaimed (ibid). This idea can be linked with Halliday's idea of 'meaning potential'.

When applying the art of *midrash* to the narrative of Ivrit reading schemes, (albeit within the context of a modern theory of hermeneutics), I re-enact an age old practice of interpretation - the practice of the Jewish sages who starting from the *Talmudic* period onward used *midrash* to elucidate the homiletic interpretation of the Scriptures.

The *Talmudic* literature is dotted with phrases that command use of this art of commentary, the hallmark of the Jewish tradition of

study. Use of *midrash* is premised on the notion that although the text of the Scriptures is above and beyond change, it may be expounded and is amenable to exploration, investigation and, indeed, to interpretation. This notion is articulated in such *Talmudic* phrases as "Just as the rock is splintered by the hammer, so every divine utterance is divisible into seventy interpretations" (Tract. Shabath 88.6), or "God speaks but once, yet I have two messages. Every biblical verse allows second meanings, and no two (different) verses will ever have identical meaning" (Tract. Sanhedrin 34.9) (English translation taken from Sokolow: 1989 p. 44).

By applying the art of *midrash* to the analysis of the text in the reading schemes, I bridge a gap between the ancient traditions, (the practice of the Ashkenazi *heder* and houses of study in Eastern Europe where meanings were negotiated by *midrash*) and the new techniques employed in the Israeli primary school system.

This also enables me to approach the task at hand (or at least to profess to approach it) as an 'insider', because as such, according to Kermode, I have immediate access to the secrets of the texts. Through the *midrash* I shall attempt to uncover first the text within texts, which form the network of the narratives in the reading schemes, and then the 'texts' within and across the cultural continuum. For, as we are told by Kermode "Broadly conceived, the power to make interpretations is an indispensable instrument of survival in the world, and works there as it works on literary texts." (1979 p. xi). By providing an exploration that extends beyond the surface level of the text's function, (that of promoting reading ability), I offer an insight into the layered meanings hidden within the reading schemes.

From her very first encounter with authorised school texts, the first grader is presented with and gains access to three dominant discourses: of being a Jew, of being an Israeli, and of becoming - and being - literate. Since all texts are framed within these three discourses the first grader is manipulated towards reading a single version of her culture and of her place and role within it. In reading this single version the child's cultural and national identity is inescapably moulded.

6.5.1 Reading with Midrash.

I shall now present six narratives from three different reading schemes commonly used and authorised primarily for secular schools¹, and submit them to a process of *midrash*. Two illustrate the discourse of "being a Jew", two concern "being an Israeli", and two bear upon "becoming literate in school".

Narrative No. 1 (see also Figure 1).

This narrative is composed of 16 words, seven of which are repetitive. In total there are 12 consonants and the vowel sound 'a' (X X). The words in brackets serve as substitute for the illustrations in the text.

Fasting

Grandfather is fasting,

[grandmother] is fasting.

[mother] is fasting.

Dana asked:

Is Ram fasting?

Is Rama fasting? Why?

Midrash:

The text is concerned with a religious ritual and a religious obligation. Fasting on the Day of Atonement, a day on which all sensual pleasures are interdicted, has been the most solemn ritual of orthodox Jewry throughout the ages.

In an authoritative and didactic tone, as exemplified by the repetitive use of the word 'fasting', F A , the narrative (though not mentioning the name of the holiday) explicitly describes the ritual to which, on this day, all the adult members of the family adhere (or should adhere) by following the commandment to fast. Children are exempt from this duty. This concession is not overtly articulated in the text, and the readers are left with an enigma: are they or are they not obliged to fast, and if at all, then why? Implied is the notion that a good Jew fasts, but until he passes his *bar mitzvah* ceremony, the Jewish male child is free from many duties to which he becomes subject as an adult.



צָם

ספּא צָם,

צָמָה.

אַפּא צָם,

צָמָה.

שאַלָה דָנָה:

— גַם רָם צָם?

גַם רָמָה צָמָה? לָמָה?



צָ | מָה
מָה | צָ

צָם
צָ

מָה שַׂאֲלָה דָנָה?

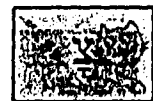


Figure 1.

The exemption from fasting notwithstanding, the text signals to the children that, although still young, they are already part of the congregation of Jews and full members of this tribe. The illustration, in which the boy is seen wearing a skull cap, connotes this idea, as it is a signifier that symbolises the belonging to the Jewish people. The picture also carries the message that fasting on the Day of Atonement is not a private occasion celebrated within the family circle, but a public act, shared by the collective and performed largely in the synagogue. Symbolic religious regalia are featured in the illustration: the praying shawls in which the male figures are wrapped, and the ram's horn, a sacred article which symbolises the whole cycle of the high holidays (the New Year, the Day of Atonement and the festival of the Tabernacles. The ram's horn is, however, also a reminder of the ram offered by Abraham in substitution for his son Isaac "...And Abraham lifted his eyes, and looked and beheld behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horn. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered him ..." (Genesis 22:13). In the Jewish tradition the ram symbolises therefore the covenant between Abraham and the Lord, and the blowing of the ram's horn is metaphorically considered a way of communicating with God.

Since the service in the synagogue on this day is a ritual reenactment of the ancient services in the Temple, the text taps on cultic, as well as on historical meanings. Hidden in the text are the value laden notions that lie at the heart of this holiday: repentance for trespasses committed against the Jewish laws and against fellow men; the practice of confessing one's sins in public; and the concept of atonement to be attained through self-affliction.

The narrative also enfoldes a historical tale, that of the antecedents of this particular day (and of the other high holidays) which are part of the story of the very beginning of the Jews as a people. These are proclaimed in the source of all Jewish narratives - the Scriptures: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement; it shall be a holy gathering to you ... it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings." Leviticus 23:26, 31).

Finally, the narrative is also a portrayal of cultural continuity, in

that the text is a story about the role of the Jewish holiday in safeguarding the survival of the people. The text implies that it is partly through adherence to the rituals that the Jew maintains his personal identity and his sense of belonging. These ideas are signified in the text by the succession of generations - the grandparents, the parents, the children - all are part of a cultural and historical continuity.

"Why fast?" as the text queries, is therefore not a question, but an imperative, a didactic act disguised as a rhetorical question. It orders the first graders to ensure that cultural continuity will be maintained.

Narrative No.2 (See figure 2)

This narrative is composed of 12 words, seven of which are repetitive. In total there are 10 consonants and three vowel sounds 'a' (x x) 'o' (xix) 'u' (x ux).

Light in the tabernacle
 The tabernacle is full of light.
 The tabernacle is beautiful.
 Hush, hush!
 Grandfather is studying.
 Father is studying.

Midrash:

Integrated into the text are the quintessential attributes of Judaism. It is, first of all, the realisation of a divine command ("And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk about them when thou sittest in thine house, ..." (Deuteronomy 6:7)). It further implies that literacy and studying are interchangeable with the observance of the Mosaic law and reiterates the idea of life-long study as portrayed, in both text and illustration, by the succession of generations. Literacy is perceived by Judaism as a source of enlightenment, which is metaphorically expressed by the light in the tabernacle. Indeed, not only is the literate person called in Ivrit 'son of light' (אֱרֵבֶן), but the *Talmudic midrash* links the letters of the Ivrit alphabet to the act of creation "and the light of creation is said to inhere in them." And, finally, the text signals that



אֹר בִּסְפָה

אֹר בִּסְפָה.

הַסְפָּה יָפָה.

הֵס, הֵס!

סָבָא לֹמֵד.

אָבָא לֹמֵד.

אֹר לֹמֵד

אֹ לֹ

Figure 2.

the ideal of literacy is to turn the novice reader into a *talmid chacham*.

These motifs are linked with the custom of religious Jews who build a tabernacle for the festival that ends the cycle of the high holidays and eat all their meals in it during the seven days of the feast. This is commanded in the Bible: "Thou shalt celebrate it in the seventh month; thou shalt dwell in tabernacles seven days..." (Leviticus 23:42). During these seven days, the tabernacle is also a house of study, a *beth midrash*, thus complying with the command of "reciting day and night". The text thus signals to the first grader the notion that literacy and study are to be integrated into all spheres of life. In fact it says that to be a Jew is to be literate.

Narrative No. 3 (see also Figure 3)

The narrative is composed of 16 words, eleven of which are repetitive. The words comprise 13 consonants and the vowel sound 'a' (א א).

The army is coming

-The army is coming, the army!

Dana marched, Chana marched,

Hadassah sang, Dana sang:

Ra ta ta! Ra ta ta!

The army is coming, the army!

Midrash:

In this narrative the children are playing at being soldiers, marching in procession and singing 'The army is coming'. The repetitive key-word in the text is 'army' (צבא) which, although it is not explicitly stated, refers to the IDF. The children portrayed in the text are the new generation of Israelis, the *sabra*, and as such they are not wearing a skull cap, but the so called '*tembel* hat', which used to be worn by the *halutz* and has become Israel's quasi official symbol.

The children are pictured carrying the national flag bearing the Star of David, one of the most heavily-laden symbols in Jewish history.



צָבָא בָּא

— צָבָא בָּא, צָבָא!
 צָעֵדָה רַמָּה, צָעֵדָה חֲנָה,
 שָׂרָה הַדְּסָה, שָׂרָה דָּנָה:
 ר־ת־ת! ר־ת־ת!
 צָבָא בָּא, צָבָא!

צָבָא
 בָּא

צָבָא
 בָּא

מה שָׂרָה דָּנָה?

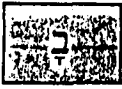


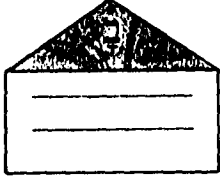
Figure 3.



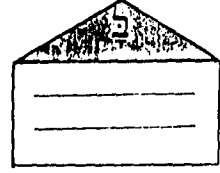
צָבָא
צָבָא



1. כתוב את המלים עם ב או כ במקום הנכון



שָׁבָה
בָּאָה



2. השלם

הַ
הַצָּבָע
הַמָּפָה

צָבָע
בָּאָה
כָּבָה

3. המלים פוורוח. העחק אותן לפי הסדר הנכון וחקבל שאלה



אָהָבָה מָה עָדָה

?

4. כתוב מחתח לכל הכרה מלה המתחילה כאוחה הכרה

שָׁעָה
פָּרָה
מָפָה
צָבָא

צָ

שָׁ

מָ

פָּ

Figure 4.

In the context of this narrative, the Star of David represents the reborn national identity, the State's sovereignty and independence. The children in the narrative therefore represent the successors of the Jewish heroic warriors of the First and Second Temple periods; of the *halutz* (and the pre-State voluntary military forces) and the future guardians of the State - the soldiers to be. This can be inferred from the picture on the activity page (see Figure 4). The soldiers on the march in this illustration are adults, they are 'for real', suggesting that the game is precursor to the reality. Thus, beneath the veil of joyful play, the children rehearse their first task upon entering the adult world: that of joining the army.

The narrative, aided by the illustration, implies therefore that the first shared experiences of the children starting school-the games they play, the first texts they read- bear the seeds of their collective identity and future role.

The narrative is notably 'plural'; it is a network of codes, connotations and meanings that incorporate the State's rhetoric of Nation-Building. Enfolded in its multi-meanings is the notion of defence as the new principle of survival, the myth of the IDF soldier, and the role of the schools in preparing first graders for their first responsibility as adults. The game in the text anticipates the future reality, in which the playful activities initiated by the children themselves will transmogrify into duties over which they have no control.

The multi-layered meanings of the narrative receive support from the layout of the text: as in the repeated use of the exclamation marks closing the sentences with a direct military connotation.

Narrative No. 4 (See figure 5)

This text is comprised of 22 words, 12 of which are repetitive. The words comprise 14 consonants and the vowel sound a (x x). The words in brackets serve as substitute for the illustrations in the text.

Ran is a little pilot
Father gave Ran a small [aeroplane].
Ran was happy with the present.
Took the [aeroplane], called:
Father, the present is nice!
Father was happy, called:
You are a little pilot!

Midrash

The narrative and the illustration tell a familiar story, one with which the children can easily identify: father performing his national duty by doing his stint as reservist in the IDF. This is near enough to the children's real life experience, and thus far from being mere metaphor.



However, beneath the surface of this narrative lies another layer of meaning: service in the IDF (compulsory or reserve) is congruous with service in the Air Force.

The protagonist is not just an ordinary soldier - he is portrayed as a military pilot, which has the implicit meaning of 'father belonging to the elite corps' of the IDF.

Given the crucial role of the air force in warding off danger and protecting the State's physical existence, it is no wonder that in the Nation-Building discourse, the position of military pilot is perceived as highly prestigious. The slogan 'הטובים לטיס' (literally: 'the best go flying') is but one popular expression of this sentiment. To serve as a pilot in the army signifies personal and social achievement, and is the unrealised dream of untold Israeli youngsters. The screening procedures for recruiting conscripts into the air force starts already in the last year of secondary school, the majority of the many candidates coming from the high ability cohort of these schools. Yet, at the end of the recruitment process, only a few in each of the yearly groups manage to stand up to the high quality (intellectual and technical) pre-training requirements and enter the training



רן טיס קטן

אבא נתן לרן  קטן.
 שמח רן במתנה.
 לקח  ה קרא:
 אבא, המתנה יפה!
 שמח אבא, קרא:
 טיס קטן אתה!

שמח
 ה

לקח
 ה

לרן

קטן

לקח

שמח

Figure 5.

programme proper.

In short 'air force pilot' equals 'great aptitude, outstanding scholastic ability and a high level of literacy': all competences that grant membership in a purposely chosen elite.

The interlock of the two discourses -'that of becoming a reader' and of 'being an Israeli'- in the reading scheme text is but the first covert layer. Within it are hidden even more subtle message that associate the first instances of literacy acquisition with high status future tasks that are valued and rewarded by the society at large.

Like the 'traditional' father who aspires that his son should become a *talmid chacham*, and thus join the elite of the Jewish people, the Israeli father, himself a soldier, envisages for his son membership in what he conceives as an elite society. This wish and vision of the future is hinted at in the text when the father says to his son '*You are a little pilot*' as he gives him a toy aeroplane. The text thus indicates that the present game is but a rehearsal for the future 'play for real'. The narratives on 'playing pilots' and on 'being a pilot' suggests that the process of preparing the young for a prestigious first out-of-school assignment starts upon their very first entry into school, and thus with their first reading lessons.

The prestigious future positions are, however, contingent upon successful mastery of literacy. In order to become a pilot, the child has to acquire a high level of reading ability, a competence that must already be displayed in the first grade. Implied here is that 'the best in literacy' will automatically lead to 'the best go flying'. The first grader is expected not simply to learn to read, but in order to gain status and prestige, he has to excel in it.

Narrative No. 5 (see Figure 6).

This text is composed of 16 words, 14 of which are repetitive. The words comprise 12 consonants and the vowel sound 'a' (X X). The words in brackets serve as substitute for the illustrations in the text.

Chava is running

Chava is running,

Nava is running.

Why is Chava running?

Chava is running to [school].

The time is now 8 o'clock.

Midrash:

The fifth narrative, in which the repetitive key word is running , וְיָרָא , is about getting to school on time.

In the reality of Israeli school life this means eight o'clock in the morning. As articulated in the text and indicated by the illustration, in order not to be late the children must hurry and therefore they are running. Not being late for school is, however, one of the many new rule-governed behaviours children must learn in their first weeks in school. The narrative behind the explicit text is therefore about acquiring norms; how they originate within the social setting of school, and how individuals learn them. In particular, it is the tale of the novice who, as she begins to cope with new routines and regulations (soon to become habitual), learns the social value of time. Very soon, during her initial period of adjusting to school life, she will learn to differentiate between individual and collective time. She will learn that school time is collective, organised according to the school clock. It is a sanctioned commodity owned and controlled by those in charge. 'Getting to school on time' is a story about power to control; about drawing boundaries, setting limitations and restriction, and about the power to punish or award (for abuse of time and tardiness, or for promptness).

Beneath the narrative about being in school on time is yet another tale, that of transition from the ludic to the ergic. Teachers and parents expect the children to keep to the command of the time table, so that they can immediately 'get down to work'. In the context of the first grade this is interchangeable with ' being taught how to



חֲנֻה רָצָה

חֲנֻה רָצָה,
 נְאוּה רָצָה.
 לְמָה חֲנֻה רָצָה?
 לְמָה נְאוּה רָצָה?
 חֲנֻה רָצָה לְ
 הַשָּׁעָה 8 עֵתָה.

נְאוּ | חֲנֻה
 חֲנֻה |

חֲנֻה | חֲנֻה
 חֲנֻה |

לְמָה רָצָה חֲנֻה?



Figure 6.

read'.

Learning to read is work, a system of order and of rule-governed behaviour. It is to be achieved within the boundaries of a pre-set period of time. 'Hurrying to school' stands for 'hurrying to become literate', the socially expected task of every first grader. As a corollary, school time equals literacy acquisition time. Literacy acquisition is work, an enterprise that demands effort and must produce results. Thus, the time allotted to its successful completion should never be wasted.

That time reserved for the study of literacy is sanctioned and not to be wasted is a value laden concept among orthodox Jewry. As the reader will recall, setting aside daily periods for the study of the *Torah*, individually and communally, was a common practice among Babylonian Jewry of the *ga'onic* period, and was later institutionalised within the communities of European Jewry. Assigning a daily period for study meant the pursuit of an ideal: that of devoting one's free time exclusively to the study of the Scriptures. Failing to follow this ideal was considered 'wasting time' (*bi'tul z'man*) (see chapter 2, 2.2). It was a transgression of norms that could lead to sanctions and penalties. The overt text in 'Getting to School on Time' is one 'entrance' of many into the multi-layered narrative on the value of time with regard to the study of literacy in school.

Narrative No. 6 (see Figure 7.)

The narrative is composed of 21 words, eleven of which are repetitive. The words comprise 13 consonants and the vowel sound 'a' (\underline{X} \underline{X}). The words in brackets serve as substitute for the illustrations in the text.

Ram was wrong

Ram came to the [classroom].

The [teacher] asked:

-Ram, what happened? What is the time now?

-The time is 8 o'clock- answered Ram.

Chava laughed, Nava laughed:

-Ha, ha, ha, Ram is wrong,

The time is now 9 o'clock!



רָם טָעָה

רָם בָּא לְ
שְׂאֵלָה הַ

— רָם, מָה קָרָה? מָה הַשָּׂעָה?
— הַשָּׂעָה 8 — עֵנָה רָם.
צְחָקָה מְנָה, צְחָקָה נְאֻמָּה:
— חֲחֲחִי, רָם טָעָה,
הַשָּׂעָה 9 עֵמָה!



טָ טָ
עָ עָ

טָ טָ
עָ עָ

לְמָה צְחָקָה מְנָה?

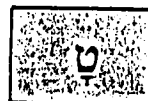


Figure 7.

Midrash:

In this text the boy, Ram, is one hour late for school. Being late is a violation of norms, which is implied in the repetitive key word 'wrong' (אָפּטוֹר). In the text, this event is, however, treated as a humorous episode, a funny mistake: Ram was wrong and that makes the class laugh.

It is only the boy's facial expression in the illustration, a combination of embarrassment and puzzlement, that imply the possible effect of the class's laughter on his self-image as a pupil. Pointing to a child's mistake in public, turning him into an object of ridicule, especially in front of his peer group, is a painful experience for any learner at any age and at any level of intellectual ability. The child, whose mistake has been turned into a joking matter for others, may feel both a sense of shame at his incongruity and a sense of guilt for being incompetent and being incapable of getting things right (and thinking that others might have, had they been in his place). Ridicule is thus both a threat to self image and a means for eliciting conformity.

Underlying the overt solecism in the narrative is the general idea of wrong-doings in the scholastic sphere. It is a tale of the first public judgement of children's performance in school. When these performances concern initial reading behaviour, a mistake is an even bigger source of shame and embarrassment, because failure in reading is often interpreted as failure to perform as a pupil, and may bear consequences for the first grader's future in school. Failure in school, particularly in the process of becoming a reader, impinges on the child's status within the pecking order of the class. Failure in reading acquisition places the child at the fringe of the class, where she is labelled underachiever and disadvantaged. Failure in reading is shameful (recall Levanon's assertion that it is a shame for a Jew to be illiterate; see chapter 5.5.1). The narrative within the narrative of the text is thus about what is involved in being a scholastic failure, especially in a culture in which illiteracy is not tolerated.

Furthermore, under the guise of a 'funny mistake' that elicits laughter, the text signals to the first grader to what extent the school will allow her the 'right to be wrong', will accept variant behaviour

and nonconformist responses. The narrative about getting it wrong implies, therefore, the school's threshold of tolerance and acceptance, particularly where sanctioned behaviour and practices are concerned.

6.6 Learning to Read in the Service of *Gibush*.

Before completing the first month, and having mastered only one or two vowel signs and some consonants of the Ivrit alphabet, the novice has already learned how to read meanings and symbols that constitute her culture. Within these first few weeks of schooling, the first grader has already encountered the three discourses that will mould her cultural, national and personal identity: the discourse of being a Jew as exemplified in the first and second texts, that of being an Israeli as incorporated in the third and fourth, and the discourse of being a pupil in school as mediated by the fifth and sixth texts. These last two texts also tacitly imply that the first experiences of schooling are interchangeable with the first experiences of becoming literate. All six texts offer to modern Israeli children a recognisable shared history, collective mythos and a common present which already contains the embryonic expressions of a shared future.

Analysing the above-presented texts by means of *midrash* has enabled me to demonstrate how features that constitute the core value of a group and characterise it as a cultural entity are implicit in these narratives aimed at beginning readers.

Core-values represent the heartland of an ideological system and act as identifying values symbolic of the group and its membership (Smolicz: 1981). The notion of accepting and obeying commandments is undoubtedly a core value in Judaism. An imminent part of the logic of being a Jew is the concept of 'thou shalt/thou shalt not', which is premised on the unequivocal acceptance of the Law as commanded in the Scriptures. A Jew is born into the discourse of obedience which is not conditional but absolute and ultimate, one which is unceasingly enforced by the authority of a written text.

The same line of reasoning applies to the concept of 'being an Israeli'. This too entails a non-negotiable undertaking of commitments and obligations. By fulfilling duties to Israel, one

ensures the continued existence of the collective. This ideal, though enforced by State law rather than by the Law of the Scriptures, constitutes a sanctioned core-value within the discourse of 'being an Israeli'.

The notions of following law and order, of discipline and conforming to authority are embedded in the reading-schemes, cut across all the narratives. They are quite explicit in the illustrations: thus in sample No. 1 it is the authority of the elders (in the family, as suggested by the images of grandparents) and the leaders of the community (signified by the picture of men in prayer shawls). In sample No. 3 the illustration of the marching soldiers is an obvious hint that the children will eventually have to conform to the discipline and authority of the army. And, finally, the authority of the state and its literacy, mediated by the teacher, is to be obeyed from the first day: this is clear in samples 5 and 6.

Within each narrative and across them all is also hidden the notion of uncritical adherence to the words of a written text: of the Scriptures: this is worked into the story of samples No. 1 and 2 of the State's official statements (which will eventually be imposed on the children) as implied by samples No.3 and 4; and of school texts, as is made clear by all six samples taken from the reading-scheme.

What emerges from *midrash* of the narratives are not only messages concealed in the texts, but also guidelines for their use in a way that suits and perpetuates the hegemonic culture in which the messages originated.

So we have the hidden curriculum of literacy teaching. Through the authorised texts the children are expected to learn how to read culturally in school; that is, they are expected to acquire a set of culturally-inscribed prescriptions according to which they will perceive, make sense of and negotiate information about the world in which they live. In other words, to teach the first grade how to read culturally within the institutional setting of the school is to initiate them into a pattern of cultural behaviour that is ideologically and politically congruent with the version transmitted by the school in its capacity as the State's agent.

How the voice of the school-based text is transformed into a

symbolic expression of the State's authoritative communal voice will be further demonstrated in the next subsection, which deals with the process of mass production of literacy skills by means of an all embracing and powerful medium - television.

6.6.1 Learning to Read with Alfi: The Televised school Programme 'No Secrets to Reading'.

The reader will recall that six of the authorised reading-schemes were found to be those most commonly used by first grade teachers. Of these, the most popular one (at present in use in 48% of all first grades) is a reading scheme based on a televised series, called 'No Secrets to Reading' (Wohl, 1985). The series is prepared and broadcast by the Educational Branch of the Israeli Television Authority under the auspices of the Ministry of Education².

A prominent identification mark of the 'No secrets...' programme (from which the teacher's image is conspicuously absent) is Alfi.

Alfi is a fictitious, amorphous, cartoon-like creature, whose image appears on every printed page of the reading-scheme and in every televised programme. It is Alfi who instructs, advises, asks questions, reminds, summarises, interprets and leads the children into the secrets of reading. From their first encounter with school-based literacy until the final televised episode at the end of the first grade, Alfi will be their mentor, instructor and surrogate teacher. Alfi's first words in the children's workbook "Shalom, I am Alfi" is the class's introduction to literacy, and his last words "There are no more secrets to reading, you can now go to the book corner" are a legitimation of the child's competence and mastery of reading skills.

Alfi is presented by the author of the reading scheme as a magical and mythical creature: being amorphous, Alfi -whose name is of course a derivation of the first letter of the Ivrieth alphabet *aleph*- can constantly change and rechange. Alfi metamorphoses into letters and words, and back again into his familiar shape. Like the ancient prophet Ezekiel who, before speaking to the children of Israel, swallowed the scroll (Ezekiel 3:1-3), Alfi incorporates the letters and words, which become part of him. As he metamorphoses again and again before the children's eyes -and to their utter amazement- he

mediates magic, supernatural powers, the omnipotency of the written word and its authority, symbolising both the source of literacy and the means for its transmission.

Notwithstanding his amorphous contours, Alfi is immediately identifiable as an Israeli by the simple gimmick of his headgear, the *tembel* hat which, as already mentioned, used to be worn by the *halutz*. Alfi, the modern arbiter of reading, has assumed the role of a mythical image in which elements of older myths such as the *talmid chacham* and the *halutz* can be recognised (see figure 8).

In figure 8 the teacher holds the Book of Genesis and a pencil in her right hand. She is the bearer of traditional Jewish literacy - both reading and writing - into which the children will be initiated on completing this reading-scheme. On her left hand stands Alfi, wearing the *tembel* hat of the *halutz*. He begins to instruct her in teaching literacy. As this is a text for the first week of the children's experience in school, Alfi and the teacher will begin to initiate them into the literacy of their future, while reminding them of the great Text of their shared past.

The visitor to the room where the class watches the 'No secrets...' programme will be surrounded by Alfi's image on huge posters on the wall. Teachers wear an Alfi finger puppet during the lessons, engage with him in dialogue and allow him to address the class and instruct the pupils. The children write letters to Alfi, bring him little presents, send him New Year greeting cards, kiss him. Alfi has not only become a myth, he has turned into a fetish, an object of worship and transcendent powers. The Alfi classroom cult is re-enacted daily. As the children work with the printed units immediately before or after the broadcast, Alfi accompanies them along the text: he not only points to words and syllables, but is in fact the hero in most of the sentences and the short narratives that form the children's reading material.

The thrice-weekly programme is usually transmitted during the first morning periods allocated by all schools for the teaching of literacy. According to the guidelines, the teachers are expected to prepare their pupils prior to the broadcast, using the syllables and words they are about to encounter. After the broadcast, and as part

שְׁלוֹם מוֹרָה.



שְׁלוֹם אֶלְפִי.
שְׁלוֹם מוֹרָה.
שְׁלוֹם יְלָדָה.
שְׁלוֹם מוֹרָה.
שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם.



התלמיד יקרא וישלים את הצירוף החסר.

Figure 8.

of the scheme's pedagogical approach, the children re-enact scenes and dialogues from the televised episodes, imitating gestures and mimicking the speech of the characters of the scenes they have just watched, momentarily transforming into miniature protagonists of the programme. The trip to the audio-visual laboratory, library or common room for the televised lesson (classrooms with a television set are a rarity) has been turned into a routine. Eventually, this thrice weekly routine assumes elements that could be best described as 'the ritual of learning to read with Alfi'.

The process surrounding this television ritual, in which nearly half of the Israeli first graders participate, functions as "...an organisation of symbol system embedded in technology. It creates the common milieu of a world view and values that has an existence beyond any particular individual or group." (White: 1983 p. 279). (Williams : 1974; Kellner : 1979; Brookfield: 1986; Hodge and Tripp : 1986).

From its rudimentary stages, the 'No secrets...' enterprise is a process in which rituals enacted as cultural forms are objectified into symbolic medium supporting the existing social order and echoing the State's dominant voice. In these rituals, teacher and pupil are positioned not as negotiators of meanings, but as passive viewers and followers of a fictitious figure's orders. The medium of television is used as a channel for communicating arbitrary educational messages rooted in a centralised source.

Literacy instruction via the medium of television links the institutional and the symbolic superstructures. When we realise that nearly half of the country's first graders are subjected at the same time, at the same pace and, in a sense, in the same place, to an identical message that comes from a central institutionalised and legitimised locus of authority, a passage from the Scriptures comes to mind: "And all the people saw the sounds..." (Exodus 20:15; literal translation from the Hebrew"). Alfi, the programme's mythical figure and protagonist, becomes interchangeable with this institutionalised locus of authority and with its all-pervading voice.

The timetable and sequence of the broadcasts are prepared in advance and distributed to the teachers at the beginning of the

school year. The teachers are locked into the pre-dictated pace of the programmes. On the 1st of September they know on exactly which day, and at what time, given syllables and words will be taught. They are captives of the rigid timetable and strict regularity forced upon them by the televised series: broadcasting time, school time, literacy time - it all fuses into one. Alfi, who personifies literacy, mediates a mechanical and technocratic product; he deskills teachers and pupils, all the while communicating a very particular cultural message that promotes, via his reading instructions, standardisation and uniformity.

For some years 'No secrets ...' was broadcast in the afternoon, in the guise of a family entertainment show. The mark left by this exposure was manifold. For some children it meant that school was transformed and privatised by being brought into the intimacy of the home. For others, especially the very young, it meant being ritualised into the programme's format, cadence, characters and discourse long before they reached school age. The programme marked out the model of literacy they were going to learn, thus implying what reading is all about. As Israel's main television channel is wholly state-operated, the fact that these afternoon transmissions were discontinued, only highlights the State's power and its authority in deciding upon and controlling the process of imparting literacy to the masses.

To end this sub-section, attention is drawn to the title of the serial 'No Secrets to Reading'. The wording is clearly intended to convey a message: reading is accessible to all; everyone can become an insider (in Kermode's (1979) terms); learning to read does not involve unravelling secrets, nor does it call for the solving of a mystery. To go one step further, by using the public medium of television (which in Israel indubitably has the status of a national voice), reading has truly become a public commodity.

This form of public presentation turns reading into a technique mediated by a technology. The beginning young reader learns to follow a technical manual and is deprived of the intimacy of interaction with a book. She becomes a stranger to the joy of finding out by herself 'what it is all about', of solving the mystery or

discovering the multilayers of meaning enfolded in a text. On the contrary, she is being taught that in reading there is no room for *midrash*.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has analysed reading-schemes and didactic television programmes. The school texts, the style of their delivery, and the content and approach of the television instruction, with their strong elements of homogeneity, uniformity and conformity appear to expose the pupil to a cultural discourse. I conclude that, through common pedagogical regime, a uniform register and a unitary system of messages the reading schemes facilitate a single text for all first graders; a text that voices cultural and national imperatives handed down by the State and its Education Authority.

The reading-schemes and the television programme aim at producing a two-fold result: they seek to affect the pupils' self-awareness while, at the same time, inculcating the State's ideological views in these youngsters. But, this is to speak of them as 'texts lying upon the page'. It remains to be seen how these same texts actually function when they are being used in the classrooms where children are being taught literacy. It may be that, in this 'dynamic' situation, these texts acquire even further layers of meaning. It is with this in view that I have constructed a field-study in which the actual process of using these texts and programmes can be observed and subjected to criticism.

Part Three: The Main Study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Main Study: Methodological Considerations And Framework of the Field Study.

7. Introduction.

In this chapter I discuss my decision to adopt an ethnographic perspective for the main study. In Section One an autobiographical interlude shows where I stand as a researcher. In Section Two I formulate the questions which the main study will address. I explain my choice of an ethnographic approach which is shown to be more suitable than an experimentalistic approach for investigating the questions initiating the main study. In Section Three I present the framework of the fieldwork. I provide a detailed description of the two schools in which the fieldwork was carried out and discuss data collecting techniques and the criteria for data selection and data presentation.

7.1 Autobiographical Interlude.

My mother and father came to Palestine from Eastern Europe in the early 1930s as Zionist *halutzim* at a moment when Nazism was beginning its ascent in Germany. At home and at school in the 1940s I was being strongly and continuously shaped by Jewish tradition, with its Scriptures and festivals, and by the myths and ideals of Zionism. I attended a primary school of the Religious Trend where the literacy that I learned was deeply coloured by homilies, midrash and tales of the Sages.

On leaving secondary school, I became a soldier in the IDF and trained as a teacher in the army. I taught oriental Jewish children in the southern part of the country, at the height of the reading-failure crisis, as they arrived as immigrants from North Africa, Egypt, the Yemen and Iraq. Thus, I was one of fifteen first teachers sent to carry out the remedial-reading programme (1965).

I have raised three sons who have passed through all the

stages of Israeli State education. I have bid them farewell as they became solidiers in the IDF. As a professional reading teacher, I became first a supervisor, then an inspector with a special brief for literacy-learning: thus, I am now part of the "establishment" of Israeli education.

The percipient reader will, no doubt, be aware that my life experiences have paralleled those of the People of the Book, through the "longue duree" described in the first and second parts of this thesis. I am, therefore, an "insider" to all this process and, as such, well-placed to explore the cultural meanings underlying literacy-teaching in Israel.

From the early 1980's I became increasingly uneasy about the teaching of literacy in Israeli primary schools. The more we dealt with "reading-failure" and reduced reading for children into study of discrete vowels and consonants, the less successful we were in leading them to become genuine, competent readers and lovers of books.

I was able to come to England and spend many months in schools and contact with people in education-circles who had a different perspective altogether on reading and the teaching of literacy. I became gradually capable of looking at Israeli ideas and practices concerning literacy from a fresh and startling viewpoint. These were my first steps towards becoming an "outsider"; one who was able to start questioning all the higherto taken-for-granted *orthodoxies* about literacy.

Monday, 14th of September, 1987 brought a moment of 'revelation' to me. I was sitting in class; it was the second week of school for the first-graders. The teacher was introducing a new syllable from the "No secrets..." book. On finding that not all the children had been able to write this syllable in its assigned "box" on the page, she made this remarkable statement: "Alfi's instructions are like a command; they must be obeyed!"

This was the moment in my study of literacy-teaching when the central question began to arise in my mind in its clearest form. For it was at that moment that I was struck by the suspicion that, from the very beginnings of learning literacy, these children were being prepared to obey as solidiers of Israel.

Literacy instruction is socially prescribed, shaped and

controlled. It features the imperatives of the hegemonic culture: children are to become literate in the image of society formulated for them by the schools. The most urgent strand of the Israeli state's discourse must be a concern for bare survival of the people and its culture in Israel, i.e. for defence. It would appear that, from the very first day of schooling and in their first encounter with school literacy, Israeli children are being socialised for this role. Is this the case, and in what ways?

7.2 Questions and a Method for the Main Study.

Given the centrality of the above question to my studies, I realised that I had to explore the following questions:

1. What is the cultural logic underlying the phenomenon of literacy teaching/learning in Israeli Primary Schools?
2. What is happening and why when children are initiated into literacy in Israel?
3. In what ways is the entry into literacy also an entry into the nation-building discourse?

No purely experimentalist approach could address these questions adequately. Literacy is not an autonomous factor within a culture nor is it an objective reality open to experimentalist methods. There is no place for isolating quantifiable variables within the underlying cultural logic, and the ways in which they affect each other cannot be stated statistically.

Thus, I needed investigative approaches which would enable me to address appropriately the entirety of this question. First of all, they must make full use of me as an "insider", while providing means for acknowledging and integrating inevitable bias and subjectivity. Secondly, they must be holistic approaches: they must enable me to investigate the whole social and cultural interaction which takes place where people are learning/teaching literacy. They must address the historical dimension of a social phenomenon like "literacy teaching/learning". Lastly, since my questions concern *covert* meanings and values, I need approaches which search for and identify these and explore the power relationships involved in the teaching of literacy.

All of this seemed to point to a use of methods *deriving* from anthropological/cultural approaches to social studies. These are

premised on the assumption that... knowledge is socially constituted, historically embedded and valuationally based. Theory serves as an agentic function, and research illustrates (verifies) rather than provides a true test." Lather: 1986 p.239 (Karabel and Halesy: 1977; Anderson 1989).

Anthropological/cultural approaches to social studies make use of research techniques that are inductive, subjective, generative and constructive. These methodologies are defined as naturalistic quantitative, phenomenological or ethnographic. Ethnographic approaches differ from the experimentalist methods in their basic view of the place of the researcher in the research process. Ethnographic approaches do not exclude the researcher and her personal history, her biases and subjectivity from the research process. On the contrary, the researcher is the instrument of the research and her bias becomes part of the argument (Heath: 1972; Glaser and Strauss: 1976; Wilson: 1977; Hymes: 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson: 1983; Erickson: 1984; Stierer: 1985; Dombey: 1986; Lather: 1986; Simmon and Dippo: 1986; Brodsky: 1987; Le Compte: 1987; Van Mannen: 1988; Anderson: 1989).

The design of an ethnographic study warrants a methodology conducive to its final objective, which is a written representation of a culture (or selected aspects) of this culture. (Van Mannen, 1988). The methodology has therefore to elicit data that are phenomenological and representative of the subjects under investigation. It should afford acquisition of first hand accounts as they occur in real world settings. The ethnographer aims to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts of occurrence. From these descriptions, major concepts affecting human behaviour and beliefs regarding these phenomena can then be generated (Le Compte and Gotez, 1988; Marcus and Fisher, 1986).

Participant-observation is the primary technique of the ethnographic discipline by which to gain access to data. For this mode of investigation to be meaningful, the ethnographer spends as much time as possible with his informants in their natural setting, sharing their daily activities and interactions. Participant-observation thus serves as a means for eliciting from the

informants their definitions of reality and extract the principles according to which they organise their world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Le Compte and Gotez, 1984). Conceptually, however, participant-observation epitomises the ethnographer's paradox of constantly moving to and fro between 'within' and 'without'. Clifford defines participant-observation as "The dialectic of experience and interpretation", that is to say, on the one hand grasping with empathy the sense of specific occurrences and behaviours, at the same time stepping back to situate their meaning in a wider and more theoretical context (Clifford: 1983 pp.127).

This dialectic interplay between within and without, between experience and interpretation, is accentuated when the investigator acts as participant-observer in her own cultural terrain. The characteristic component in these circumstances is the absence of 'cultural shock' experienced by explorers of the 'new' and 'unknown'. Instead, the investigator is faced with the shock of self recognition, a blending of the familiar and the strange, which accompanies her when she sets out on her investigation (Erickson: 1984; Katriel: 1987).

The investigator probing her own culture thus faces the situation of having to start with making the familiar strange, of having to look at her own culture as an outsider. 'Defamiliarisation' is an imperative duty so that the participant-observer can understand her informants' point of view from their 'native point of view' (Shutz: 1964; Geertz: 1976; Katriel: 1987; Gurevitch: 1988).

The process of defamiliarisation forces the investigator to reflect, re-orientate and, eventually, reformulate her 'experience near' concepts and turn them into 'experience distant' analytic categories (Geertz, 1976).

Making the other strange is a complex experience which may be enlightening and self revealing as much as threatening. By this deliberate cognitive manoeuvre the investigator distances herself from a taken-for-granted reality. It is directed at her informers, but it also challenges her own previous conceptions of self and, by implication, the social world in which these conceptions anchor. The accompanying shock of self-discovery or self-recognition,

however unavoidable, has its positive side in that it is also the mechanism that enables the investigator to act as a 'stranger' (in Schutzian terms) within her own culture.

The ethnographic investigator approaches the field of research from an atheoretical perspective. Data collection is not guided by preformulated hypotheses. As the field work progresses, the first forms of the research problems are tentatively delineated, their scope and boundaries become clarified and the first substantive concepts and questions emerge. These emergent hypotheses are then set against existing formal theories and examined to test which, if any, of these may help in generating a substantive theory (Glaser and Strauss: 1967; Hammersey and Atkinson: 1983; Le Compte and Gotez: 1988).

The ultimate aim of the researcher is to present trustworthy accounts. In an ethnographic approach, validity and trustworthiness are not the result of adherence to the formal rules or standardised procedures. Rather, they derive from the fact that the 'observer paradox' is always overtly acknowledged and included in the accounts. The presence of the observer continually affects and transforms the events which she observes: all that this implies must find its way into an account which can be considered valid and trustworthy (Romaine: 1984, Anderson: 1989, Mishler: 1990).

Reflexivity is critical with regard to validity and reliability of ethnographic accounts (Glaser and Strauss: 1967; Hammersley and Atkinson: 1983; Stierer: 1985; Anderson: 1989).

Reflexivity calls upon the investigator to recognise the fact that unconscious and conscious biographical determinants are the source of her personal bias and subjectivity. The investigator is forced to reflect and study the source and character of her own "make up" (Le Compte: 1987) and to "discipline her subjectivity" (Wilson: 1977; Erickson, 1984; Le Compte: 1987). This means that the ethnographer has to test her reactions that is, identify her own ideologies (whose interests are served by the ethnographic work), study the character and bases of her own work practices and reflect upon the knowledge such practice may produce.

Reflexivity is also important in the last stage of the study, when the raw field-data are transformed into an ethnography,

into a written account of "how culture is portrayed" (Van Mannen: 1988). In this stage, which is independent of the field work itself, reflexivity demands the self-conscious recognition that, although it is the images of others that are inscribed in the ethnography, the terms used for their representation are the ethnographer's sole responsibility. (Clifford: 1983; Marcus and Fischer: 1986; Van Mannen: 1988).

Ethnographic approaches, then, would appear to address all of the methodological needs which my investigation demands. I am keenly aware that I am not a professional anthropologist or ethnographer. However, since they are best adapted to my purpose, I feel confident in using tools and approaches borrowed from these disciplines.

My study needs to do two things: (a) to give a relatively complete account of the cultural logic underlying literacy teaching in Israeli primary schools; (b) to investigate power relationship within that logic. Two distinct forms of ethnography are available here: Interpretative and Critical.

To draw on more than one analytic tool is considered legitimate in the field of ethnography; an ethnographer does ^{not} need to limit herself to one single method as a framework for data analysis. On the contrary, there are great advantages to be gained from a "theoretical triangulation", that is from approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind (Hammersley and Atkinson: 1983). I will now sketch conceptual assumptions underlying these two approaches.

7.2.1 Interpretative Ethnography.

Interpretative ethnography draws on the theoretical outlook of cultural anthropologists who define culture as a system of symbols and meanings (Schneider: 1976; Geertz: 1973; Marcus and Fisher: 1986). Implicit in these views is the notion that fundamentally social life is a negotiation of meanings. An analysis of social life focuses on the patterns of interaction between the protagonists. The researcher's main task is thus interpretative. Using interpretation she attempts to establish the layered multiple networks of meanings carried by words, acts, conceptions and other symbolic forms.

Geertz's main metaphor for describing the relationship of the researcher to the researched is that of "reading a text" (Ricoeur: 1971; Geertz: 1973; Gordon 1980; Clifford: 1983). In Geertz's metaphor, social activities (or cultures) are like "manuscripts", written in transient examples of shaped behaviour. These "texts" are read for their meanings by the observer (the cultural interpreter) just as are the-more conventional- written and spoken material. It is the researcher's task, in the course of the study, to set the metaphoric 'text' in a contextual world, to 'read' its cultural meanings and to 'translate' them into a written form. In Geertz's terms interpretative ethnography is "thickdescriptions our own construction of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to (1973 (p.9)).

Interpretative ethnography operates on two levels of analysis simultaneously: it provides accounts of cultures from within (the native's point of view) and it reflects the epistemological grounding of such accounts.

7.2.2 Critical Ethnography.

Critical ethnography combines elements of socio-anthropological theory with ideas drawn from the neo-marxist critique of education in society (Williams: 1961; Bernstein: 1971; Freire: 1978, 1987; Bourdieu and Passeron: 1977; Giroux: 1981, 1983, 1989). The critical ethnographer sets her arguments within a historic moment of time and addresses the power relationship between large-scale impersonal systems of political economy and local systems of symbols and meanings (Anderson: 1989; Marcus and Fischer: 1986; Simon and Dipppo: 1986). She claims that the informant's reconstructions are often permeated with meanings that sustain powerlessness, and that people's conscious models exist to perpetuate, as much as to explain, social phenomena. For the critical ethnographer the cultural construction of meanings is inherently a matter of political and economic interests (Andersen: 1989).

The critical ethnographer's major object is to take account of power relations and history within the context of her informant's life. In order to make her ethnography 'critical', she aims to

identify the problems within the social practices that come under her inquiry. By placing her topic of inquiry in holistic social contexts she is able to unmask dominant social constructions, highlight their ideological aspects and point to the interests they serve. In order to subvert views which constitute existing forms of social life as taken for granted and obvious, it is imperative that the ethnographer should view the social forms and practices she studies within the process of history. For the critical ethnographer history is not merely a collection of background information, but an inherent part of the argument (Simon and Diplo: 1986).

7.2.3 The Choice of Ethnography as an Alternative Methodology.

From the outset educational studies in Israel have taken a very different path from the one I propose to follow. They have been greatly shaped by American research approaches, whose scientific rationale and methodology belong preponderantly in the experimentalist tradition. American research-data concerning the cultural deprivation syndrome influenced and, to a great extent, determined the institutionalisation of the skill-oriented reading teaching/reading testing paradigm, which has dominated the Israeli educational scene since the early 1950's (Elboim-Dror: 1963; Lewy and Chen: 1973; Lewy and Davis: 1974; Lewy: 1977; Sor and Langerman: 1978; Stahl: 1981; Minkovitz Davis and Bashi: 1982; Adar et al.: 1987; Gillis: 1987; Peritz Teitelbaum and Sor: 1989).

It has been argued that the experimentalist stream in the social sciences falls short of providing a useful tool for the exploration of education (Berlak and Berlak: 1981; Hammersley and Atkinson: 1983; Stierer: 1985). However this approach is well established as the dominant research mode in this field in Israel. As the vast majority of literacy research is based on the experimentalist approach, the conception of literacy as 'autonomous', as a neutral mechanism for achieving functional ends, is sustained (Levine: 1968; Roth: 1984; Street: 1984; Willinsky: 1990).

Experimentalist data-collecting techniques and research models were instrumental in institutionalising standardised methods for teaching reading, in their en masse application in

schools and in the enormous growth and popularity of the literacy testing machinery.

Compared with the dominant trend in experimentalist research, ethnographic accounts of the Israeli educational scene are sparse (Lewis: 1977; Halper, 1977; Gordon: 1984; Katriel and Neshet, 1986, 1987; Albaz, 1985). Two comprehensive studies among them look at the Israeli primary school from a holistic perspective (Lewis: 1977; Halper: 1978). They are concerned with the role of schools in legitimising and sustaining the myth of cultural deprivation. These two ethnographers explored the responsibility of the school for socially marginalising the oriental child, thereby contributing to his scholastic failure. Although both researchers offer an in depth account of the Israeli primary school, the teaching of reading was ignored, since it did not fall within the scope of their studies.

In adopting an ethnographic perspective, this study shares common methodological ground with researchers who studied literacy practices in their authentic cultural setting. (McDermott:1974, 1978; Gilmore & Glatthorn:1982; Heath:1983; Street:1984; Stierer:1985; Schieffelin & Gilmore:1987).

My use of ethnography in the present thesis is thus the first contribution towards adopting an alternative research approach to the study of literacy and literacy teaching in Israeli schools.

7.3 The Field Work.

7.3.1 The Selection of Schools.

I was to explore the teaching of reading in the first grade of Israeli primary schools as a socially and culturally constructed practice. Focusing on the first grade, the site of Israeli children's first encounter with school literacy, means focusing on literacy teaching practices in their embryonic phase. The field work confined to this grade level, was carried out in two secular primary state schools.

The choice of secular state schools was based on practical rather than methodological reasons, as entry into religious State schools is difficult for individuals not directly connected with the religious division of the Ministry of Education.

The choice of the two target schools was based on different

criteria. I chose Lewis Roth Primary School because I wanted to observe the activities in an ordinary first grade class in a typical secular Israeli state school; its choice as the first site of observation does not imply in any way that its practices are more interesting, original or innovative than any other run-of-the-mill primary secular school in Jerusalem. My task was made easier, because the head teacher and one of the two first grade teachers were kind enough to enable me to spend daily observation periods in the school for an extended period of time.

I had completed the ethnographic field work in the above school. From this first encounter with the classroom culture it became clear that there were grounds for supposing that a hidden logic was, indeed, at work. However, it was still very difficult to formulate patterns and pose hypotheses. It seemed to me that I now needed to experience literacy teaching in a school with overtly political and ideological affiliation. The Givat-Oren Primary School was chosen because, at that time, it was the only school in the city with an explicit adherence to the elitist 'mythological' ethos of *halutziut*. This school openly and clearly states that its educational discourse is built around this ideology.

7.3.2 Description of the Schools.

7.3.2.1 The Lewis Roth Primary School, its Location and its Structure.

The Lewis Roth primary school is located in a residential area situated about six miles north of the city centre. It is a typical Israeli post-1948 War of Independence neighbourhood, in which new immigrants from Arab and North African countries and refugees from post-war Europe were housed. Gradually, the neighbourhood developed into a working- and lower middle class quarter with a fringe of modern, newly purpose-built flats occupied by young Israeli-born professional families. This modern, recently developed sector is situated on the outskirts of the school's catchment area. The school was purpose-built in 1962 and bears the name (as do many other Israeli public buildings) of the Jewish American donor who contributed towards its construction and development.

The school's catchment area encompasses 16 streets, which

form the old core of the neighbourhood's population. The municipal educational authorities are responsible for delineating the boundaries of a catchment area, and it may happen that children living on the odd-numbered and those on the even-numbered side of a street are assigned to different schools in the same area. The reasoning behind this compulsory division aims at achieving an equal level of social integration and a balanced mix of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

More than 85 per cent of the pupils in the school are of oriental origin, although the majority of their parents are Israeli born who received an Israeli post-1948 elementary (and secondary) school education. Most parents are native speakers of Ivriith.

The school caters for 650 children between the ages six to 14 years. They receive eight years of schooling, and are grouped in classes according to age level.

The school comprises 25 regular classes and one special class for 'emotionally mal-adjusted' children. Twenty five pupils between the age of 8 - 12 visit this class for one to six periods a week for what is known in Israeli school parlance as 'treatment'.

The school maintains a small library for the pupils and a small resource room for the staff. Computer facilities are available for the pupils from the third grade on. In weekly sessions, the children practice highly structured, skill-oriented computer programmes of reading comprehension and an equally highly structured programme of mathematics. The computer laboratory is decorated with wall to wall carpeting and is treated as a sanctuary by staff and pupils alike.

7.3.2.2 The Teacher.

Sarah¹, the teacher in whose class the field study was carried out, is in her early thirties. She stems from oriental Jewish background and came to Israel as a small baby. She comes from a working class family: her mother had only five years of schooling, and Sarah's sister started working when she was 16. Sarah is the family's pride (she told me that the happiest day in her late father's life, he was a policeman, was the day she graduated from the teachers training college). She herself sees her professional

teaching career as a high personal achievement. Sarah has ten years of teaching experience. She started as a special-education teacher, a position she held for two years, after which she transferred to the Lewis Roth school where she usually teaches first and second grades. Sarah has also been appointed 'training teacher', and tutors third year student teachers in their school practice.

7.3.2.3 The Student Teacher.

The trainee (Rina, aged 25), a third year student, came to class three times a week. On Tuesdays, when Sarah joined a staff workshop, Rina took the class during the fourth period. As part of her final examinations, Rina had to present a 'teaching practice project', which includes a full week of taking charge in a class. She therefore used these Tuesday periods to prepare the pupils in advance and rehearsed with them the appropriate behaviour she expects them to display during her 'project teaching'.

7.3.2.4 The Children.

The first grade class taught by Sarah has 33 pupils (18 girls and 15 boys). The majority of the pupils in Sarah's class (27/33) are second generation Israelis; 63% are of oriental descent. Most parents are blue collar workers or clerks. Approximately 50% of the fathers have up to 12 years of schooling, while the majority of the mothers have only eight to ten years of formal education. Ten fathers have academic degrees and have professional jobs. Five of the fathers are out of work, the family receiving unemployment pay.

The children all come from the same neighbourhood, and all have attended one of the two local kindergarten that feed the school's population. Thus most of the children were not complete strangers to each other upon starting their school life.

7.3.2.5 The Physical Setting and Organisation of the Classroom.

Sarah's classroom occupies approximately 40 sq m., which is typical of most purpose built schools in Israel. The long outside

wall is constructed entirely of windows, with some plants on the window sills which Sarah or the children occasionally water.

On the wall facing the class hangs a blackboard. The space between the windows and the teacher's desk holds a shelf with open drawers that house the children's drawings, math bricks and cuisenaire rods. On the shelf itself are placed the books that comprise the class's library. The space between the shelf and the wall, having room for not more than three children at a time, constitutes the class' 'reading corner'. There are no chairs in this corner, and the children sit on the floor on a small rug which they fold up when they go back to their seats.

A row of illustrated cards presenting the letters of the alphabet is pinned up above the blackboard. The cards are not ordered alphabetically, but are displayed according to the sequence in which vowels and consonants are introduced in the reading scheme book used in class.

On the right hand side of the entrance door hangs a small flannel square on which flash cards with newly learned words are fastened. On the wall opposite the blackboard, at the far end of the classroom, the children's drawings and samples of their 'work' are exhibited. Six large tables occupy most of the central floor space. At one small table, placed in front of the teacher's desk, sits Daniel whose behaviour in class is considered problematic to warrant separation from the other children. The children sit around the tables on small though unevenly sized chairs in groups of five or seven. Assignment to a group is the result of careful deliberation by Sarah. Changing in the sitting order are allowed on rare occasions only and are generally not negotiable. Sarah's criteria for grouping take into consideration the children's abilities, reading level, social interaction and their sex. Each group is named by the children themselves, mostly after popular television characters or programmes. A daily roster assigns a monitor in each group who is responsible for returning library books to the shelf, handing out reading sheets or drawing paper, and collecting the copybooks for marking.

Groups are rewarded for good conduct and diligence, and Sarah constantly and explicitly refers to the "quickest group", "the quietest group", the "best organised group", and a host of other

praiseworthy characteristics.

7.3.2.6 Patterns of Organisation and Daily Routine in the Classroom.

Each school day is divided into two 90-minute periods, interrupted by the mid-morning break. The weekly schedule is rigidly adhered to and changes in routine are rare.

On most days the first 90-minute period -from 08:00 to 09:30- is devoted to the teaching of literacy. The second 90-minute period is divided into 45 minutes of math and about 45 minutes of subjects that vary daily, but are all referred to as 'fun activities'. These include art, occasional outings, indoor games and on Fridays, reception of the Sabbath. The periods after the mid-morning break are more flexible in the sense that subjects other than those fixed on the roster may be addressed. The early period is without exception devoted to scholastic subjects.

The rigid routine breaks down, however, with the approach of a festival, when the class becomes preoccupied with preparations for the forthcoming event. The year-round cycle of the Jewish traditional festivals is an axis around which much of school life revolves, especially in the first three grades of elementary school. Teachers of these grades spend a considerable portion of teaching time preparing the class for these occasions: many periods initially designated for specific curricular subjects are diverted into preparatory activities. As part of these activities, the teachers focus on the historical events and figures featured in the festivals, always accompanying their instruction by a historically based text and traditional narratives.

Sarah, too, devotes a large part of the days before a festival to reading these texts to the class, to teaching the children traditional songs and to explaining the meaning of symbolic objects and the why's and wherefore of specific foods eaten on the various feast days.

Sarah employs frontal teaching as her main mode of instruction. She addresses the class either seated behind her desk or standing at the blackboard, which she uses frequently and intensively as a focus of presentation and attention. The class engages largely in a question-and-answer style of discourse, and

the children are requested to answer in unison as a sign of general understanding. Raising one's hand is the accepted social code for turn taking. The pupils are not allowed to move around freely. The children's territory is confined to the space between their seats and their table. From there they carry out all assignments.

7.3.2.7 Reception of the Sabbath.

The last period on Fridays is devoted to the reception of the Sabbath. For this event, the tables are moved to the walls, and the chairs are placed in a semi-circle. The ceremony itself follows a regular pattern: Sarah lights the traditional two sabbath candles, reads the class a story, after which the class sings popular sabbath songs. Mothers take turns in providing a cake or sweets, which they send to school with their children on Friday mornings and which are distributed at the end of the ceremony. Sarah considers Fridays 'fun days', and only a little academic work is accomplished.

7.3.2.8 Birthday Celebrations.

Sarah makes a point of celebrating the children's birthdays and parents of the birthday child are invited. It is always held on Friday of the week in which the birthday occurs. On Thursday, the class prepares an album with drawings and personal greetings for the birthday child. At the end of the Friday mid-morning break Sarah writes a birthday greeting on the blackboard. It is always the same text - the only change being the child's name - and illustrates it with a flower or a funny face. The mothers prepare cakes and small take-home surprise bags; the fathers usually take photos during the ceremony.

The class is encouraged to bring presents for the birthday child. As the popular children receive more and bigger presents than those less accepted by their classmates, Sarah constantly urges the class to bring presents to each and every child celebrating her birthday, explaining the value of friendship and the need to be kind to others.

7.3.3 The Givat Oren Primary School, its location and its Structure.

The Givat Oren school is situated on a hill some three miles south from the city centre in one of the most dismal neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. A massively subsidised low-cost housing programme in the early 1950's produced a densely crowded neighbourhood, populated mostly with working class families of Afro-Asian origin. For over a decade the population consisted of some of the poorest families in the city, belonging to the lowest marginal socio-economic stratum. A high percentage of the heads of families had no distinct occupation, and many others were disabled, they and their families lived on social security allowances.

From the mid 1970's the economic situation started to improve for many of the residents. The municipality and various government agencies contributed towards the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood, and a project for renovation of the buildings and the blocks of flats was instituted. Although these enterprises have changed its general appearance to a certain extent, the neighbourhood is still considered a socially and culturally deprived area.

During the same period an awakening to upward social mobility, especially among the second generation Israeli residents of the neighbourhood, paved the way for the emergence of a local leadership. The community leaders are a group of highly militant individuals, mostly in their thirties and forties who share the same social and ethnic background. The core of the local leadership is strongly supported by their peers and by the even younger generation. Many of these have acquired secondary education and are willing to shoulder the responsibility of communal commitment to the benefit of the neighbourhood.

The Givat Oren school is divided into a primary level (first to sixth grade) and a middle level (seventh to ninth grade). Of the 875 pupils 280 attend the middle school, 595 attend the primary school.

The school consists of three buildings. The main building houses the middle school, the head teacher's office, the main

reference library, resource and television rooms, computer room and the main staff room. The primary school has two buildings, one housing the three first grades and the other the fourth to sixth grades.

These buildings are separated from the main building by empty waste land and a shrubbed area. Adjacent to the elementary school building is a religious primary school, the two schools sharing a brick wall.

7.3.3.1 The Head Teacher.

One head teacher is in charge of both the elementary and middle school. She is assisted by a Board of Directors on which sit members of the teaching staff and of the school's parents association.

The head teacher, who has been leading the school from its very beginning in 1962, is undoubtedly the living spirit of the school. In her mid-fifties, she is known to hold a firm and well-defined educational ideology. She is a member of the Labour Party's educational forum, and is involved in socio-political activities which seek to establish understanding and co-existence between the Jewish and Arab populations. The head teacher cultivates a close collaboration with the local leadership of the neighbourhood and takes an active part in facilitating social and cultural improvement for the people in the neighbourhood.

7.3.3.2 The Teacher.

Rachel is in her late fifties. She has been a first to fourth grade teacher for nearly thirty years. Rachel is of Ashkenazi origin and was born in Hungary. She came to Israel after the holocaust. She and her family lived in a *kibbutz* for many years, where she was a teacher in the *kibbutz* school. Upon moving to town, Rachel was deputy head of a large regional school near Jerusalem, and also had a part time job as advisory teacher. After turning down an offer for a post as head teacher she started working in the Givat Oren school.

Twice a week, during the mid-morning break, Rachel acts as the primary school librarian, a task she performs enthusiastically. As she has also a professional musical background and a beautiful

singing voice, she devotes much of her time in class to musical endeavours, and her singing sessions are highly praised throughout the school.

Notwithstanding her long experience in literacy teaching, Rachel joins the other first grade teachers in the weekly instructional television course on 'How to teach according to the *No Secrets to Reading* programme'.

7.3.3.3 The Children.

Rachel's class, one of four first grade classes in the school comprises 32 pupils (16 boys and 16 girls), 17 of whom live locally. Most of the children in the class come from young families, and many are the eldest among their siblings. The children from the neighbourhood have known each other from a very young age: they went to the same kindergarten and/or live in the same apartment block. Some of the children who come from outside the catchment area were also acquainted with each other. Before these children came to school their parents moved in the same professional and social circles.

With the exception of two girls, whose mother tongue is English and one boy whose is Dutch, all the pupils in Rachel's class are native speakers of Ivriith.

7.3.3.4 The Physical Setting and Organisation of the Classroom.

The classroom is bright and sunny, the light coming in through the large windows occupying one of its two side walls. On shelves running along these two walls is placed an array of open books, including an Ivriith dictionary, with more books displayed in two book cases at the far end of the room. The shelves also house boxes containing the usual first grade paraphernalia: educational games, puzzles, prepacked workcards, bricks of various sizes, crayons, plasticine and a few toys.

The main space of the room is taken up by six tables, each surrounded by six chairs. On the wall bordering the entrance and facing the class hangs a blackboard, with Rachel's desk standing in front of it.

Next to the blackboard hangs a poster on which Rachel has printed the word 'instructions'; underneath this caption are written the

words 'cut', 'paste', 'colour', 'copy', 'draw' 'circles', 'read'. Next to each word appears its matching illustration (scissors, bottle of glue, crayon, pencil, book). Word labels reading 'door', 'window', 'shelf', 'teacher's desk', 'blackboard' are fastened to the matching objects. The labels are written in black with the diacritical marks added in red.

On the wall facing the door and the blackboard hangs a huge poster of Alfi, the cartoon character of the television series 'No secrets to reading', who is seen reading a book. The poster says "Alfi, no secrets to reading" and "*Shalom Kita Aleph*" ('welcome to the first grade').

7.3.3.5 The Daily Class Routine and Pattern of Teacher/Pupil Interaction.

Rachel adheres to the conventional time roster, which prescribes the teaching of reading during the first two 45-minute periods. She addresses the class frontally, standing near the blackboard. During the second half of the morning she occasionally takes small groups of her pupils for extra reading practice, which is done near the blackboard.

The third period is devoted to the teaching of math, which often spills over into the fourth period. Sometimes the last (fourth) period is used for reading games, reading a story to the class or other 'fun' activities and, periodically, to make preparations for a forthcoming traditional festival. On alternate weeks a music and an art teacher take half of the class for one period.

The last period on Fridays is called the 'social hour'. The tables are pushed aside, the children sit in a semi circle and are treated to sweets. Rachel prefers the term 'social hour' to the traditional 'reception of the sabbath' which, in her opinion, is purely a family matter.

This last period of the school week is intended to act as a social cohesion mechanism: issues concerning class life are discussed, artistic abilities are displayed and social games are played. Although Rachel tries not to associate this period with the sabbath ceremonies, the popular sabbath songs are sung and the traditional words of welcoming the sabbath (*sabbath shalom*) are

said upon the children's departure for home. Birthdays are also celebrated during the 'social hour'.

Although the school day ends at 11:45, the children have an option to stay for two more periods to join in the activities of various clubs organised by the parent association. Four parents are artists and offer workshops in drawing, ceramics and dancing. One mother runs a cookery club. Most children have joined at least one club and stay on once or twice a week.

7.3.3.6 The School's Ideological Platform.

The Givat Oren School, named after the neighbourhood in which it is located, was originally founded in 1962 as an ordinary primary state school. However, faced with the educational and social problems of the deprived area in which it is located, the school authorities immediately started to develop an additional framework of social and education assistance for both its pupils and their parents, many of whom were judged to be in need of cultural enrichment.

In 1981, the school's Board of Directors officially declared the adoption of a political/ideological affiliation which aimed to revive and foster the ideology and values of pre-State Zionist socialism and of *halutziut*.

The formal establishment of a politically oriented school was (and is) subject to the approval of the Ministry of Education and the municipal educational authority.

The decision to establish a school dedicated to an explicit political ideology entailed a three-year process of discussions and debates, accompanied by an explanatory campaign. The founding committee unanimously agreed that a school based on principles and values of the Labour party should be located in an underprivileged area, as an expression of the *halutziut* egalitarian ethos. Such a gesture would create opportunities to bridge the gap between social classes and facilitate genuine integration among children from diverse backgrounds.

The parents had to be reassured that the school would continue to operate with the firm intention of providing the best opportunities for each and every child that came under its wing.

Upon final completion of the procedures the name of the school

was officially changed to "The Givat Oren School Founded According to the Principles and Values of the Labour Movement". This name appears on the school's nameplate and letterhead. Following the incorporation of its new ideology, the school received the status of a 'free catchment area educational institute', which may admit pupils from all over the city.

The majority of the non-neighbourhood pupils come from middle class families of professionals and academicians. Many young left-wing intellectuals of European and American background, send their children to the Givat Oren school. Among the parents are found journalists and other professionals of the free media and a comparatively high number of psychologists and artists. The integration ratio of the 'outside' to 'local' pupils is about 50:50 in some classes, though in others it is 70:30 in favour of the latter. Parents who wish to send their children to Givat Oren school presumably agree with the school's ideology as articulated in its charter. Children are accepted only after the parents have been interviewed by the school's admission committee and have signed a form stating that they are conversant with the school's political, social and educational principles.

The school seeks the involvement of the parents in its activities. The school has developed the tradition of monthly Saturday outings for the children, their parents and the home class teacher. This event is not always enthusiastically welcomed by all parents. The parent association also aims at creating opportunities for informal contact and interaction between its members. One of the activities sponsored by the association is a weekly folk-dancing evening for parents, a communal ritual which is rooted in the pre-state Zionist socialistic period and which has become integrated in the school's lore.

7.3.3.7 The School's Educational Policy.

The school considers the intensive contact between children from the local, predominantly oriental, neighbourhood and their, mostly Ashkenazi, middle class-peers to be a laudable and educational achievement.

The school's policy stresses the fact that, unlike other

educational institutions in which the socially and culturally deprived are integrated into the well-established middle class environment, here the middle class children are the 'visitors' who come to the home ground of the (deprived) neighbourhood.

Given the school's demographic mixture, much effort is put into achieving a high level of scholastic success for all pupils. An elaborate educational machinery of remedial teaching and psychological and educational supervising has therefore been established.

The large number of periods devoted to non-curricular subjects, such as music, handicrafts, art and home economics, attests to the school's policy of providing every child with an opportunity, for personal achievement.

The school's intentionally cultivated political ideology is intertwined with its educational strategies. From the very first grades democratic values are stressed and promoted. In the middle school, for instance, there exists a pupils' council, whose members are elected in a manner that mimics a real democratic election campaign. One of the curricular subjects is called "political education", which falls under the direct responsibility of the head teacher. Each class maintains close connections with a peer group in a *kibbutz*, and reciprocal visits take place regularly. The Zionist socialist youth movement *HaShomer HaTsair* (The Young Guard), which is identified with the left wing of the Israeli Labour Party, is officially allowed to recruit members in school from the fourth grade upwards, and the movement's section leaders take part in many of the school's extracurricular activities.

Awareness of focal matters that concern Israeli society is strongly fostered: for example, from the fourth grade onwards the children engage in joint activities with pupils from an Arab school in the nearby neighbourhood, albeit on a non-permanent and infrequent basis. May Day, which during the *yishuv* period and the first three decades of statehood was acknowledged as one of the Zionist socialist symbols, is celebrated in the school, with the socialist red flag, alongside the national blue-white one, displayed in the entrance hall of the school's buildings.

7.3.4. The Chronology of the Field Work.

Between January and November 1987 I spent a three-month period of daily observation in each of the two first grade classes. The first observation period (January - March 1987) was spent in Sarah's class in Lewis Roth school, and the second period (September - November 1987) in Rachel's class in Givat Oren school.

In Lewis Roth I regularly attended the two morning periods devoted to the teaching of reading (08:00 - 09:45). In the Givat Oren school I spent all four daily periods (08:00 - 11:45) in the classroom. During the period of observation I joined both classes in every activity in which the children were involved, both in school and on excursions. Extended and intensive observation in the two schools enabled me to sample routines, as well to experience the occasional extraordinary event. In fact, the prolonged observation periods ensured that I was able to record as full and a representative range of activities and interactions as possible. It prevented the danger of falling into the trap of singling out only interesting or exceptional events.

7.3.5 The Data Collecting Techniques.

The main technique used was that of "observer as participant" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Although the distinction between 'participant as observer' and 'observer as participant' seems moot, the constraints of the settings and of the pedagogy used, especially in Lewis Roth school, led me to act more in the former than in the latter manner. Placing the accent on the role of observer is congruent with the usual conduct expected from a visitor to an Israeli class. She should sit quietly and silently watch the teacher-centred, frontal type of class activities.

7.3.5.1 Observation in Sarah's Class.

Most of my time in Sarah's class I sat in the same place, which had been offered to me by the teacher. The seat was at the back of the room, affording me an unhampered view of the pupils and teacher, who was usually standing near the blackboard. My seat was also near two table groups of six pupils each, so that I could watch their activities closely and hear them talking. From the

beginning it had been clear that Sarah expected me not to take part in the teaching and I had no choice but to comply with her terms. Not moving from my seat during the observation periods, meant that I could follow the frontal teaching process undisturbedly, with the teacher as the focus of my observation. Although this prevented me from seeing what the class was doing during the 'silent work' periods. I was able to watch closely the 12 children in the table groups located near to my place in the classroom.

Active participation on my part occurred only early in the morning, when Sarah was still absent. To avoid the morning traffic, I arrived at school well before the start of school. Because working parents send their children to school very early, most of the children were already in the classroom by half past seven. The children spent this 'before school' time playing with small toys and they brought with them from home. Within a few days of my arrival on the scene I became involved in the children's 'before school' activities. They would come and talk to me, show me their toys, books, 'read' to me and asked me to read to them. After about three weeks, a 'reading circle' had formed, to which I read a short story. After this I would move around the room and talk with the children about their games. Heath (1982) maintains that "When participation in the field round of activities is not possible, field workers should make a principle decision to learn and to describe as completely as possible what is happening in selected activities, setting or groups of participants."(p 35). Participating in and observing the children's self-initiated morning activities provided an opportunity for exploring a children's world and of being exposed to behaviours, lore and, particularly, to an intensive flow of language rarely observed during formal school time. These 'before school' morning activities gave me a clearer understanding of who these children were and how they experienced a daily passage into literacy learning in school.

7.3.5.2 Observation-Participation in Rachel's Class.

In Rachel's class I sat in a corner, very near to her desk. From this vantage point, it was very easy to establish eye contact with Rachel and exchange a wink or a nod every now and then. I had a clear view of the class and the teacher, whether she was standing near her desk or at the blackboard. Again, my chair was near enough to a table group of six children, to allow close observation of their activities. Although for most of the time I remained seated in my corner and watched Rachel frontal teaching method, I was more of a participant than in Sarah's class. Occasionally she asked me to join her in listening to the children's reading, or to make a point of watching the assistant teacher who tested the children's weekly progress. I was thus able to circulate in class more often than I had anticipated. I was also often invited to join the 'advanced' group of pupils who were given extra exercises in reading-comprehension. These activities took place in the corridor, where the children carried out their assignments independently. When I joined them in the corridor, the children would turn to me for help actually seeing me as their teacher.

Twice a week Rachel's class sallied forth to the television room, which was located in the main building, to watch the 'No Secrets to Reading' programme. This trip was another form of 'participation' for me, especially since Rachel wanted me to help her organise these expeditions to and from the adjacent building and in the television room itself. These journeys provided me with opportunities to talk with the children, and particularly about the programme (before and after). I could thus find out more about what literacy and reading meant to them.

Finally, Rachel invited me to attend the first parent-teacher meeting, which was held in the classroom one evening at the end of the second week of school. I was also welcomed to one of the monthly meetings of the parents class committee, which took place in the home of one of the parents.

7.3.6 Data Recording Procedures.

The data were recorded in two ways: day-to-day hand written field notes and audio taping of the daily classroom discourse. The field notes were written daily on location. All verbal interactions between myself and the teachers, headteachers, staff members, other individuals involved, and the children were also written down as field-notes immediately upon termination of a conversation. Audio taped recording was also carried out in both classes. In the Lewis Roth school audio taping started at the beginning of the second month of the observation period, while in the Givat Oren school recording was initiated during my first day in the classroom. At all times recording was started the moment I entered the classroom in the morning, and switched off only when the children were engaged in longer 'silent work' periods.

Audio recordings were made in all the settings in which observation was carried out, and included, apart from the classroom, interaction in the corridor and television room, at the parent-teacher meeting (Givat Oren School) and sample recordings of the children's 'before school' play (Lewis Roth school).

Additional factual information obtained during the observation includes examples of the written material prepared daily by the two teachers, such as worksheets and workcards, copies and photocopies of the pupils' written work, in books and on worksheets, and samples of the children's free writing.

Without exception, all the material - from audio tapes, and field notes to the written samples by teachers and pupils - is in Ivrit. As in previous sections, the translation of selected examples of the Ivrit text into English is my own, closely following the original. If, therefore, the English translation of the transcribed material has a strong literal flavour, this must be ascribed to my intention of keeping as close as possible to the original notes and utterances.

7.3.7 Data Selection Sampling and Presentation.

From the vast array of daily written field-notes and audio-tapes it was necessary to select those accounts which corresponded most clearly to the themes and patterns which

emerged as the work developed. Through all this time I was moving from 'experience-near' to 'experience-distant', so that major themes became more and more clearly defined. Thus, for instance, I became even more aware of the presence of 'ritualisation' in all the aspects of literacy-learning in the two classrooms. I saw that I must select paradigmatic instances of this theme out of all the accounts.

I found that I had four criteria for selecting transcriptions to provide evidence for recurring clusters of patterns which, when analysed, might reveal the underlying cultural logic in the classroom interactions and practices. These are the four selection-criteria:-

1. Transcriptions which provide evidence on the phenomenon of passage from being a non school-literate to being a school reader may be selected.
2. Transcriptions displaying the 'ritualisation' of pedagogy and classroom interactions in relation to literacy-teaching may be used.
3. Transcriptions which illustrate the role of the texts being used in literacy-learning can be chosen.
4. Transcriptions revealing the phenomenon of 'silencing' should be selected.

Use of these criteria produced four very extensive selections of transcriptions. From each of these I shall only present here those which are paradigmatic.

On moving to the second school, I expected to draw comparisons between literacy-learning in two Israeli classrooms. However, as my observations progressed and I began to search for points of comparison between the two, it became increasingly clear that there were far more similarities than differences. I found myself 'comparing like with like', notwithstanding the professed *Halutz* ideology in the second school. My presentation, therefore, will not reveal sharp differences between happenings in the two schools. This, in itself, is of great importance for what I shall attempt to establish.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Children of the Book: Ethnographic *Midrash* of Literacy practices in the First Grade.

8. Introduction.

In this chapter I present selected transcriptions of the ethnographic accounts, and subject them to critical analysis. In a metaphoric sense, everything that happens in the literacy-lessons in the two classes, constitutes a "cultural text" (Geertz: 1973). This "text" is about what it is to be an Israeli now, and what it has meant to be Jewish down the centuries.

At all times, when seeking the underlying layers of meaning within the text, the People of the Book has had recourse to the art of *midrash*. As an 'insider' I propose, once again, to use this art, availing ^{myself} of the tools of interpretative and critical ethnography.

Accordingly, I shall now present four *midrashhim* (plural for *midrash*) through which I attempt to provide answers to the central questions which are at the heart of this thesis.

8.1 First *Midrash*.

8.1.1. The First Day of School as a Rite of Passage.

'Going to school' for the first time constitutes a transition which can be interpreted as a "rite of passage".

It changes the children's social status, personal identity, self-image and collective consciousness. (Van Gennep:1960; Turner:1967, 1969, 1974, 1977; Kapferer: 1981; McLaren:1986).

According to Van Gennep, a "rite of passage" marks a transition between temporal periods, spatial zones, social status and relations of various kinds. Rites of passage are marked by three phases, separation, liminality and re-aggregation. In the first phase, the 'separation phase', the ritual subject detaches herself from an earlier fixed position in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions.

8.1.1.1 Separation.

Description Segment No. 1

It is Thursday, the first of September, the start of the new school year in Israel. It is ten to eight in the morning. The bare asphalt

playground of Givat Oren school, is already burning in the hot September sun. A group of children is gathered near the entrance to classroom 1B.

When the bell rings these 16 boys and 16 girls will enter Rachel's classroom to start their very first day in school.

These children, who had arrived escorted by their parents, carry their newly-bought colourful school bags. Each child wears a flower-shaped nametag which he/she had received during the 'welcome to school' ceremony that had been held in the school hall the previous afternoon.

Rachel, the home class teacher of 1B, her hair freshly permed and wearing a tailor-cut light brown outfit, stands at the door of the classroom to welcome the children.

Both boys and girls wear unisex garments: shorts or denims, T-shirts and sport shoes. Many of the children have already put on the T-shirts on which the school's name and logo ('G.O. A School Following the Spirit of the Labour Movement) are printed.

Parents and children alike look excited; cameras abound and the parents are busy taking pictures of their offspring and the classroom.

Gradually the children start entering the classroom and seat themselves at one of the tables, placing their bags on the floor. The children are exceptionally quiet and none of them wanders around, as do some of the parents who carefully inspect the books Rachel has put up for display. On the blackboard is printed "Shalom Kita Aleph" (שָׁלוֹם כִּיתָה אֶלֶף 'Welcome to the "Aleph", i.e. first grade').

On the wall facing the door and the blackboard hangs a huge poster of Alfi.

Shortly after eight o'clock the first notes of Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* are played through the loudspeaker system, signalling the start of the school day. Rachel allows her public a few more minutes of grace and then taps lightly on a small tambourine, a subtle sign for the parents to leave the room. The parents hug and kiss their children. "Come back at eleven," Rachel says to the parents "today is a short day, and we will only study for three hours".

For the children in Rachel's class, the first day of school constitutes a rite of passage which marks a shift in each child's status/role, from a kindergarten infant to a pupil in school. The separation (both physical and symbolic) starts with the children's

arrival at school and ends with Rachel's tapping the tambourine for the first time, a sign for the novices to cross the threshold into a new social framework. In this first phase, which the parents want to sustain and 'freeze', (symbolised by their photographing their offspring in the school surroundings), the children already carry indications of their future status: the school bag, which signals to the world that they are about to become pupils, and the school's T-shirt which they are wearing. The shirts are a distinct statement of these children's future identity inasmuch as the logo states that they are pupils in a school that openly pursues and espouses a prestigious and elitist ideological discourse.

8.1.1.2. Liminality.

The second phase, the 'margin or limen phase', is the main transitional phase in which the ritual subject symbolically prepares herself for her reintegration into a new social structure; during this liminal phase the ritual subject is in an ambiguous "betwixt and between" state (Turner, op. cit.) in which she has only few or none of the attributes of the past or the coming phase.

In this phase of liminality the children make their first encounter with the school's discourse of literacy.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 1¹.

08:10am. *The children sit silently, looking at Rachel who remains standing in front of the class.*

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1.	Join me, and we will sing a good morning song that you all know. (<i>Starts singing</i>).
2. <i>Start singing.</i>	
3.	And now, let us talk about this very special morning, for it is an important morning, not only for you, but for so many other children in our country.

4. Please sing us
another song, the
one you taught us
yesterday afternoon.

5. Maybe later, now we must
talk.

6. You will have to
raise your hand in order
to get permission to
talk. In that way I can
listen to each and every
one of you.

7. So, now tell me why is
today's morning so very
special?

8. This is school, it is not
something that small kids
do.

9. It is school, we are big
now, bigger than we were
last year.

10. In the older days there
was no school; now we go
to school.

11. There was always school,
you were not here, you
were in kindergarten,
but other children sat
in this very class, and
now they have moved to
the second grade.

12. In kindergarten we played.
13. We played with bricks.
14. We sang.
15. We learned little in kindergarten.
16. We drew, we learned how to decorate.

17.

Yes, in kindergarten you played, but not just that. The kindergarten prepared you so as to be ready for school; and you are well prepared, because I can see that you already know how to raise your hand when you want to talk. You must have learned that in kindergarten.

18. I wanted to stay small. I wanted Mammy to go on calling me 'my baby'.
19. We have to go to kindergarten, kindergarten is compulsory.

20.

Indeed yes, all the children in Israel, and in the whole world, must go to kindergarten before they go to school. That is why we call it 'compulsory kindergarten.'

But today, all the children in the country, in Tel Aviv, Haifa and in all the *kibbutzim* are going to school. So it is not only you who are so very excited, but all the parents and children in Israel.

21. There is a law. If the parents do not send their children to school, the father is sent to prison.

22. Come on, that is not true, is it Rachel? (*in an astonished voice*)

23.

(*Looks at the boy's name-tag.*) Indeed, Dror is right. The law says that every child when he turns six must to go school. School is compulsory. But, we will soon find out how much we like to come to school, law or not. So let us talk about what we do in school.

24. It is important to go to school. If we do not go to school we won't be able to tell our children anything.

25. When will we get our school reports?

26. *(laugh)* School reports are still a long way ahead of us, and are not important at all.
27. In your new year greeting cards you will all wish each other 'success in school'; let us all succeed in our studies. You will all study and be very clever, much cleverer than you are now.
28. And now let us stop just chatting and start our real studies.
29. What is the first thing we learn in class?
30. To read. *(Children shout in chorus).*
31. Yes, so let us now look around and see what we can already read. *(Draws the class' attention to the 'Welcome to the first grade' caption on the blackboard).*
32. Let us all read it together now.
32. *(In unison) - Shalom Kita Aleph.*
33. And Now.... *Points at the instruction poster next to the blackboard.*
34. *In a loud voice:* cut, paste, copy, draw a circle.
35. How did you know, Dror?

36. I can read.

37.

That is very good, but let us now talk about the children who are not yet readers. How will they know what the words say? *(Goes on to explain the words on the poster*

38.

These are instructions; you must remember these words. When you get 'work', these instructions will help you to know what you have to do, and if you forget, the pictures will remind you. And now it is time to introduce a very important friend.

(Points to the Alfi poster on the back wall of the classroom.

37.

Do you know who this is?

38. Alfi, *(in chorus)* Alfi, Alfi!

39.

Do you know Alfi?

40. Yes, *(shouting)* from the television.

41.

Alfi will be our friend, and will join us every day. We will watch him on television. Alfi and the television will teach us how to read. But now let us really get going,

08:35am *Hands out worksheets. The worksheets read 'Shalom Kita Aleph'.*

42.

let us start our work.

I would now like you to colour each word, please, make sure that the work sheets are nicely decorated and write your name at the top of the page.

The children are busy with their task.

43.

You can whisper a word to your neighbour, but, please do not raise your voice. *(the teacher is holding a writing pad and pen in hand, carefully notes the way each child holds her/his pencil, marking down the names of the children who are not aware of the conventional directionality of writing.)*

Nathanella finishes her assignment very quickly and adds a written message of her own:"to mammy from Nathanella".

Rachel Starts putting books on children's desks

44. Look, *(whispers to her neighbour)* she is getting us books.

08.55am

Taps lightly on the tambourine

45.

This will be a sign for calling your attention, you will always stop

immediately everything
you are doing when the
tambourine calls you.

(All pencils and crayons are put down).

46. You probably wonder what
these books are for; they
are for you to read.
Every morning when you
come to class you will
find books on your table.
You will sit down and
immediately take a book
and very quietly start
reading.

47. I do not know how to read.
(In a worried tone).

48. There is no need to
worry. *(In a very
reassuring tone).* You
can look at the pictures;
any one who takes a book
and quietly looks at the
pictures behaves as if he
can read.

49. May we really read, if we
really know how to?

50. *(Laughs).* Of course, if
you really know how to
read, you can even be our
little class room teacher.
Are there any other
children who know how to
read?

Two girls, and two boys, raise their hands.

51. I know how to read *silently.*

52. Take any book you like,

and you can read it for yourself. I now invite the whole class to read.

Circulates in class, encouraging the children to have a go at the books. The children browse through the pile of books, look at the pictures, turn the pages very quickly. There are now two piles of books on the tables: those that have been 'read' and those yet to be opened. Books are shuffled between children. A few are still busy decorating their worksheets, others play with their crayons or fingers.

09.25am. A pair of parents peep in through the door. The father is in uniform, it is obvious that he is on military reserve duty.

53.

Hearty tone:

Come and enjoy these wonderful children. Would any one believe that they have only come in today? They behave as if they have already been here for a whole year.

The parents leave.

54.

Taps on the tambourine.

We have five minutes to the morning break. Please close your books, put them in the middle of the table and tidy up.

Dror approaching Rachel.

55. I want to show you a caricature that I drew.

Looks at him in amazement.

56.

What do you mean by caricature? You use such very complicated words.

Dror shows Rachel the picture he has drawn and reads the caption that he has written underneath. Rachel laughs:

57.

Now run along, you clever

boy, or else you will miss your play time.

As she and I walk to the staffroom for our morning coffee, Rachel turns to me and says: "Well, this is certainly going to be an interesting year."

In a state of liminality there are words and terms that indicate to the novice that he is "being grown" into a new, post-liminal state of being. In this phase, the transitions in space and time that accompany the social change are also ritualised (Turner: 1974).

The phase of liminality, in which the children are now immersed, starts with a morning song as the symbolic expression of a new beginning; the children are formally detached from their previous status as kindergarten infants and move into their new role as pupils. This shift consists of a series of transitions which, as part of the rite itself, are publicly declared in a ceremonial way and which treat of the following:-

(i) A move from the kindergarten's main metaphor of 'play' to the school's main metaphor of 'work'.

This move from the 'ethos of the ludic' to the 'ethos of the ergic' inextricably links the definition of being a pupil to the learning of reading, making 'work' an inherent part of the latter process.

(ii) A move from verbal modes of expression and iconic forms of symbolisation to the use of the written word and its specific form of symbolisation.

(iii) A move from individual and plural to uniform and single literature behaviour. This is accompanied by

(iv) the first introduction of the authoritative voice of school literacy as exemplified by the image of Alfi. Already in this phase of liminality, the pattern of transactions in class is defined as the children first learn whose authority and voice will prevail in class. School places before the first graders an existing order of knowledge and social organisation which links the teaching of reading to powers and authorities operating both within and beyond the school's boundaries.

Immediately upon entering the classroom, these children are

confronted with the symbolic representation of these powers: Alfi's image, hanging on the wall like a religious insignia; the instruction poster, which associates first literacy events with obeying orders; the blackboard, which serves as the teacher's "power spot" (McLaren:1986); the 'welcome-to-the-first-grade' inscription, soon to become the shared first text read in class. All these artefacts of the classroom's "material culture" (Johnson:1980) are visual symbols of the authorities which regulate the ways in which these children will be allowed to receive meanings and knowledge from print and will come to see themselves as readers.

From the moment the children enter the classroom for the first time wearing the school's logo-printed shirts they themselves become carriers of the power of the written word and its exploitation by the dominant culture.

Even before they have actually started their first formal lesson in class, when they first negotiate the meaning of school with their teacher, they already know that not only will they learn to read and write, but that they are also expected to be good at it. They know too that their literate competences will be evaluated and rewarded.

They have already learned that their society views school as the source of all knowledge. They see themselves as their parents' successors and future bearers and transmitters of this knowledge. The children are not strangers to the written word. They have been exposed to 'literacies' other than the one they are about to acquire. Some are already readers.

However, within the first hour in class the children's prior knowledge of out of school literacies gives way to definitions and practices of reading and writing which accord with the school's values. Within this hour the children are introduced to the school's dominant discourse on literacy, which is channelled into a regime of classroom pedagogies that forces the children to acquire and display an identical pattern of literate behaviour.

From their first entry into the classroom the children are being ritualised into a didactic regime that teaches that reading is a system of orders and instructions regulated by the law of the State. Being literate means being a law-abiding citizen, illiteracy is a transgression of the law.

The ultimate expression of the authority of literacy is Alfi, who is

presented to the children as a superpower and as the arbiter of all knowledge. Within the ritualised structure of the class Alfi becomes the symbol of a state-mandated and state-transmitted universal reading-instruction curriculum. It is Alfi who decides for both children and teacher who will read and write in what manner, within what kind of structural circumstances and to what end. Alfi's authority, augmented by that powerful medium television, is predicated by the authority of the written word.

From the first moments in class, literacy is mediated as a form of traditional cultural heritage. The first activity experienced by the children - reading aloud in unison - is an act in which the resonance of traditional literacy practices is clearly echoed. The children are made aware that schools are long-standing institutions for the transmission of literacy. Within this process, the children see themselves as successors of generations of literate people. This is the fraternity they are about to join.

Associating the acquisition of reading with success, and thus with pride for the child/readers, his family and his community, is another reminder of the role of literacy throughout *la 'longue duree'* of Jewish history.

Success in learning to read implies becoming a scholar a *talmid chacham*, the symbol of cultural continuity, a figure responsible for transmitting wisdom to the younger generation.

By linking success in reading to the Jewish New Year, Rachel in fact refers to deeper layers of meaning that connect literacy with cultural heritage.

The notion that learning to read is work, whereas 'just chatting' is a waste of time also echos the traditional ethos of spending one's time solely in study.

It is within this phase of being "*betwixt* and between" that these children are actually being inducted into literacy as an ideology, that is "as a social construction that is always implicated in organising one's view of history, the present and the future." (Gramsci:1982; in Giroux:1989 p.148).

The father/soldier who has entered the classroom in uniform is but a reminder of such a social construction; the national discourse into which children will soon be by means of literacy. The phase of liminality functions also to introduce the children to the

institutional social setting of the classroom. This integrates the formal and conventionlised practices of the teaching of reading with the modes of conduct and *patterns* of verbal and non-verbal classroom transaction. The children's spatial and temporal locations in class are ritualised: how and when they will be allowed to move around in the room, where they will sit, how they will get permission to talk and when, within these circumscribed locations, they will have to read .

About the process of settling down in school, *Wills* (1981, 1983) says that "... children new to classrooms are obliged to learn how to interpret what teachers say, what constitutes appropriate responses and how and when to make individual contributions that teachers recognise as commendable." (1981 p. 51).

From the initial moment of negotiation between teacher and class as to what, within the institutionalised setting of the school, counts as appropriate reading-behaviour, enigmatic messages are being delivered and received.

Is reading a sign of achievement and success for which external rewards are given or not?

To what extent is reading equated with the command to obey the law?

How free are the children to display plurality of literate behaviour?

How far dare the children go in initiating individual literacy behaviour?

How often will children be allowed to bring to class their knowledge of other literacies?

Does reading-ability come from instruction, or can be it 'caught' by simply using and enjoying books?

Which aspect of 'learning to read' can be 'fun', and which aspects count as 'work'.

Rachel herself is in a state of liminality. She is unable or unwilling to clear up these points. In one sense, there is no point in responding to the children's uncertainties: the answers are all laid down, since the whole process of 'becoming a reader' is minutely prescribed. Alfi will make it all clear, when the time is right.

"In the transition from home to school the relationship between language and context is an aspect of the child's experience which

changes quite dramatically." (Romaine: 1984 pp.104). The first verbal interactions between Rachel and the class not only circumscribe the children's individual entry into reading. They also mark the boundaries within which the children are free to use the language they bring to school, as an expression of their subjectivity, i.e. their ways of taking meanings from, and understanding, the world they live in. From the first instance, Rachel establishes a teacher-initiated, teacher-dominated, teacher-regulated type of classroom-talk, which operates as both a control and silencing mechanism.

The phase of liminality establishes, as Turner (1974) argues, the interstructural character of the relationship between the instructor and the neophytes, which is one of complete authority and complete submission.

Indeed, the children who have only just entered a completely new environment almost immediately, even before the end of the first period, behave as 'natives'. They are well on the way to become what the teacher wants them to be. Soon they are publicly awarded for their compliance and docility.

This acceptance of the teacher's authority marks the children's final move from the liminal phase to their new well defined position in the new social structure. They start performing as 'pupils'.

In Van Gennep's terms the children have now moved into the third phase of the rite of passage; the reaggregation phase. The ritual subject, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, resumes her place in society and is expected to behave in accordance with clearly defined new obligations and norms.

8.1.1.3. Re-aggregation .

Interaction Segment No. 2

Children

1.

Teacher

Enters the head teacher

I came to welcome you to our school. Good morning to you Kita Alif. I am

Nili the head teacher. I

will come and visit you very often and you can

come to me if you have a real serious problem. Otherwise you go to Rachel or to Ziona. She is in charge of the primary school, you will meet her later or perhaps tomorrow. Do you know why Ziona got this special name?

Let us tell you. Ziona was born in Argentina, but her parents were Zionists and wanted to come to Israel.

So they decided to give their daughter a name that would mean to 'go and live in Israel'. Who knows what Zionists means?

2. Zionists are like Bedouins. They have no homes and wander around.

3.

Nili smiles

We live in Zion. Israel is sometimes referred to as Zion, so Zionists are people who want to live in Israel. And, indeed when Ziona grew up she fulfilled her parents' wish and came to live here.

4.

Turning to Rachel

Do not forget to give each child this badge before she/he goes home.
Leaves badges on Rachel's

table. The badges read
'Work and study in 'GIVAT
OREN school'..

Interaction Segment No 3.

After play time Rachel hands out the 'No Secrets' books.

Children

1.

2. As if there is a secret in
reading.

3.

4.

Teacher

in a cheerful voice.

These are our No Secrets
books. We must first
understand the title.
What is meant by the
words there are no
secrets? What is this
secret?

Well done, that is
exactly what it means.

What is written in books
is a secret. Why?

Because you do not
understand it, you do not
know how to read it.

For people who can not
read, books are like
secrets. Reading is a
secret for those who have
not learned how to read.
But you have all come
here to become readers,
so for you books will
have no secrets. And
here, is a book that
tells you how we do it,
how we reveal the secrets
of reading. *Opens the
book and instructs the*

5.

children to follow her.
Here is Alfi, our friend,
he will help us to read.
And here he is, already
telling us what to do and
how to carry on. Look,
he introduces himself 'I
am Alfi...' And here, see
how he can turn into a
letter, Alfi can
transform himself to the
shape of a letter.

Turning the pages. We
finally reach the first
word and let us see what
it is. The word is
Shalom. We will now
learn the first sound of
this word, sha. Let us
look for things around us
in which we can hear the
sha sound. But first let
me show you how to write
this letter. This is the
way we do it, watch very
carefully, watch my hand.

*Start copying the letter
(sh), trying to
follow the direction.*

6.

And now for your
homework. I want to ask
you to find pictures of
words that contain the
sound sha. You can look
for them in newspapers
and magazines, cut them
and paste them in your
book.

7. We do not buy newspapers.

8.

Never mind, try and see if your neighbour has any old newspapers. Can you guess which words you will find in the papers?

9. sha'on (clock),

sha'ar (gate)

sharsheret (chain),

Mr Shamir may we cut

out a photo of Mr. Shamir?

10.

Who is Mr. Shamir?

In chorus

11. The prime minister.

Laughs

12.

Yes, you can certainly cut out a picture of Mr. Shamir.

It is eleven o'clock and the parents are waiting to collect their children. Rachel sticks an 'I work and study in the G.O. school' badge on the T-shirt of each child. When all the children have gone Rachel turns to me and says I planned to sing a song and read a story, but time ran away with me and I forgot.

The visit of the head teacher followed immediately by beginning the ritualised form of learning to read, marks the phase of re-aggregation. In this phase the neophytes resume their place in the hierarchical order of the school's community, at the same time joining the wider community of the State's future generation of literates. The children have their first encounter with the head teacher, who represents the pyramid of leadership in the institutionalised setting of school. It turns into a lesson in the maxims of Zionism. Thus it is the children's first school-connected encounter with the discourse of Nation Building. By the end of the first day of school, this will have been symbolised by the 'Work and study in the G.O, School' badge. The 'Work and Study in Givat Oren School' badge is a literary object, a brief written expression of the socialist ethos of the school of providing education and literacy for

all. The children go home publicly marked as belonging to the fraternity of literacy.

The choice of words on the badge equates schooling, and thus 'learning to read' with work. In fact, it neatly equates the ethos of *halutziut* (i.e., work), the cause which the school espouses, with the ethos of *talmid chacham* (i.e., study), the goal to be achieved by teaching the children to read.

At this phase the children have already been affected by the two metaphors soon to assume a central position in the class's discourse: 'growth' and 'togetherness'. Implied in the first is the notion of the children's future, their task as guardians of their society's continuity. While the second metaphor forms an inherent part of the discourse of solidarity and 'gibush' that unifies the society in which the children live. It seems therefore that the first day in class is a rite of transition into a new "context of social semiotics", (Halliday:1978), in which the children have to learn 'how to mean' within the school's social context; that is, they have to learn the system of meanings that constitute reality as constructed and represented by 'school'. Being literate in this school amounts to acquiring a particular set of social practices. These are conducive to shaping children's self-image as people committed ultimately to maintaining the collective image of the society of which they are members. Being literate means to belong culturally, to be "an insider" (Kermode:1977), for whom there are 'No Secrets'.

8.1.1.4. The First Day of School - Making the Obvious Problematic.

In the foregoing *midrash* I have been following, stage by stage, what could have appeared to be a simple, familiar, often-repeated event. A group of six-year old children, the new generation in a literate society, go to school for the very first time. They are setting out on an extended period of compulsory education intended to prepare them for adult life.

However, my analysis of the event questions the perception of this 'first day' as no more than a neutral, routine beginning of reading and writing. Underlying all that happens on this occasion, patterns of cultural logic are already clearly ^{discernible}. So, too, are lines of power and of submission.

I decided to begin with this *midrash* because it is concerned with

the three hours during which Israeli six-year olds first find themselves taken up into the State's system of education. Within this brief passage of time all the major themes of initiation into Israeli citizenship are totally present, albeit in embryonic form, and already clearly detectable. It is at this point in time where these young lives first encounter the collective in its institutional shape, that literacy is seen to be being used in very specific ways. This raises further important questions:-

Do these patterns and practices of literacy reading continue to appear and develop as the process of becoming readers goes forward? What precisely is intended to be conveyed through these first encounters with school literacy? Whose interests are being served by the consciously-constructed setting, the pedagogy and the texts? What are children learning and how do they perceive themselves as learners in this system?

My next *midrashim* will, therefore, need to address these questions. To this end I have selected representative transcriptions which concern three focal-points within the underlying logic of these events:

The first *midrash* explores - What is happening when reading-instruction is ritualised.

The second identifies what and whose 'authorities' are present in the text.

The final *midrash* concerns the silencing of individual 'voices'.

8.2 Second *Misrash*.

8.2.1 The Learning-to-read Ritual.

Rituals are highly structured and, usually unchanging behaviours or actions. According to Moore & Mayerhof (1977), the main properties of rituals are: repetition, acting, stylised behaviour and order. Repetition may bear upon the occasion, the content, the form or any combination of these. Rituals are essentially pre-patterned - like the actors' parts in a play. 'What is to be done' is highly stylised and must proceed according to a rigid, pre-determined order.

The function of a ritual is to engage those who perform it in communal symbolic acts which focus on commonly-accepted behaviours that define and sustain the beliefs which hold the community together. (Turner:1967,1969,1974,1977; Rappaport:1971;

Geertz:1973; Kapferer:1981; McLaren:1986).

8.2.1.1. Entry Into Reading Space and Reading Time.

Sarah's Class : Interaction Segment No. 4

It is nearly eight o'clock in the morning. Most of the pupils are already in the classroom, wandering around and playing. Small toys match box cars, aeroplanes, dolls are scattered on the floor and on the tables. The bell rings. "It is eight o'clock," shouts Nir, as he rushes to the bookshelf and picks up a book, "I heard the bell". Within seconds the scene changes: dolls and cars are quickly hidden in pockets and school bags. Near the bookshelves children push each other to pick up a book. They then quickly go to their seats. Two girls, flushed from running up the stairs, enter the class, holding their skipping ropes. "Sarah is coming," they announce while hurrying to take a book. The door opens and Sarah enters. The children all sitting in their places, with open books in front of them.

Children

1.

(In unison): We have
to read.

2.

(In unison): Yes.

3. We must take a book and try
to read.

4. We must take a book.

5. We can take the toys out of
our school bags and play.

6.

7. *(In unison):* No!

Teacher

I would like to remind
you what you are expected
to do in the morning.
What do we do after we
come in and put down our
school bags?

What do you think? Do you
have to read?

(Astonished): Can we?
Can we take a game out of
our school bags and play?

8. You were right when you said that we have to read. We can try and read. We can try and take a book and read. You may take any book, you may take any book and read.
9. I came in, I heard the bell and took a book, but Boaz and Liran would not let me.
10. (*Ignoring him*): What did I tell you? What are we not allowed to do, what are we not allowed?
11. We are not allowed to play, we are not allowed to play games.
12. Yes, we are not allowed to play games, not allowed to play with cards or with bricks. The bricks are meant only for the math lessons. When we do maths we will be able to play with the bricks.
13. And we are not allowed to run in class and not to hit people and not to scribble and write nonsense.
14. And there is one more thing that I saw some girls doing this morning; do not wait for me on the stairs, even if I am a little late.
15. And not to ... not to play

with dolls.

16. And not to knit in the morning, and not to do embroidery.

17. And not to do anything that is not connected with reading - we do not do it. There is no need to remind you every day. You are clever children and you can show me what has to be done in the morning. And now you can start reading.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 5

During a morning reading-activity, which is called 'free reading' some children take their small toys from their pockets and very carefully, start playing hidden behind the open books. The lucky ones are those who decided to go to the book corner. Sheltered in this secluded space between the window, wall and bookshelf, they openly discard the books and play with dolls and matchbox cars.

Children

1.

Teacher

Stop everything and freeze; stand up all of you, do not move. Today is the last time I catch you playing instead of reading. If it happens once more, we will stop the morning reading until further notice. And now put the books away and take out your pencils and copybooks, quickly, like busy little ants.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 6

- | Children | Teacher |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | What were you supposed to be doing? Instead of reading you were playing, many children were playing instead of reading. That is not acceptable. We start our daily work with reading. I'll be very upset if I have to be cross with you. What will happen when we feel like playing and some children want to read instead? When we come to school in the morning, we do nothing else, we do nothing else but read. What are we supposed to do in the morning? |
| 2. (<i>In unison</i>): Read books. | |
| 3. | But do we move around the class? |
| 4. (<i>in unison</i>): No. | |
| 5. | No, we do not move around the class. Now I hope you will remember what has to be done in the morning. And now collect every thing and take out your 'No secrets' books and your pencils and crayons. |

The daily entrance into school 'reading space and reading time' is a micro-ritual of passage into the classrooms' macro-ritual of learning to read. For a very short time each day, the children established their own ritual within which they are free to create and be imaginative. Daily, on the arrival of a school adult, they are compelled to pass from this into the rule-bound ritual of 'learning to read in school'. Playing with their toys here, is an act of open resistance. The toys represent retreat to the children's territory to which the teacher has no right of access. Within the domains of a child's world, where children are the owners of temporal and spatial extension, and where they set the rules, toys are legitimate objects. Toys bridge between the real and the imaginary, between rules initiated and rules imposed, between the alternative and the unequivocal. Stewart (1984), defines toys as "... the physical embodiment of the fiction; it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world ... To toy with something is to manipulate it, to try it out within a set of contexts, none of which is determinative ... The desire to animate the toy is the desire not simply to know everything, but also to experience everything simultaneously." Toys are intimately associated with play, which in itself, according to Meek (1985), "...inaugurates, discusses, elaborates and promotes the imaginary and the metaphorical ..." (pp. 50). In play children create the imaginative terms of their knowing. Later they discover in imaginative literature that they have powerful friends who can help them to extend their competences into the deep play of reading and writing." (Meek: 1985 pp. 53). Reading can thus be viewed as a form of play, an elaborate game with rules which, as Meek (1988) shows us, children teach themselves as they engage with texts in real books. Reading should be a personal, liberating and emancipating activity, in which children negotiate with the "... variety of written discourses, the different ways that language lets a writer tell, and the many and different ways a reader reads..." (Ibid). The reading-schemes, into which the children are daily channelled, are locked within the confines of an externally controlled 'first grade register'. They are the antithesis of creative, imaginative personal freedom. When the teacher enters into the scene the children are being moved from

stage of learning about the world through imaginative play with toys and language to a point where this knowledge must only be obtained from books, primarily school books which are presented as the source of all knowledge. (Vygotsky:1978; Meek:1985, 1988).

The actual teaching of reading in classes consists of conventional and stereotyped, daily repeated, patterns of behaviour which have the features and characteristics of a ritual. The following transcriptions have been chosen as representing typical patterns of the 'Learning-to-read' ritual in both classes.

8.2.1.2. Rituals of Instruction.

Interaction Segment No. 7

- | <u>Children</u> | <u>Teacher</u> |
|--|---|
| 1. | Today we will learn a new rule, please open wide your lovely eyes and watch the blackboard very, very carefully. |
| <i>The children's eyes nearly pop out of their head in their effort to follow Sarah's demonstration on the blackboard.</i> | |
| 2. | And now, open wide your lovely ears, your big, big elephant ears and listen carefully to the new rule. |
| <i>Children hold their ear lobes with their hands and move forward in their seats into an attentive listening posture.</i> | |
| 3. | Now we will recite the new rule, three times. |
| <i>The class follows her words in unison in a sing-song manner.</i> | |
| 4. | You must now copy the examples into your exercise books, mark words that are the same with a coloured pencil. You must remember the rules, that is why we |

learn them. If you remember the rules, then you know what to do. (*In a happy tone*). Yes, Ivrit, Ivrit, our difficult language, there are so many rules to remember.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 8

Children

1.

2. (*In chorus*): The name of the story.

3.

Teacher

Open your books, we will now read the story together. Put your finger on the first word; put your finger on the page and follow me. Put your finger, do not move it, leave your finger on the words. Let us start. What are we reading now?

Well done, this is the name of the story.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 9

Children

1.

Teacher

I will dictate the first word when you are ready. Put down your pencils, fold your arms and wait. Please be careful not to make any spelling mistakes or place the dots in the wrong

direction.
(Starts dictating).

(Gady hesitates and stops writing).

- 2.
 3. I am thinking where to put the dot.
 - 4.
- Why have you stopped writing, Gady?
- There is no need to think. All you have to do is to remember the rules.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 10

The children are copying words from the blackboard, Rachel taps on the tambourine.

Children

1.

Teacher

So many children in our class still do not know how to write properly in their copy books. We must now stop everything and I will demonstrate how we do it.

(Opens a copy book and points to the blue lines that designate the height of the letters): We only write between these two blue lines, not above or under them. The blue lines tell us exactly what size the letters ought to be. Now let us practice. Say, I want to write 'Alfi is at home'. First we write 'Alfi'. Put your fingers after

the word Alfi, we must
have enough space before
we write the next word.
When you have finished,
leave two blue lines
empty.

Children count with Rachel One, two start writing again on the third line.

3.

I suggest that you all
write with me 'Alfi saw a
picture'.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 11

Children

1.

Teacher

Open your 'no secrets'
books. We will now read
together. Put your finger
on the first word at the
top of the page. Have
you all put your finger?
Well done. Now wait, I
want to be sure that you
have all put your finger
on the right word. Now
we can start reading. We
read together 'Shalom
Alfi ... shalom yeled
(boy) ... shalom yalda
(girl). Each table group
will now read with me.
Put your finger on the
first word on the top of
the page. Now we can start.

On the way to the staffroom, Rachel suddenly says to me in an apologetic tone "I feel as if I am teaching in a heder, but this is the way we have been told to do it. By whom I ask. By the instructors on our weekly Tuesday course she answers.

Sarah's Class: Description Segment No.2

The daily reading instruction period starts with a rehearsal of the vowel and consonant sounds. These are read from the illustrated cards that hang above the blackboard. With a long pointer Sarah indicates consonants at random. The children repeat in chorus, once, twice and three times. After this part is finished, the whole process starts again, this time by chanting in unison the sounds of the syllables. For this, Sarah borrows tunes of popular pop songs that are often heard on radio and television.

The teaching of reading in both classes consists of conventional and stereotyped, daily repeated, patterns of behaviour which have the features and characteristics of a ritual. Learning to read is mediated by a series of directives and performances. During these performances the participants make use of ritual language, which is expressed in performative utterances and is accompanied by particular gestures. The learning-to-read performance is circumscribed in the time and space allotted by the teacher. Permission to enter or leave these boundaries, or to change duration of time or spatial location is exclusively in the hands of the teacher. The directives are obeyed by mechanical and redundant practices of copying, pointing, colouring of words, writing dictations, reading in unison. These are all carried out collectively while making explicit use of ritual space and time. On the surface level, the daily enactment of the ritual of 'learning to read' in the two classrooms clearly manifests a dominant pedagogic objective: to provide the children with a standard pattern of reading-behaviour which embodies the schools' discourse of literacy. The ritualised patterns of instruction are the vectors through which the children's identity as 'readers in school' is created, shaped and forged according to an identical template. At the same time, by virtue of their role as participants in this ritual, they become committed to its messages. For it is obvious how, through these daily ritual performances, the schools' discourse of reading is objectified and reified. "Reification", as stated by Berger and Luckman (1966) is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products - as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, as

manifestations of divine will. In its reified form, 'learning to read' is mediated as a system of orders, and rules that, although at times arbitrary and unexplained, may not be questioned.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 12

08.00am: Sarah is ill, and a supply teacher takes her place for the day. The children sit at their tables with their books open in front of them when she comes into the classroom.

Children

- 1.
2. *(In an astonished voice)*
Are we not allowed books?
- 3.
4. But it is morning.

Teacher

Who told you to take out books? Who told you? What are you doing?

No. Now you will listen to me.

This transcription reveals the power of ritual to create and shape reality for its participants. Reading is an act performed in the morning, not because the children choose to do so, but because this is the way the world is organised. In this sense, it is also paradigmatic of the assertion that ritual is, in a way, a cultural statement against indeterminacy. The implicit messages transmitted through the ritualised performances of 'learning to read' mediate literacy as a sanctified practice which is to be carried out to the letter, its main property being its unchallengeable nature. Any violation of this sanctity is considered a social transgression, a breach of social norms and is therefore publicly sanctioned. Moreover, because it is a public performance, this ritual functions as a control mechanism that shapes and regulates social actions of both the individual and the collective, and sets the rules for what counts as normative or transgressive behaviour in class. The following transcription is an example of this control process.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 13

For an activity called 'dictation' Sarah divides the blackboard into vertical columns according to the number of children in each group, and marks the boundaries between the columns with

coloured chalk. The children of one of the table-groups are asked to come to the blackboard. They stand there, each facing a column, chalk in hand, waiting for the dictation. Kefir hesitates, quickly glances sideways at his neighbour's column.

- | <u>Children</u> | <u>Teacher</u> |
|---|--|
| 1. Watching the group's activity. Kefir is copying. | |
| 2. | In a warning tone. Don't copy, don't copy. |

Kefir blushes and quickly turns his eyes to the blank column in front of him.

Here the children act as gatekeepers, watching each other, keeping sanctified from being "polluted" (Douglas:1966).

This layer of the midrash shows how the teaching of reading in the two first grades involves the teachers and the children in a complex set of social rituals which support and extend the meaning of 'Learning-to-read'. It is evident how through order, formality and repetition, the ritual of 'learning-to-read' transmits an unequivocal message: in 'learning-to-read' the learner is a passive recipient, cast in the role of performer, rather than as an active negotiator of meanings. To 'be a reader' means to publicly adhere to a set of rules and imperatives. It is not to be a creative and critical participant in the exchange between reader and text. Having shown that the teaching of reading in the classrooms is a ritual practice, my analysis will show how the daily ritualised pedagogic performance in both first grades transmits powerful cultural messages which link present to past and individual to collective.

8.2.1.3. The 'Learning to Read' Ritual as a Traditionalising Instrument.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 14

- | <u>Children</u> | <u>Teacher</u> |
|--|---|
| 1. | Whose turn is it to tell us today's date? |
| 2. Today is Sunday, the second day of the month of <i>Shevat</i> . | |
| 3. | Correct. And if today is |

the second day of
She'vat, what was
yesterday's date?

4. Yesterday was Saturday,
the first day of the new
month.

5.

Friday was the 29th day
of the month of Tevet,
yesterday was the first
day of the new month of
She'vat and today is
Sunday, the second day of
the month of *She'vat*.

*Carefully prints the name
of the day, the date (for
which she uses the second
letter of the Ivrieth*

alphabet, beth *ב* *)*
*and the name of the
Jewish month on the
blackboard, reading out
aloud as she writes.*

6.

Today the date is ...

7. *Repeat in chorus*

Today is Sunday, the second
day of the month of *She'-
vat*.

8.

And who can tell me what
is the festival that will
be celebrated on this
month.

9. It is the Feast of the
Trees, on the fifteenth
day of *She'vat*.

10.

Well done.

11.

Let us now start our
reading lesson.

The daily act, in class, of writing the Hebraic date on the

blackboard enables us to see how the ritual of 'learning-to-read' carries messages about cultural longevity, cultural continuity and perpetuation. The ritual time, ritual space and ritual language unite to form a "traditionalising instrument" (Moore & Myerhoff:1977). This daily never-to-be-missed activity, which is part of the 'Learning-to-read' signals the transition from the free reading period to the formal time and space of the ritual of instruction. By using an appointed time a fixed space (the date is always written in the upper right hand corner of the blackboard) and performative utterances (Today the date is), the children daily establish their temporal position in and outside the class. In this sense the ritual is a fusion between two rhythms i.e. the linear progression of time and its recurring historic cycles.

The first rhythm, that of linear progression is two-fold: the time-continuum itself and the children's position within it. The daily act of writing the date conveys that every day is a new day which, on the one hand, promises growth and realisation of individual potentials (becoming a better and more competent reader), while on the other its linear progression symbolises the unpredictable future for which school, by means of literacy, is now preparing these young children.

The second rhythm is the daily entry into the historical cycle of time exemplified by the daily writing of the Hebraic date. This act, which implies a special literate information places the children, at this phase of their lives, on the continuum of the "longue duree" of Jewish literary tradition. The Hebraic calendar, which dates back to the Second Temple period expresses communal and sacred traditions, historical events, festivals and the generations who shared them. Before entering the daily ritual of instruction, the children become links in the unbroken chain of literacy, thereby enacting their role as children of the "Great Tradition" (Wax and Wax: 1971).

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 15

The completion of the first book of 'No secrets...' is an occasion for a celebration in class. Rachel plans this for the first period on a Friday morning. When the children come to class, they find a placard on the wall on which Rachel has written a 'story', composed of all the words appearing in the first book. The children take turns in reading

the story.

Children

1.

The children open their 'No secrets ...' book and read its text in chorus from beginning to end.

2.

The celebration ends with the children being treated to biscuits and sweets.

The 'learning-to-read' ritual is a traditionalising instrument. This appears clearly in the ceremony of completion.

Jewish tradition recognises several rituals of completion which mark a course of assigned reading or study of the Sacred Text. The most common is the festive occasion marking the end of the cyclic public reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue. Another is the ritual known as *siyum* (completion), celebrated upon finishing a course of study of a *Talmudic* tractate. In both instances the completion simultaneously marks the end and the beginning of a new cycle of reading. In Rachel's ritual of completion the resonance of these old and holy traditions can be clearly discerned, especially where she asks the children to read the dull, repetitive text over again, and bestows an aura of festivity on the occasion.

The didactics used in both classrooms, chime with the old traditional heder practices of chanting (in the present case, the alphabet) and reading aloud in unison.

Both teachers make direct use of old methods in the guise of modern technological didactic aids: the children in Rachel's class learn to read by means of the hypermodern medium of television, and it is the 'television text' they read aloud in rehearsal. But is this mode of teaching not a tacit reminder of an ethos of literacy in which acceptance of the written word is unquestioned and unquestionable?

8.2.1.4. Learning to Read rituals as a Mechanism of Mechanical Solidarity - Gibush.

From reading the transcriptions we see that the daily interactions in class, are expressed in collective metaphors of unification. In Rachel's class the guiding metaphor is, as we have already seen 'togetherness', undoubtedly a reflection of the ethos and ideology of this specific school. In Sarah's class the guiding metaphor is 'sameness' (the preoccupation with dictations is but one example of how this metaphor is expressed in the pedagogy).

In both classes, the teachers' rhetoric and pedagogical style function as instruments in organising group identity. This is exemplified by the frequent use of a 'collective we' intended to create a sense of commitment to the group. The teachers' instructional language stresses the standard dimensions of literacy practices. It plays an important part in forging the children's collective identity, in a way that is more influential than the actual information-content of instruction. When Rachel says "When we come to school in the morning, we do nothing else but read", she not merely describes a state of affairs, but actually brings it into being. She formulates a social code that inscribes appropriate literate behaviours the children are expected to exhibit. There is the proviso that these behaviours be displayed 'together' in a 'this-is-the-way-we-do-it-in-our-class' manner. This exhibition of 'togetherness' is nothing if not a statement about social uniformity.

The following are brief samples of classroom interaction during the 'final project week', of the student teacher in Sarah's class. The theme, which brings to an end her school practice period is called 'sameness and differences'. In the file containing her written notes she wrote "In choosing this theme, my aim is to help the children to accept themselves and others as individuals, to be tolerant and to respect other people's needs and interests."

Children

1.

Student Teacher (S.T.)

*S.T. to a child who
quietly takes a small*

doll from his pocket and starts rocking it on his knee.

Give it to me immediately, talk to your friend. This doll has nothing to do with our project.

2.

S.T. to a group of children

You will turn to the friend who sits next to you and talk to him, tell him anything you want, ask questions, try to get to know him better.

S.T. walks behind the children as they sit chatting and takes notes. After fifteen minutes;

3.

S.T. I am very impressed with most of you. You really told each other interesting things. But I am sorry to say that some of you talked about things that are not allowed to be discussed in class.

S.T. to a child, who during a story reading session, turns his face to the wall.

4.

If you don't stop being different and start behaving like everybody else you may not join us or be part of our project.

From these transcriptions it is clear that the ritualised pedagogies, which function as mechanisms for regulating and controlling the children's literate behaviour, thus operate as channels

for instilling uniformity and sameness, that is for instilling mechanical solidarity. In this process a particular form of individual-collective relationship is established, in which the collective by far surpasses the individual.

The private and personal is restricted, and often even banned. (The children have to hide their personal belongings or use them in a furtive manner, singular behaviour is unacceptable.)

This re-enactment of uniformity and sameness is extended to extracurricular class activities. Birthdays, an occasion for the child to be in the limelight and an individual in his own right, are celebrated 'in unison' and are turned into a solidarity rite, emphasising the common features shared by all members of the class.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 16

Today's ceremony is held for Nathenella, Moran, Sivan and Elik, who celebrate their sixth birthday. The mothers are now asked to tell the class about their children's first year of life, and why they have decided to give their children their particular name. The mothers are also asked to tell what is their 'special wish' for their child.

Children

1.

2.

3.

Teacher

First Mother: Sivan was born on the festival of the Rejoicing of the *Torah*, so we named her after the month in which the *Torah* was given on Mount Sinai.

When she was still a baby, she already knew how to turn the pages of books. She would turn page after page. She has been turning pages in books ever since. She loves books.

Second Mother: Moran is afraid of military

- service. I want to wish her not to be so worried. It is not as frightening as she thinks.
4. Teacher: Have you been to the army, mother?
5. Second Mother: But of course.
6. Teacher: Moran, your mother wishes you not to be afraid of your future military service.

These birthday celebrations, transmit a dual statement of the children's future and of cultural continuity. They aim to promote a sense of *gibush* through the act of sharing. Their ultimate goal is unity and solidarity.

In the name of *gibush* ritualisation also surpresses spontaneity and creativity, so as to promote the unquestioned 'togetherness' and 'sameness' and put them beyond inquiry.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 17

Today the children are having their first out-of-school activity: an art workshop which is held at the local community-centre. The children wearing aprons, stand in two rows along the sides of a long table on which are distributed lumps of wet clay.

- | <u>Children</u> | <u>Teacher</u> |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. | Art Instructor:A.I.
A.I.; We will now learn how to make a model of a human figure. We will work together. I will show you every step, and you will follow my instructions. |
| 2. | You will move from one stage to the other only when I tell you. |
| 3. | First look at me. |

*Rolling a lump of clay
into a small ball. I
will now show you how we
make the head of the
figure. Those who watch me
carefully will then know
exactly what to do.*

*Turning to a child who takes a piece of clay and starts shaping the
hands of the figure.*

4.

What you are doing is no
good. You are not
listening. You must wait
for my demonstration, and
only then you are allowed
to continue. I will give
the orders when to start
a new part of the figure.

A.I. Turning to me.

*The children are so very
young, they tend to
forget what they are
taught to do, unless the
instructions are very
structured and carefully
demonstrated. And
besides, can you imagine
what a chaos it would be
if each child would be
allowed to work according
to his own pace and
initiative. Each would
want to make a different
model.*

The art workshop is a carbon copy of the rituals in class. Besides mirroring the rites of instruction, the art workshop reflects an ethos of unification and conformity, qualities that will be extended into other institutionalised settings which the children are bound to encounter during the course of their lives.

8.3 Third Midrash.

8.3.1 Authorities.

The central place of text-books in the organisation and practice of teaching and learning in schools; their instrumentality in preserving and transmitting those issues which society takes to be 'true' and 'valid' knowledge, have been the topic of recent research (Anyon:1978, 1981, 1983; Apple:1979, 1982; Elbaz:1981; Heap:1985; Luke:1988; Luke, de Castell and Luke: 1989; Olson:1989). The researchers argue that teachers treat school texts as though originating in a transcendental source and use them as devices for putting ideas and beliefs beyond criticism. In this way they grant them an aura of 'authority'. Researchers have also stated that, by the way teachers mediate and interpret the texts, (what they emphasise, de-emphasise, prefer or omit), children perceive what must be acquired as valid knowledge. They then automatically accept the school texts as authoritative sources of knowledge. It is also argued that teachers use the alleged 'authority' of the school text-books to objectify institutional rules from which their 'authority' as teachers is also derived (Elbas:1981; Luke, de Castell and Luke:1989).

However, as already argued in this thesis, schools are far from being neutral, a-political institutional sites that operate as venues for transmitting objective and pure knowledge. Rather, they act as the State's agents for reproduction and promulgation of dominant ideologies and specific versions of a given culture. Knowledge imparted by the schools constitutes a particular representation of the dominant culture, a "... privileged discourse that is constructed through a selective process of emphasis and exclusions." (Giroux: 1989 - p.129).

The selection of 'knowledge-competences' and the pedagogies utilised for their implementation in school are thus politically/ideologically contingent processes. They serve the interests of particular forms of social organisation.. The status and authority of the text-books employed for mediating the knowledge schools present as objective, derive from the power of the social institutions that authorise the books. These may be governments, boards of educations, curriculum planning centres or schools. The texts that children are taught to accept as authoritative justify the

authority of sanctioned social institutions - forms of religion, forms of government, forms of education - which society has put beyond criticism (Olson:1989). In other words, the meanings and authority of the school texts reflect the meaning and authority of the institutions that mediate them. School texts, including those from which children learn to read, stand thus as "... iconic markers of authority, both a symbol and an agent of institutional power" (Luke, de Castell and Luke:1989 pp.257).

8.3.1.1 Learning to Read With Alfi, The Authority of the Written Word.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 18

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1.	Today we must hurry. We must prepare ourselves for the 'No secrets to reading' television programme. First we must find out what Alfi is going to teach us today. Take out your No secrets books and your pencils and crayons. <i>Opens her book and shows the pages to the class.</i>
2.	<i>Here he is. Points to the illustration of Alfi.</i> He is showing us the new letter and the new sound he wants us to learn. Look, he points to the pictures of the words in which the new sound can be found.
3.	Alfi wants us to point to the words in which we can hear the sound <u>ra</u> and write the syllable

underneath them. Open your books, remember to write the letter properly in the right box. For Alfi's instruction is like a command, it must be obeyed.

children busy looking for words with ra, all the while singing.

4. Ra, ra, ra. Ra is a sound that can be found in the middle, the beginning and the end of a word.

5.

Hurry up, we must move on to find the words that Alfi wants us to read today, and we have to talk about the word which Alfi thinks is the most important in today's lesson. All turn now to the next page, the key word of today's lesson is *mora* (מֹרָא ; teacher).

6.

Let us all read it together.

7. *Reading the text on this page in chorus:* shalom mora, shalom Alfi.

8. Rachel, what are the small words written below the pictures? They are so small that we can not read them, and they are written without the dots.

9.

These are instructions for me. You know that I go every Tuesday

afternoon to learn how to
teach you the "No
secrets..." programme.
These are my
instructions, it is Alfi
reminding me what he
wants me to teach you.

By means of ritualised practices of literacy-teaching, which is partly performed as an act of "worship at the video altar" (Goethals:1981), the children are gradually transformed from a congregation into a platoon. The twice weekly transmission of the 'No secrets...' programme controls and regulates the mode and pace of the literacy teaching in Rachel's class. The television broadcast mediates messages on the power and authority of the written word. The children learn to view the written word as an expression of the supernatural and as magic acts as Alfi metamorphoses into letters and words. They are told that words carry value-laden meanings: there are more important and less important words. Despite the facade of a popular television show, the hidden rhetoric of the 'No secrets...' programme implements a rule-governed and circumscribed model of literacy teaching which constrains and shapes the children's literate behaviour in subtle and insidious ways. The jingles that dot the 'No secrets...' programme, and which the children sing as they do the exercises of the reading-scheme in class illustrate how commercial television gimmicks are exploited to instill into the child 'consumer of literacy' a universal pattern of literate behaviour.

As they watch Alfi's performance, as they listen to the broadcaster's comments and observe the literate behaviour of the human actors, the children are exposed to a discourse of literacy that rings with institutional authority. It renders both teachers and pupils passive recipients, rather than active participants, in a literate culture engendered by the television medium.

There is a prescribed timetable for the television transmissions, which also directs the pace of teaching in class. Rachel, by virtue of the institutionally-defined authority of her role as teacher, is expected to control how and when to teach certain texts of the 'No secrets...' programme.

Instead, she merely imparts the non-negotiable authority of a

prescribed technology. Thus, when saying 'Today we must hurry, we must watch the 'No secrets...' broadcast, or when suggesting 'Alfi wants us first to colour the words' Rachel establishes not only the children's position, but also her own place vis-a-vis the text. By saying to the class 'Let us see what Alfi is going to teach us today' Rachel overtly relegates to the 'No secrets...' book and its fictitious 'mediator' a considerable part of her 'epistemic authority'. (de Castell:1982 Luke, de Castell and Luke:1989).

Alfi is nothing but an illustration in a school text book and cartoon in a television programme. He is reified and presented in class as the arbiter of knowledge to whose superiority both teacher and pupil are subordinate. The fact that Rachel herself is officially requested to attend a weekly course where she is rigidly instructed how to teach the 'No secrets...' scheme, places her within an institutionally controlled hierarchy of knowledge transmission.

The following selected brief transcriptions display the teacher's subordinate role very clearly:-

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1.	We will now be like Alfi. We will find words with the sound 'la' Alfi suggests that we first find the words and then colour them. When you have finished, put down your pencils, sit quietly and wait. I will come and see if you have followed Alfi's instructions properly.
2.	<i>To Yafit during 'No secrets...' lesson:</i> If Alfi says to write the letter L (ל), we do not question it.
3.	<i>After a three-day sick leave.</i> Today we will not

4.

spend time in free reading. There is so much to catch up in the 'No secrets...' book. I want you to try and write a story. I will not tell you how - we will see what you can do all by yourself.

The children write 'stories' composed of one or two short sentences, using various combinations of words they have already learned from the 'No secrets...' book. Alfi is the hero of all the 'stories'. They write "Alfi saw a snake"; "Alfi wanted soup"; "Alfi saw the teacher"; "Alfi ate salad".

After the high holidays vacation, the children in Rachel's class have to decide which names they want to give each table group. One of the groups is called Alfi.

The way Alfi is reified, even deified as it were, in Rachel's class points to the sanctity bestowed on the school text. The 'No secrets...' book is given the role of a torah (literally 'instruction'). Alfi turns into a spiritual image, an object of worship. He symbolises a supernatural entity with transcendental powers whose words are like godly commands. No wonder, then, that Alfi becomes incorporated into the children's identity as readers.

Rachel legitimises and sustains the 'sanctification' of the texts in the reading scheme and submits the children to the directives of a curricular technology that is presented as the only source of valid knowledge.

It is a process whereby the teacher exercises an uncritical and mechanical relation to the reading of texts, the writing of texts, and the acquisition of knowledge from texts.

The transcriptions which follow were selected to underline this mechanical relation of teacher to text. Though brief, they are typical of all the processes I observed.

Children

1.

Teacher

You will now write stories and use the words we have just learned.

2. How do I write aeroplane?

3.

Use only words that you already know, otherwise you will spend the whole day writing one story.

1.

Rachel to Daphna (who has just taken a book from the bookshelf during the morning free reading period): The print in this book is too small for you or for the other children in your group. I will have to read it to you.

Rachel is writing on the blackboard. She suddenly realises that instead of printing the letters (as teachers do in the first grade) she is using cursive script.

4.

Oh, look what I did, I have used grown-up script.

(Erases the cursive script and starts writing again in print).

The children are cutting out letters from the 'No secrets...' book from which they have to form words and paste these back on the page. Hilla has already cut the letters at home.

1.

I won't even look at what you have done. I do not allow anybody to do work in advance at home.

Rachel Reads aloud the instructions for today's 'No secrets...' lesson.

Sivan and Hilla meanwhile complete the assignment, before Rachel has finished her explanation.

2.

You must erase everything.

3 . But Rachel everything is correct, we did it properly.

4 .

You have to erase it, even if it is correct. You have to listen to the instructions first. No one can start working until I have finished my explanations.

Since the school text comes before the children almost solely via the teacher's interpretation, they learn not only a body of knowledge and skills, but also an attitude to what counts as school/text knowledge.

The first texts of reading-schemes function as the gateway into the school's (and society's) knowledge. How and what the children learn from these texts is greatly dependent upon the manner in which they are presented.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 19

Children

Teacher (Student Teacher in Sarah's Class)

1.

S.T.: Today you must be very attentive. You must listen very carefully to what I have to explain, because today we start a new activity.

2.

We will learn how to read the instructions written on the work cards and what to do with these instructions. If you do not pay attention, you will not understand what needs to be done.

3.

You have to copy the instructions from the work card to your copy

- book. After you have copied them you will do what these instructions tell you to do.
4. There is one last thing, which is, however extremely important. The work cards must be very carefully handled. You are not allowed to take them out of their covers, you are not allowed to fold them, you are now allowed to crease them, and you must never ever write on them. All you do is copy the instructions into your copy book.
5. I will now invite six children who may come and fetch the cards from the card boxes and give them out to the children.
6. *Turning to Dana:* Dana you will be the first. Go to the card box and take out the work cards. Gently, gently, careful or you will crease them, they must be handled with care.

Dana, her face a mixed expression of pride and apprehension, slowly tiptoes back to her table, holding the bag of work cards in both arms, very close to her heart. S.T. switches on a cassette player and the final choral of Beethoven's ninth symphony fills the classroom.

In this ritualistically staged act, the classroom is transformed into a 'shrine of the book' and the children are made to believe that

what they are about to receive is in fact holy. The workcards are presented as sacred objects, to be accorded the sanctity traditionally accredited to the scroll of the *Torah*. Embedded in this is a particular code of conduct with written texts which interchanges literacy with purity. Books, and especially the scroll of the *Torah*, are sacred objects that call for certain rituals before they can be touched. Permission to touch the workcards is given to only a chosen number of children. This is in symbolic re-enactment of the privilege granted to selected members of the synagogue congregation who read the weekly portion of the *Torah* in public. They are thus allowed to touch the scrolls. Like holy writings that lay down rules of behaviour for obeying Godly commandments, so the workcards imply a code of conduct that prescribes behaviour appropriate to a reader. Deeply rooted cultural conceptions of literacy are tacitly re-enacted in the teaching of reading. From the teacher's attitude towards the texts and from her metatextual commentaries, the children learn to treat school writings as venerated social objects that must be handled with care, so as not to defile them.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 20

- | <u>Children</u> | <u>Teacher</u> |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. | I will read to you today about the poet Bialik whose birthday we celebrate this week. This is why we have <i>our</i> "poet week". <i>Opens book starts reading.</i> |
| 2. | He was born in Russia, and studied the <i>Torah</i> in the <i>heder</i> and the <i>yeshiva</i> . He then became a teacher and a journalist, and published his first poem when he was 22 years old. |
| 3. Was he clever? | |
| 4. | Was he clever? What do |

you think?

5. Yes, because he studied the *Torah*, and wrote in a newspaper, and wrote stories for children.

6.

Yes, I agree, he must have been clever to have done all this. People who write in newspapers are clever.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 21

Children

Teacher

The class is rehearsing the alphabet

1.

I will start, and you will carry on to the end.

2.

You wonderful children, you can really go straight from here to the university.

Rachels Class: Interaction Segment No. 22

Children

Teacher

1.

Let me tell you what happened to me when I went into the library of the Hebrew University for the first time.

2.

It was so quiet, I thought the room was empty. It was so quiet, so quiet and I could hear no one.

3.

This is the way to behave in a library.

4.

If you want to say a word

- to a friend, whisper.
Let him only read your lips.
5. Let us see if we can all behave as if it were the university library.
6. This class will turn every morning into the university library; when we read in the morning it is a library. You are only allowed to whisper.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 23

Second Week of school.

Children

1.

Teacher

We have four or five children in this class who read as if they were third graders. They will help me to help all the other children, because each of you who already knows how to read shall be a little classroom teacher.

From the very first moment the children learn to associate literacy with societal forces that shape their society. As in the traditional ethos of literacy, the ultimate goal of being literate is to become a scholar, a *talmid chacham*, albeit in the modern sense. Learning to read in school is a prerequisite for attaining high scholastic status.

Already at this early stage of learning to read, society, through the teacher and the texts, presents these children with its ideal and its message. Their future depends upon their first scholastic performances. The teachers' make it clear that, in order to enter the academic circle of scholars, the children should only adhere to the authority of the text. By following the literature behaviour

perceived as appropriate by the school, one will attain the social and cultural ideal of scholarship.

Scholarship is also displayed as interchangeable with obligations and duties. The traditional *talmid chacham*, was not just a bearer of culture; he was also duty-bound to be the transmitter of culture. Children who are already literate are expected to act as transmitters of knowledge.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 24

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1.	<i>Taps on her tambourine:</i> Today we are going to talk about reading and books. You have already been here for two weeks and learned so many words, and we have not yet discussed why we need reading at all... why read? What would happen if we are not able to read or write?
1. When you tell us to take out our books...	
2. We must know how to read, otherwise we would do exactly the opposite.	
3. Had we not known how to read. We would not have been able to read in our reading books, and we would not have been able to learn to read.	
4. We would have tried and tried and finally we would have learned.	
5. It is books that teach us. The books teach us; had we	

not known how to read, we would have been ignorant.

6.

Reading makes it possible for people to get information from books and to follow instructions. Only those who can really read can follow all the instructions on their own and without help from other people.

7. Reading is fun. Had we not known how to read, there would have been no books in the world, and had there been no books and we would not have known how to read, we would have been terribly bored.

8. We can do without reading, if we look at the pictures. The pictures tell us what it says. I bet that some books would be difficult, even for you Rachel, (*in a mature and assertive tone*) If it wasn't for the pictures.

9.

Yes, you are right, illustrations are helpful. But it is the written words that tell us what to do. Books tell us about places, places that we may never visit, and about what people do and say in

10. these places, about the music they play, the books they read. And let me tell you how lucky you are that you know how to read, because in some countries only the very rich who have the means can afford to send their children to school, while the poor do not get a chance to learn to read and write. In our country, however, where the law compels every one to send his children to school, rich and poor, all the children can learn to read.
11. My granny does not know how to read. She went ... she went to the first grade and she did not like it, so she stopped.
12. Is it your mother or your grandmother?
13. It is my granny.
14. She must have come from one of those countries where only the rich people go to school. Ask her where she comes from.
15. She did not come from anywhere. She is my granny, she is from here.
16. I very much enjoyed our talk. *starts hanging a*

*poster on the wall on
which is written a poem
concerning the
forthcoming Jewish new
year.*

17.

And now, as we all know
how to read, let us try
and see if you can also
read this poem.

The shaping of the children's pattern of readership is mediated by the teacher's own literate behaviour and her textual intersubjectivity. The teacher's interpretation of, and interaction with, literacy is governed by her private set of beliefs and attitudes, as well as by the administratively-enforced assumptions about the teaching of reading.

As they teach their pupils to accept uncritically the authority of the school text, both teachers communicate messages on the social value attached to literacy. All the while they prescribe the prerequisite that will grant children access to and right of participation in the company of readers. To be literate, they convey, is primarily associated with acquiring instrumental knowledge. The teachers dispense the notion that to be literate is to master and to be in charge of technical information, to follow instructions and accept rules. Commercialised and marketed as a material possession, literacy has been stripped of its emotional aspects: reading is not for fun, for personal engagement, nor is it negotiated as the work of the imaginative, creative or reflective mind.

The children learn to associate literacy with prestige and social status. They are being told in so many words that the State is the societal force with authority to hand on the right to become literate and specify conditions for its acquisition. The State is presented as the benefactor of both the individual and the collective. Although the right to be literate is granted by law, the children are expected to feel privileged and grateful. Implicit in these statements is the notion that the literacy valued by the State can be acquired only in school. And this, in turn, makes the school-texts instrumental in equipping the child with appropriate normative literate behaviour. Accepting the authority of the school-text, implies compliance with

the State's authority (its laws), its institutions (the school), its agents (the teacher) and its official doctrine (the ideological messages worked into the curriculum and transmitted via the first school text). Illiteracy is shameful and is a threat to the ideal upon which this whole structure rests. (An illiterate granny is, perhaps, tolerable never a mother!).

8.3.1.2. Scholars and Scribes.

Rachel's Class: Description Segment No. 3.

Towards the end of October, when the class has completed the first 'No secrets...' book, Arna, a remedial reading teacher, conducts the first reading test. This procedure is carried out upon completion of each of the ten 'No secrets...' books.

All the children are tested, including the fluent readers. Rachel jokes when it is Dror's turn to be tested. "You will probably fail, Dror, because you don't know how to read at all" This joke is repeated when Abigail and Mayrav (also fluent readers) are called out.

The test takes two days, after which the seating-order of the table groups is rearranged according to the children's test-scores and level of reading competency.

Arna is also expected to give extra lessons in reading-comprehension to the five fluent readers. Rachel and Arna have an argument about the timing of this extra tuition. Rachel insists that the five remain in class during the early morning reading-instruction period and that they are to watch the 'No secrets...' television transmissions "like the rest of the class".

Much of the prestige as a reader is gained by publicly displaying and successfully performing literacy competence. The successful performers (i.e., those who pass the reading-test) are placed at the top of the class's social stratification. Like the elders of the tribe, they are seated at a special table separate from and above those who even at this early stage of their school career already sense what is involved in being only a 'scribe'.

Finally, the children are taught that within the order of the class, literacy is not a private possession. It must be practiced as an act of the collective. Individually initiated and individually displayed literate behaviour is perceived as uncontrollable and therefore

dangerous. It is nothing less than a threat to social order, interferes with the class's integration, and undermines the authority of both teacher and text. On the one hand the 'readers' are expected to act as 'little teachers', and thus share their literate competences with the collective. On the other, so as not to shatter the foundation on which the integrity of this collective is being built, the readers are not exempt from participating in all the shared literacy activities. (They have to watch the 'No secrets...' programme;; to carry out all reading assignments, and to be tested.)

Learning to accept the authority of the written word of the school text book is, at one of the same time, learning to accept the meaning and authority of the institutions that mediate these texts. It is a statement on homogeneity and solidarity. Here the 'togetherness' and 'sameness' metaphors are re-enacted to the full. Paradigmatic of the power of these feelings, which overrides all other didactic considerations, is the fact that Rachel sends children who have already acquired reading to take the class's first reading test. Both Rachel and the children realise that they are 'pretending', playing a 'social game' and acting out a present performance. But the rules of this game (as formulated by the externally prescribed curricular directives) must be followed in order to sustain 'togetherness'. In this process of "deskilling" (Apple: 1983) both parties must sacrifice private views on reading, acquired linguistic competences and personal display of literary aptitude. In the name of homogeneity they have to yield to the directives of curricular technology, to the authority of externally defined transmitted and tested skills.

8.4 Fourth Midrash.

8.4.1 Silencing the Voice of the Children.

How teachers and students read the world is inextricably linked to forms of pedagogy that can function either to silence and marginilize students or to legitimate their voice in an effort to empower them as critical and active citizens. (Giroux:1989).

In the language of critical pedagogy the concept of 'voice' denotes the cultural grammar and background knowledge that individuals use to interpret and articulate experiences. (McLaren:1989).

The advocates of critical pedagogy suggest that schools be viewed as cultural and political spheres, actively engaged in the

production and struggle for 'voice'. (Gramsci:1971; Freire:1978, 1987; Giroux:1981, 1983, 1989; McLaren:1986, 1989; Fine:1987, 1989).

Giroux:1988 defines three 'voices' in this struggle for power in school, all three being in constant interplay: the 'voice of the school', the 'voice of the teacher' and the 'voice of the pupil'. The first voice is expressed in the directives, imperatives and rules that shape particular arrangements of time, space and curricula within the institutional and political setting of schools. The second voice, that of the teacher, reflects her own values, ideology and subjectivity and these, in turn, are expressed in relation to the voice of school. It is often through the medium of the voice of the teacher that the very nature of the schooling-process is either sustained or challenged.

The 'voice' of the pupils is the means they have at their disposal to make themselves heard and to define themselves as actual participants in the world. (Freire:1987; Giroux:1989; McLaren:1989).

What constitutes the discourse of the classroom, whose 'voice' resides and dominates in class and how much the children and teachers really engage in a collaborative dialogue are therefore important pedagogical issues. They enable us to understand how classroom meanings are produced, negotiated, legitimised or delegitimised.

The main vehicle for constructing experiences and subjectivity in school is language. Language intersects with power and constitutes the way in which teacher and pupils define, mediate and understand their relation to one another and to society at large. Schools are places where language constructs, projects, imposes particular norms and forms of meaning. It follows therefore that as part of the production of meanings, language represents a central force in the struggle for 'voice' (Giroux:1989).

The notion that language, power and 'voice' are inextricably linked furthers our understanding of the function of literacy-teaching as a mechanism for empowering or silencing pupils. In Freire's:1987 terms, literacy is fundamental to constructing one's 'voice' as part of a wider project of possibility and empowerment: "... students' language is the only means by which they can develop their own voice ... the students' voice should never be sacrificed, since it is the only means through which they make sense of their

own experience of the world (p.152). From all of this, several questions arise regarding Sarah and Rachel's attitudes towards 'voice'.

How do the two teachers in my chosen classrooms make use of the language, knowledge and concepts about print that the children bring to school? How much of their teaching enables the children to learn within their "zone of proximal development"? (Vygotsky:1978; Wertsch: 1984, 1985).

From the transcriptions will emerge whether these two teachers allow leeway or put constraints on the children's attempts to express a 'voice' of their own in class. Are the children's out-of-school knowledge, experiences and ways of taking meaning from culture, valued and encouraged or marginalised, trivialised, and "silenced" . "Silencing", in this context, means the mechanism by which the children learn to conform and by which "contradictory evidence, ideologies and expressions find themselves buried, camouflaged and discredited" (Fine:1987:157).

8.4.1.1 The Language of Conformity.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 25.

It is the second day of school

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1.	Will the children who know already how to read, please raise their hands.
<i>Dror, Nimrod, Meyrav and Abigail raise their hands. Nathanella hesitates.</i>	
2.	Do you know how to read, can you read books? Only children who can read books should raise their hands.
3. <i>Nathanella puts her hand down.</i>	The four of you, from now on will keep quiet when we read from

the blackboard or from
our 'No secrets...' book.
You will have to pretend
that you don't know how
to read.

4.

It will be our
'stop/silence' game.

5.

It will be just a game,
but we will pretend that
you do not know how to
read.

Sarah's Class:Interaction Segment No. 26

Children

Teacher

1. I have a book with poems; I
would like to show it to the
class.

2.

Is the poet Bialik?

3. No, it is another poet; my
sister told me about her.

9.

Now we only talk about
the poet Bialik. We have
no time for other poets.

Sarah's Class:Interaction Segment No. 27.

Children

Teacher

1. Must we copy now, must we
copy all the words?

2.

(In an angry voice):
Who is that, who asks me
if we must. If the whole
class is copying all the
words then no one can ask
me if we must. In class
we always do everything
together. That is not a
question one asks in
school.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 28.

Children

Teacher

1. Can we do maths now?
- 2.
3. I wish we could do maths now, pity we can not.
- 4.

No way.

Can you imagine if every one wanted to do a different thing. Some children may even want to sing now.

The class Laughs.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 29.

The children are writing a story from the words they have learnt in the 'No secrets...' book.

Children

Teacher

1. I do not want to write.
- 2.

You can not be in class and 'not want to'.

Rachel's Class Interaction Segment No. 30.

When they finish their second 'No secrets...' book, the children are asked to comment on what they liked about the book. Abigail, who is a fluent reader, writes "The book was very boring, but reading is fun."

Children

Teacher

- 1.

You must find one thing you liked about the book, at least one thing. Everybody did.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 31.

The children are copying words that Rachel has written on the blackboard. (Points to one of the words-sharsheret שרשרת (chain).

Children

Teacher

- 1.

This is a very long word,

you must not copy all of
it, you can make do with
the first sound, sha,
only.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 32.

When the children return after the purim festival holiday they find that the tables, which had been pushed aside for the class Purim ceremony, have not been put back in their usual place.

Children

Teacher

1. Can we sit in a circle
the way we did for Purim.
- 2.

One does not sit in class
in this way, unless it is
a birthday or festival
ceremony. It is not the
proper way to study.

What emerges from these transcriptions? We see: how and to what extent the beginning readers are allowed to sound their own 'voice' in class; how, in turn, literacy-practices serve as tools to control, restrict and eventually silence the children's attempts at self expression.

The teachers teach the children to read, but their 'voice' cues the ways for a particular pattern of behaviour, shaping the children's identity as persons and as readers. Teacher messages are powerful. The children learn norms of classroom behaviour and routine; they also, learn that what counts as 'reading' in school is first and foremost, complying with arbitrary directives. It means avoiding questions and falling in with conformity. "Whatever else happens in early lessons, teachers convey what counts as reading in school ... what they say ... becomes the reading gospel in that class. (Spencer: 1986 p.61).

The teachers' 'thou shalt not' rules are frequently dispensed arbitrarily, like godly commands.

It appears from the children's 'voice' that they try to make sense of the logic underlying teaching in the class. They query, suggest resist.

The teachers' response is immediate, unequivocal and non-negotiable. The social order of the school is presented as a universally codified reality. Both the teachers mediate *stereotyped*, redundant patterns of literate behaviour which provide a blueprint for the children's 'thinking' and 'acting'.

From the teacher's voice the children learn that 'learning to read' follows a strictly hierarchical route of skill acquisition. They learn that reading is a performance which may not be carried out beyond a child's presumed level of ability. They learn that while 'learning to read' personal interests are taboo. The act of reading in class is displayed as merely an external performance and not as a critical search for meanings. "Written language" functions, "as a medium through which individuals extend their own thinking and understanding ... (it is) a technology for the empowerment of the mind. To be authentically literate, is to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, thinking, and feeling in the context of purposeful social activity." (Wells:1990 p. 379).

However 'empowerment' of the individual 'mind' poses a threat to the unity of the group, which must maintain its solidarity by transmitting a 'collective voice'. In both classes 'learning to read' is a constant re-enactment of the metaphor of 'gibush'. In this process the 'voice' of the individual is marginalised and trivialised. The language the children use must conform to their status of first graders.

'Learning to read' beyond the realm of school is treated as a kind of social transgression against which sanctions must be taken through silencing the children's 'voice'. When Rachel orders the fluent readers to be quiet, she does not simply silence them physically: although disguising her sanctions in the form of a social 'game', the import is clear and powerful. To begin with, her message states what counts as in-school-reading, devaluing the personal achievement of reading behaviour acquired out of school. All five fluent readers in Rachel's class are in fact 'rehabilitated' in that they have to join in with the rest of the class in 'learning to read', including watching the 'No secrets...' programme. Secondly, Rachel imparts a message on the kind of learning the school encourages; it is the type that lays sanctions on children for being curious, creative,

imaginative, inquisitive and critical. Finally, Rachel communicates a social message on uniformity and divergence. Emancipated expressions may become threatening to the imposition of the dominant ideology. Children who learn to read outside the school walls are transgressors of norms, in that their literacy differs from that dispensed in school, and for that they are symbolically 'excommunicated'. To be a reader in the school ethos means to be a member of a collective. Hence, acquisition of the reading skills must be performed collectively. This use of a teaching-approach to silence children's 'voice' (as part of a whole philosophy of what constitutes 'school'), leads me on to uncover yet a further layer of this phenomenon, concealed under the guise of 'permission for self-expression'.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 33.

Children

Teacher

The first Sunday morning in school. Rachel taps on her tambourine. Children stop reading and look at her attentively.

1.

On Sundays we will have to allow time for telling stories. Each of you who did an interesting thing on Shabbat, or who remembers an interesting event that happened to him in the past and wants to share it with us, may tell us his story. But you must really choose the most interesting, special or exciting thing that happened to you, otherwise we will be bored.

2.

Every child is allowed only one story. The story that the class finds most interesting

3. will be chosen to be the 'class story of the week'.
It will be written on a poster and hung on the wall for everybody to see and read. Every Sunday, we will have a new story on the wall, which we will call 'our weekly story wall'.
4. Mine is certainly going to be the most interesting story. *With great excitement.*
Ignores him. Daphna you can be the first story teller.
5. In the summer holiday we went to the water park and to the pool one day and one day we went to the banana plantation...there were friends that came, so we went, we went together.
6. Daphna told us how she and her family picnicked in a banana grove.
7. In the summer holiday we went to a *kibbutz*, we swapped houses it was great fun, they had many toys - they live in a *kibbutz*.
8. Tell us more what could you see in the *kibbutz*.
9. We went to the beach. I found shells and crabs and seaweed and put them in a bucket. The crabs do not

eat seaweeds.

10

11. My uncle came yesterday, his daughter, she is called Einat, we went for a walk, we lost the little one we could not find her. My uncle could not find her.

12. (Second child)

Was she small?

13. Yes, she is very small, we searched for her everywhere. We found her playing in the park.

(After 15 minutes of more stories)

14.

(Everybody raises their hands).

15.

16. Why, Rachel, we have such very interesting stories.

17.

18.

Nimrod and his family spent the summer in a *kibbutz* near the sea.

Who still wants to tell a story.

Oh no, I am afraid you will have to wait and keep your stories for next Sunday. Now we must decide which is the most interesting of all the stories, and vote for our story of the week.

We must vote, and I shall remind you what the stories were.

Paraphrases again, in one or two sentences, each of the stories.

Now we shall vote, you can only raise your hand

- once. Each of you can only have one vote.
19. I am glad you voted for Moran's story.
20. Moran's story is now our story. It is not Moran's story any longer, but the story of the class. So you will now tell it to me once again in your own words, and I will write on the blackboard.
21. You must tell the story as if it happened to all of you; it is now 'our story'.
22. *Starts writing the first sentence:* On Shabbat our uncles and little cousin came to visit us...
23. Suddenly we could not find our little cousin. We had to look for her everywhere.
24. This will do, we do not want our story to be long. When you are better readers, our stories will become longer. Let us now read it together.
25. We must now give the story a title, otherwise people will not know what it is about.
26. Now can you look for the sound sha (שָׁ) in the words of the story. *The sound is quickly identified.*
27. It is in the word shabat.

28.

Well done, Asaf come to the blackboard and draw a red circle around the sha.

The class returns to its normal routine, which is working with the 'No secrets...' material. Over coffee in the staffroom, Rachel sounds a little bit uneasy as she says to me "The instructor of the 'No secrets...' course would kill me if she knows that I let the children read a text comprising consonants and vowels they have not yet learned."

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 34.

Children

Teacher

A few children approach Rachel as she enters the classroom a little bit before 08.00 o'clock.

1. I lost a tooth last night.
I put it under my pillow for luck.
2. I fell off my tricycle.
Look, my finger is bandaged.
3. For my grandfather's birthday. We went to a Chinese restaurant.
4. My sister, who is in America, is coming home today. She is coming for the new year vacation.

5.

I see how exciting and interesting your stories are, but you will all have to keep them for Sunday morning. We have so much to do today.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 35.

Children

Teacher

1.

Lidia will be our first story teller today. I hope it will be an

interesting story, Lidia.

Lidia, starts talking very quickly in a high pitched voice

2.

You must remember to tell only interesting things that happened to you, so get to the interesting part. Do not tell us about your aunties and grannies over and over again, these are dull and boring stories. We want our Sunday morning talks to be interesting.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 36.

Children

Teacher

The children return to school after the purim holiday.

1.

We are lucky, it is Sunday so you can tell stories about your Purim adventures.

2. *Raising his hand* : I have an interesting story, but it is not about Purim.

3.

No, today we only tell stories about Purim.

The occasion, set aside by both teachers for giving time and space to their pupils to act as authors of their own texts, are in reality but silencing mechanisms. This weekly activity is as formal as all the instructional activities, and is carried out according to set of ritualised regulations and performances like all other literacy acts in class. The rigid adherence to one weekly, strictly limited, 'story telling' period, turns the children's pleasurable anticipation of this Sunday's occurrence into an event of disappointment and frustration. Neither of the two teachers view these events as opportunities for imaginative and creative thinking. Fiction and made-up stories of the sort that children encounter in books are not to be allowed.

Rather, what is expected of them are 'true stories' (Heath:1983) the reporting of real life events and factual happenings. Unlike the occasions of "sharing time" (Michaels:1986), in which children's 'stories' form a basis for an extended linguistic interaction between teacher and pupil, this verbal activity, remain a child's monologue. The class is not encouraged to react and enter into a dialogue with the story-teller, to expand and extend the story by asking questions, offering explanations, or weaving elements of one story into another. The teller's main task is to entertain his audience and attract their attention. This point is made clear by instructing the children over and again to 'tell only interesting stories'. Insistence that the themes of the stories must be important is but a control device to channel the children's expressions into the narrow framework of the school-literacy type of discourse, thus marginalising and silencing the children's 'voice'.

Once they have been publicly told, the teacher takes full control over the content of the stories. Through a series of didactic steps, Rachel turns the children's stories into a reading-scheme type of text, not very different from those read by the class during the 'No secrets...' lessons. At the same time this didactic process is a weekly repeated re-enactment of the classroom's guiding metaphor of '*gibush*' in which the private voices are absorbed by a collective voice, and the individual is disempowered in order to empower the group.

In this process the 'teacher's voice' which, to a great extent, transmits the 'voice of the school' (after all, the ideology of 'togetherness' is overtly preached in the G.O. school) clearly supersedes the 'voice of the children'. From the moment the child has told *her* story, it becomes public property and the story teller is deprived of both *her* sense of authorship and *her* power to control the content of the tale. Rachel takes over by summarising in her own words each of the stories. She signals what, in her opinion, is the main message of the story. And it is again Rachel who constricts and suppresses the children's voice by prescribing the length of the text voted the most popular.

Finally, there is the change to the plural tense, which deftly cuts the last connection between the teller and her tale. True, the children whose story has not been chosen are less deprived of their

own 'voice' and authorship than the original teller of the chosen tale. They become part of his story.

Voting is a paradigmatic instance of using literacy-teaching to instill into the first grader some of the principal tenets of the school's ethos of egalitarianism and fraternity. But one has to be careful: this overtly democratic act bears a concealed dialectic message. The very act of voting, albeit offered as an act of democracy, disempowers the individual and silences her. Here the 'voice of the teacher' openly espouses and reproduces the schools' dominant discourse of literacy.

The 'story of the week' in Rachel's class thus functions as a dual mechanism: it becomes a short, bare text which deskills in the same way as the 'No secrets...' text to which it now bears close resemblance and reduces the children's literacy-competences to the level of automated performances. At the same time, the story is a declaration of solidarity and uniformity, in which the class is made to express its 'one voice' in the form of a collectively written text.

8.4.1.2 A Voice of their Own.

The fact that there are children who discover, or are shown, what reading and writing is all about before they go to school is the focus of an extensive body of research (Ferreiro and Tebersoky:1983; Heath:1983; Fox:1983; Dombey:1983,1986; Chocran-Smith:1984; Harste, Woodward and Burke:1984; Tizard and Hughes:1984; Spencer:1986; Tolchinsky:1986; Meek and Mills:1988). Home and community play an important role in enabling children to become literate before they enter the schooling system. The home and the neighbourhood are fields rich in print that conveys both the function and value of written language. "Children's learning to become literate", says Meek: "starts as does their learning to talk, as a form of domestic interaction with language, this time with reading language."(1988 p. 59). As they watch how adults respond to print, as they sort out televised advertisements, food wrappers, labels, road signs and names of streets, when they share in 'literacy events' with an interested and patient adult, children learn how to "take meaning from culture" (Heath:1983).

Many parents leave their children to find their own way in the world of printed messages. They feel confident that the child will take from the culture the information necessary to support and

advance what she needs to know about reading and writing. Others intervene in various ways, by reading to their children, by letting them draw or write their names, and by explaining the meaning and function of the various kinds and types of print they meet in their environment. In doing so, "they unlock all the social forces which make children 'play for real' when they look at books and hear stories read." (Meek:1988 p.59). Children who have been read to know how the language of books works and what they themselves "can make words do" (Meek:1988). They know how to weave together stories from books and stories of their own life (Fox: 1983) and how to socially negotiate the meaning of a story read to them by an interesting and collaborative adult (Dombey:1986). When they first learn to read and write in class, however, the children have, in most cases, to adhere to the patterns of literacy enforced upon them by their teacher's view of the task.

Clearly, not all children can formally read when they first come to school, though some do. Others express in their own 'voice' literacy competencies they have already acquired. How are these literate behaviours regarded when formal reading and writing is first taught in school?

I have been listening to the teacher's 'voice' and noting how it is used to silence the children's individual expression. I now turn to consider what happens when children breach this silence.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 36.

<u>Children</u>	<u>Teacher</u>
1. We went to the Jerusalem Forest for a walk, and found the skeleton of a snake.	
2.	Were you not afraid?
3. No, it was already dead.	
4. It can still be poisonous!	
5. I also found a skull on our Friday afternoon nature-lover's walk. I spent all day yesterday trying to find out if it was a fox's or a dog's skull. Boaz	

was with me and helped me.

6. We used a magnifying glass, and Gilad's brother showed us a chart of animal skulls.

7. We went to Mount Herzl, to the military cemetery, to visit the soldiers' graves.

8. Our first kindergarten teacher died. She had cancer.

9.

This is very sad, indeed, yours is a sad story.

10. We went to the Dead Sea: We bathed in the warm water from the springs, and then we covered ourselves with black mud, and it was great fun.

11. I have so many stories to tell. What shall I start with.

12.

You can tell only one story, so make up your mind.

13. We went to Latrun,^{to} an open air museum. We climbed a tank and saw shell holes.

14.

Latrun is a place on the way to Jerusalem. A fierce battle took place there during the War of Independence, and we won the last fight. And now Yoni is telling us an interesting thing. He

saw the holes of the shells fired during the war.

15. I also saw...

16.

That will do, this is the end. Do not raise any more hands; you will have a turn next Sunday.

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 37.

Children

Teacher

I enter the classroom and Gili, who is already a fluent reader, comes to tell me about the last book he read.

1. They gave me such a silly book yesterday in the Community Centre Library. It is called 'Flowers and Plants', but flowers are plants.
- 2.
3. Plants that Grow Flowers and Plants that Do Not Grow Flowers. The book is one in a series of science and nature. I have also taken a book from the geography series. I took a book on France. You see, they usually do not give you two books, but my mother asked them to make an exception. She had to put down a deposit. My mother explained to me what it means to leave a deposit for an additional book.

What would you call it then.?

Sarah's Class: Interaction Segment No. 38

Children

Teacher

1. Gilli is very quiet in class

Wake up Gili. You are falling asleep.

2.

I am worried about your spelling mistakes.

3.

It is because you are not listening, Gili. You must open your eyes wide and watch the blackboard, like we all do.

Rachel's Class: Description Segment No. 4.

Dror and Abigail, who are both fluent readers, are writing stories. Abigail writes, in neat handwriting, an autobiographical story: I had a grandfather, his name was Moses, he died long before I was born. Rachel wants Abigail 'to do' a reading comprehension card, but Abigail refuses.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 38.

Dror writes story books, which his mother types out for him at home on her word processor. He has already brought his book 'The Adventures of the Secret Gang' to class and read it to the children during play time. Today he comes with a new story, which he has not yet finished. Its title is 'The Chase of the Tiger'. On the book's cover Dror has written 'Written, illustrated and published by Dror D. All rights reserved'. On the first page Dror gives an abstract of the story: 'In this book you can read about the adventures of the tigers. The first chapter will reveal who these tigers are'.

Children

Teacher

1. I want to read my book to the class. It is very funny.

2.

I suggest that you do that during play time again. You use such complicated words, the

children may get bored.
If you read it during
play time, those who are
really interested can
come and listen to you.

3. Can I go on writing my
book during the morning
reading period.

4. When we all read, you
will read too.

Rachel's Class: Interaction Segment No. 39.

It is the last day before the school breaks up for the new year holidays.

Children

Teacher

1. I suggest that every
child will tell me his
wish for the new year,
and I will write it down.
2. Inbal: I wish I were
healthy.
3. Abigail: I want our
country to be clean, and
I want there to be no more
wars, so that my father
will not have to go and do
his three-week reserve duty.
4. Naomi: I want a pony.
5. Hilla: I pray that the
solidiers will not die.
6. Daphna: I want to be a good
painter.
7. Elik: I want to succeed in
school and to be a pilot.
8. Rottem: I want to be a
good pupil and a pilot.
9. Ariel: I wish I were a good
soldier.

10. Maya: I want not to be rude to my parents and help them.
11. Dror: I like "to make peace with our Arab neighbours - that is my wish".
12. Nimrod: I want to be an olympic long distance runner.
13. Michael: I want to be a good boy, to help mammy and daddy, and most of all I want school to be fun.

Rachel's Class: Description Segment No. 5

The key word in today's 'No secrets...' lesson is 'hat'. Having talked about various hats, Rachel suggests that each child writes what he would wish if he had a magic hat. Maya writes: "Magic hat, I beg you to teach me how to read well and to write beautifully."

These are some of the 'children's voices'. This short selection is utterly typical of very many others sampled, in similar circumstances, over my many months of observation.

The language, background knowledge, first hand experiences and ways of extracting meaning from print that these first graders bring to school is easily recognised. The children unmistakably provide evidence for this out-of-school knowledge whenever they are given the opportunity to express their own 'voice'.

The children's stories and talk show how they learn to observe, explore and draw conclusions. They show that this happens as they share and interact with parents and other siblings in activities which have a meaning for them.

The children make it clear how they learn to use language in context and to negotiate meanings of words; how they look for books that tell them more about topics learned in class. The children hear, and respond to news broadcasts. They are attuned to their elders' conversations, sense their preoccupations and anxieties, and have formed their own views on matters and issues that lie at the heart of their society's existence.

The development of children's higher mental functions are

socially formed and culturally transmitted. (Vygotsky:1978). As they engage in learning and taking meanings from their immediate environment children learn to distinguish and absorb the social value of literacy, and especially school literacy. They start comprehending that their parents expect them to behave as literate people and they begin to realise that their future role as adults and useful citizens is dependent upon their scholastic achievements. These first graders not only already realise the value of scholastic success, but also the pain and grief of school failure.

It is evident that while in class they are gradually learning how to master the skills of reading, these children display, in various ways, a proficiency in "emergent literacies", i.e. those literacies that are evolving in social context as children begin to move about in the world. (Spencer:1986).

This is underscored by the fact that some of them come to school already as fluent readers and writers. Take Dror, for instance. He is familiar with the conventions of print, with literary language and with the 'way books work'. He weaves the content and formats of books and stories he has heard and read into stories of his own. He writes them down, displaying a sense of authorship as he invites his friends to become his audience. Gili, uses books as a source of information; he already shows the literate behaviour of a mature critical reader and is ready to challenge and question the authority of the written word. Abigail has undoubtedly discovered the power of being literate. She uses this social knowledge as a means for assertive self-expression, and as a form of resistance.

When they talk to adults and peers, when they read and act as writers, the children use language in meaningful social context. With it and through it they learn how to make sense of the world around them and of themselves within it. When they engage in joint activities with adults who support them in their search for understanding, sustain their interests and provide them with skills and tools for obtaining knowledge, they learn to act as "apprentices" to the adults. (Wells:1990). Vygotsky suggested that children develop mentally through social interaction. Learning in collaboration with an adult may assist the child's performance with mental tasks that are beyond his current capability and thus "...awaken and rouse to life those functions which are in a state of

maturing or in the zone of proximal development." (1978).

My analysis of events in classrooms shows that the pedagogy and its related texts serve to silence this individual, divergent 'voice' of the children.

In an attempt to promote the 'schools' voice', the children are channelled into a "pedagogy of silence" (Freire: 1987), in which the individual child is disempowered and in which the teacher, as the agent of the State, regulates by means of literacy practices the way the children talk, act and finally learn to become the children of the book.

Conclusion

At the heart of this thesis is a field-study whose problems arise out of the 'longue duree' of Jewish history. In the earlier chapters I have reviewed the role accorded to literacy in the course of this long history. From this first part I conclude that:-

Historic events in the first two millennia of its existence led the Jewish People to a point where its cultural leaders proposed and imposed an attitude of total submission to a Text. This was done in order to preserve and enhance cohesion and to ensure the survival of a distinct people and culture. There was a related movement to place the Text beyond all questioning. Cohesion and survival had a price: segregation and alienation from other cultures. In the diaspora situation, leaders also used this condition of "textcentredness" as a mechanism of control within the people and of segregation from other cultures. They nurtured the ideal of life-long study of the Text and embodied it in the person of the *talmid chacham*. They were ready to accept the gap between this ideal and the realities of life.

In the period of national revival, the Ashkenasi leaders attempted to substitute Zionist socialism for Covenant theology and to transmit it to all via a secular literacy. The ideal of this new literacy was embodied in the image of the *halutz*. In all of this they took up themes and images from Scripture and tradition and transformed them to serve the new purposes of survival.

In the central chapters, I have dealt with literacy issues which concern the contemporary leadership in Israel. From that part I conclude that:-

The need to survive physically as a State moved to centre-stage and gave rise to the dominant image of the Soldier. This same need raised concern for the integration of the large and diverse immigrant population. A centralised education system, whose slogan was "unity via uniformity", worked to lead young Israelis to commit themselves to the tasks of national unity and defence.

This need to achieve cohesion in order to survive determined the whole State response to the literacy-crisis. It compelled the leaders to re-arrange the whole of literacy-teaching in primary

schools for all groups of the population. It had to appear that all could perform at the same pace and at the same level.

Underlying this response was the need to establish '*gibush*'. Primary-school reading-texts became tools to initiate children into "being Jewish/Israeli".

In the first and second parts of this thesis a number of perennial cultural imperatives in Jewish/Israeli attitudes to texts and literacy have emerged. These are:

- Total submission to a text, so as to ensure cohesion and survival - a people becomes the People of the Book;

- Use of this basic attitude as a means of control and segregation.

- The assumption that being literate is primarily about cultural belonging so that sheer performance can become more valued than 'content'.

In the final part I presented my field study in which these imperatives are shown to be actively present from the very first encounters with literacy in Israeli primary schools. I conclude that:-

- In both classrooms there is a uniform and single school-defined understanding of what counts as reading. In both of them 'learning to read' is mediated as a public, collective, performance using ritualised language and behaviours.

- Under the cloak of modern educational techniques, the literacy behaviours transmitted in both classrooms stress docility, passivity, compliance with authority, association of literacy with absolute, binding law.

- Teachers and pupils, in both classes, became totally submissive to a school text approved by the State.

- The two classrooms function primarily as sites for "cultural making". (Hardcastle:1985). ' Learning to read' is a means to learning to act as Children of the Book. This covert, primary work of learning has to do with the meaning of social cohesion (*gibush*) and solidarity; it requires personal dedication to the collective. It is but the first instance of the interweaving of individual and collective commitments in the building of the young reader's sense of self.

One point remains. It concerns what is gained and what is lost

in all this. The gain from all the process is the survival of a people with its new cultural ideal. The 'price' has to be paid by both children and teachers. The latter are deprived of genuine freedom to initiate learning in response to the real needs and abilities of the children. They are placed within an institutionalised hierarchical structure of knowledge transmission and knowledge distribution and assume the role of gatekeepers for the State's dominant discourse. They have been compelled to act as mediators of the prescribed arbitrary meanings of the text, and have been made guardians of the hegemonic boundaries of knowledge, of the dominant cultural forms and of the social order mediated by the texts. The children pay an even higher price. During these formative years, which for some are their last, (since they will die as young soldiers), they are effectively deprived in school of everything that genuine literacy can provide. Instead, literacy is offered as reified and objectified. The teachers present it to the children as natural, inviolable and part of an existing social order. Learning to read thus constitutes for the children the first instance of discovering the meaning of being an Israeli.

The aim of this ethnographic study has been to seek the cultural logic and power-structures underlying a phenomenon. It was restricted to what was happening in two classrooms. I do not intend to generalise my findings. However, there is very strong evidence to suggest that such approaches would be detectable in many other Israeli primary classrooms. The centralisation of the education-system, the uniformity of the texts - with their strong underlying cultural and political messages - point clearly to this. The need to secure the physical existence of a country still fighting for survival can seem beyond criticism. The role of the school in this process and the way literacy teaching in the first grade is used to prepare the young for these tasks is certainly debatable. Educators should work to create emancipated and critical readers. They should not be hampered by the fear that independently thinking citizens-to-be might come to weaken the cohesion of the nation. But such a radical change in the perceptions of Israeli educationists is contingent upon a radical change in their world-view and their

pedagogic interests. Whether attempts to effect such a change would bear fruit remains an issue for further academic inquiries.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Although the cult of *Yahweh* played a significant role in the religious practices of the Israelite tribes (in the 13th century B.C.), it is believed that other deities were also worshipped among the tribes in the pre-monarchic period, and that *Yahweh* emerged as the national god of the Israelite only gradually. In its initial stages, the acceptance of the *Yahwistic* cult remained practically restricted to narrow localities with rites that varied from place to place (Albright:1949; Noth:1983). In their recent historical research Miller and Hayes (1986) put forward an interesting interpretation as to the origin of *Yahwism*. They suggest that the most notable characteristic of *Yahweh* is his militancy. It may have been, according to the authors, that under the conditions of tribal warring *Yahweh* gained status on a national plane. To support their claim, Miller and Hayes refer to biblical texts, such as 'the song of the sea' (Exodus 15: 1) and 'the song of Deborah' (Judges 5: 1), in which *Yahweh* is portrayed as the divine warrior who helps his followers in times of distress.

2. With the rise of the monarchy in the 10th century, the Judean kings declared an official commitment to the cult of *Yahweh*. The kings of the Davidic dynasty cultivated the *Yahwistic* theology, which designated Jerusalem as the chosen place for *Yahweh's* special presence and *Yahweh* as the commanding God. *Yahweh* was considered the God who had chosen King David and his descendants to rule from Jerusalem in perpetuity. The concept of a covenant relationship between *Yahweh* and the Davidic kingdom was integrated in this theology. However, the ideology of a covenant between *Yahweh* and his people, either directly or through an intermediary who, by virtue of his personality, is in direct communication with *Yahweh*, is rooted in the earlier concept of the covenant of Sinai. According to this the relationship between the God *Yahweh* and his people takes the form of an agreement between

human partners.

The making of the covenant signified the submission of the people to the rule of the God who had appeared to them, and their acknowledgement of this claim to their exclusive worship.

The traditions of the covenant did not include commandments pertaining to worship; these were integrated into the concepts of the covenant at a much later stage. (Weinfeld:1970; Miller & Hayes:1986).

3. After the codification of the *Talmud* in the 5th century A.D., the heads of the academies, especially those of the cities of Sura and Pumbedita, were accepted as the authorities on religious law, and their ruling based on the interpretation of the Oral Law became the sole dictum, regulating the life of the Jewish communities for over 500 years. The term *Gaon* (*plural ge'onim*) = literally excellency, refers to the heads of the two principal academies. These were recognised by Muslim caliphate as the *excilarch*, and thus as the official arbiters of all questions of religion law and as the religious heads of all Jewish communities that came under Muslim sway.

Chapter Two

1. *Bar-mitzvah* (literally 'son of the commandment') denotes the attainment of religious maturity, a ceremony held at the age of 13 and one day. Although the term stems from the *Talmud*, the public celebration of this occasion in the synagogue started only in the medieval period, and slowly won in popularity over the ages. The *Bar-mitzva* is the outstanding example of literacy performance, as this was the boy's first public demonstration of reading a portion of the Torah before the congregation.

Redemption of the firstborn son (pidyon ha-ben) is a ceremony dating from Biblical times and takes place 30 days after the child's birth. It signifies that all "firstfruits" rightfully belong to God, the human child being redeemed by his father by a symbolic monetary offer.

2. The term *Talmid Chacham* (plural: *Talmiday Chachamim*) denotes a lifelong student of traditional literature, who had acquired a thorough training in the *Talmud* and accumulated codification.

3. Heder, (Hebrew for room), was located in the teacher's private home. The custom of teaching on private premises is known from the 13th century. - Before that period, elementary literacy was acquired in the synagogue and it is believed that the German designation for synagogue (*Schule*) originated in this practice.

4. Solomon ben Isaac (1040 - 1105), known under the Hebrew acronym of *Rashi*, was born in Troyes in France. He is considered the leading Jewish commentator of the Bible and the Talmud. His commentaries became the fundamental texts of *Ashkenazic* Jewish education and an integral part of the scriptures. *Rashi* employed for his writing a semi-formal style of Hebrew script that developed in medieval Italy, since bearing his name.

Chapter Three

1. This seemingly contradictory situation arises from the fact that the success of the youth movements was apparently not measured by the proportion of their members who did enter a *kibbutz*, but by the movements' educational programmes - the inculcation of national values, political dogmas and preparation for involvement in political life (Shapira and Peleg:1984).

2. The changing distribution of the three patterns of schooling - traditional, philanthropic and Hebraic - during the second *aliyah* period is illustrated by the following figures: in 1904 (the beginning of the second *aliyah*), about 80% of the Jewish children in Palestine attended traditional educational institutions (*heder* and *talmud torah*), 15% studied in schools that were under the auspices of philanthropic societies, while only 3-4% were enrolled in the 17 'national Hebraic schools' (Rosenstein:1985; Elboim-Dror:1986). By

the end of the second *aliyah* period in 1913, the national Hebraic educational system already consisted of 28 kindergartens, 26 elementary schools (20 in agricultural settlements and six in urban environs), two secondary schools, a teacher training college and an art school, comprising about 2600 students. About 5000 children still studied in the various schools provided for by the philanthropic societies. For example, in 1912 the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* still controlled 18 institutions, including a secondary school and a teacher training college, altogether holding 2214 students.

3. The Jewish sage *Ben Zakkai* who, after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 A.D., set up the first house of study in the city of Yavneh, which eventually became the seedbed of *Talmudic* literacy.

4. Two additional educational frameworks functioned alongside the threefold Trends set-up. The *kibbutz* movement, erected a school system distinct from the Trend schools. This 'extra' educational enterprise was closely interwoven with the singular social structure of the *kibbutz*, and its special features were shaped by the division of labour as perceived by the *kibbutz* ideology.

At the other end of the pole was the non-Zionist ultra-orthodox circle, mainly descendants of the old *yishuv*. This ultra-orthodox sect maintained its own educational system, in which the process of instruction and learning did not differ one iota from the age-old traditional *heder* and *talmudic yeshiva* practices.

5. The educational dichotomy that existed in the *yishuv* was expressed also by the composition of the teachers. A survey held in the 1940's among the members of the Teachers Association shows that 89.9% were of *Ashkenazi* descent, 0.1% were *Sephardis*, 1.4% came from the *Yemen*, 0.5% from *Persia* and 0.2% were of other oriental origin (Nachum:1980). The earlier mentioned McNair Report, too, alludes to the cultural background of the teachers. It should be added here that these figures also reflect the ethnic composition of the *yishuv*, which was overwhelmingly *Ashkenazi* (approximately

90%; Sicron,:1957).

Chapter 4

1. The ultra-orthodox faction of Israeli society, had opted out from the State's educational programme. This faction has its own two types of educational network. The first was given the status of an independent, but recognised, school network. The national educational aims are not binding upon it (although it is subsidised by the government). This particular educational frame provides traditional Jewish literacy in its classic form, though its teachers must be qualified and the language of instruction must be Ivrit, two pre-requisites for State recognition of any school.

The second type belongs to the extreme branches of the ultra-orthodox *Ashkenazi* Jewry. Its schools furnish traditional *heder* education and literacy in *Yiddish* to the population in the segregated neighbourhoods of Jerusalem and other islands of ultra-orthodoxy throughout the country. This educational enterprise has no official recognition by the State as a literacy-providing body.

Chapter 6

1. Texts No. 1,3,5,6, were sampled from the reading scheme 'our First Grade Alphabet Book' (*ספר האותיות*). Vilensky and Persky:1984). Text No. 2, was sampled from the reading scheme 'Telem' (acronym in Ivrit from 'Comprehensive Language Program'). Yishai, A., (1989). Text No. 4, was sampled from a reading scheme 'my Alphabet Book' (Vilensky and Persky:1976). Both our 'First Grade Alphabet Book', and 'my Alphabet Book' are two out of the six most widely used reading schemes. (Spektor and Katz:1990).

2. The 'No Secrets' to Reading series is composed of 45 twenty-minute programmes, transmitted three times a week, and is supplemented by 55 printed units. These can also be used as a self-contained and independent reading scheme. The printed units are

compiled in ten exercise books. Each programme and its corresponding printed unit is arranged around a particular basic vowel sound combined with various consonants to make specific syllables. Every sixth printed unit and every third weekly transmission are review exercises. The pace of instruction is dictated by and contingent upon the frequency of the television broadcasts, with which the children are expected to keep up. Teachers who are not acquainted with this televised reading aid have to attend a weekly course on the intricacies of 'teaching by television'. These guideline courses are supplemented by a teacher's training kit (Wohl:1985). The programme's tone fluctuates between a didactic classroom-like discourse and the fun-like tone of popshows and commercials.

Chapter 7

1. In keeping with the habit of both parents and pupils in Israeli primary schools of addressing the teachers by their first name, I will refer to the teachers of the classes in which I carried out the field work in like manner.

Chapter 8

1. The transcriptions are set out on the page in a style reflecting Ochs' suggestions (1979). The children's utterances appear on the left of each page. The teacher's words are shown on the right. Each utterance receives a number which is given in the left-hand margin. Under the heading 'children', utterances are generally those of one child, occasionally, more than one child's response or even a whole class, are included. Under the heading 'teacher', remarks by other adults may be shown. The reader must follow the order of the numbers. The comments in italics are mine. Only where it proved quite impractical to use this format, have I presented a narrative description of the transactions.

APPENDIX

An Outline of the Linguistic Features of *Ivrith*

For the reader's edification, the following is a brief outline of the unique features of the Ivrith language.

- i. A high degree inflection, as expressed by variations of a three-letter root; changes in meaning (tense, gender, part of speech) are accomplished by adding prefixes, suffixes or internal rule-governed syllables to the main root.
- ii. Size and position of vowels in relation to consonants. *Ivrith* is an alphabetic language comprising twenty two consonants, five of which change form at the end of a word, and nine vowels. The vowel sounds are represented by diacritical marks. An additional diacritic symbol directs the reader to blend to adjacent consonants. The diacritical marks, which are of much smaller size than the consonants, do not follow a regular positional pattern, but appear below (in most cases), above or beside a letter. Except for two, the diacritical marks are graphically presented in various combinations of dots. Depending on its location in relation to the consonant, a single dot can assume seven different voice meanings.
- iii. Lack of distinctive visual patterns of words. The Ivrith alphabet features many pairs and clusters of letters of similar forms, which accounts for a strong resemblance among the pattern of words. Since there is only one ascender and one descender, words in Ivrith lack distinctive visual patterns, and their main difference is their length. (Although four of the final consonant graphemes are, in fact, descenders, they are without exception the last letters in a word, and do not therefore contribute much to the variability of word pattern.)
- iv. Finally, Ivrith is defined as a phonetic language, with a highly consistent phoneme-grapheme correspondence.

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