



Center and Periphery in Israel's Higher Education

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Abstract

At present, students in many countries are enjoying extended opportunities for acquiring higher education, leading to increased achievements of higher education among the working class and minorities. However, a hypothesis formulated recently under the designation maximum maintained inequality (MMI) strongly

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rejects the assumption that the expansion of educational systems per se reduces social gaps. In fact, new educational opportunities are first utilized by less talented students who belong to privileged groups and much less by students from peripheral groups. The former, who have more considerable financial resources, are capable of better utilizing the new opportunities. Advantages stemming from social background factors help students from upper classes ensure themselves their own distinguished place. The central dominant groups retain their advantage for purposes of registration to higher education until their participation in this system reaches a saturation point. Only at this point does the expansion of education systems begin to contribute to reducing social inequality in registration.

Hence, while colleges provide less educated groups with an alternative to selective universities, the upper classes have a much greater chance of utilizing this opportunity and studying the most attractive fields. Since colleges that offer studies in these attractive fields (law, business administration, and behavioral sciences) are not subsidized by the state, tuition is very high, and members of the working class cannot afford to study there. Nonetheless, any solid conclusion on the impact the colleges have on social inequality must carefully take into consideration all the different aspects of this issue.

Keywords

Center · Periphery · Higher education · Undergraduate students · Israel

Introduction

Although schools existed in all known civilizations from ancient times, the educational system only became universal in the last century or so. As late as 1800, most Western European adults did not attend school, and 100 years later, only rarely did people receive more than 4 or 5 years of formal education (Williams 1960). The twentieth century created an educational revolution. Education became compulsory in Western countries during the first half of the century. In time, it was embraced in developing countries as well during the second half of the century, when they attained independence.

With regard to secondary education, the USA became a pioneer in this field when it established a comprehensive public education system (Krug 1969). In 1910, less than 15% of the 14–17 age group in the USA were registered as high school students. By 1940, 75% of teens in this age group were attending school. At that time, 50% were expected to graduate and receive a diploma (Trow 1974). In the 1960s this rate rose considerably and exceeded 85% (Hurn 1985, Chap. 3).

The case of higher education is slightly different. The system only began to grow in the second half of the twentieth century in the USA. Throughout history, the main role of higher education, in most societies, was to nurture an elite group and provide its members with the necessary knowledge and social ties to manage the country. The higher education system remained a setting for training the elites until the post-

World War II era (Morrison 1998). Thus, it is quite evident that for a long time this system served both as a mirror image of the elite and as an instrument for preserving the existing social order.

The second half of the twentieth century saw both development of the educational system throughout the world and a considerable improvement in educational opportunities. Once again, the USA was in the lead. In 1940 some 15% of the 18–21 age group in the USA were studying at colleges and universities. In 1970 their rate reached 45% (Hurn 1985). In France, the number of students was 123,000 in 1946; by 1961 it had reached 230,000 and by 1968 514,000 (Auron 1999, 16). In the welfare states of northern Europe in particular, educational reforms since the 1960s were motivated by the ideology of equal opportunities in education. This led to a significant increase in the growth and availability of institutions of higher education (Kivinen et al. 2001).

Rapid expansion of higher education was characteristic of many Western countries in the 1970s. This prompted the expression “massification of higher education” (Trow 1974). Higher education, previously defined as an opportunity reserved for the privileged few, eventually became the right of all and even a civil right (Trow 1974). Nonetheless, interestingly, it appears that in the USA people had the same chance of graduating from college in the 2000s as in the 1970s. The graduation rate remained constant – 27%. Moreover, in this period the mobility of higher education was reduced, as the capacity of universities and colleges diminished in light of the population growth as well as the rise in aspirations and achievements (Hout and Janus 2011).

It is worth mentioning that the rapid spread of higher education was not limited to Western countries. In fact, from 1970 to 1990, the number of university students in developing countries grew from 9 million to 32 million. This means an average increase of 360%. In Arab countries, the increase reached 625% and in Africa 550%. Nonetheless, the graduation rate in developing countries was much lower than in developed countries; in the first 5 years, it was only 6% (Bloom and Rosovsky 2007).

The Changing Context of Higher Education

Attention has recently been drawn to the changing context of higher education. Some researchers contend that the change is rooted in the role of higher education in modern societies and economies, as well as among countries in a process of modernization. The transition primarily involved a shift of higher education from an area of marginal to one of major significance (Morrison 1998). As reflected in Table 1, a transformation occurred during the 1990s. In the UK, for example, there was an enormous increase in the number of students. In 1991, some 216,000 students were admitted to the various higher education programs. By 1998 this number had grown by 53% to 330,000 (Tonks 1999), and another 100,000 were added by 2002. This was also true of Australia, where registration to institutions of higher education grew from 534,500 in 1991 to 604,200 in 1995 and 726,200 in 2001 (Breen 2002).

Table 1 Trends in achievements of higher education in OECD countries, 1991–2001 (proportion of 25–34-year-olds who had studied at schools of higher education)

	25–64-year-olds					25–34-year-olds					55–64-year-olds					
	(25)	(26)	(27)	(28)	(29)	(30)	(31)	(32)	(33)	(34)	(35)	(36)	(37)	(38)	(39)	(40)
Country	2000	2005	2010	2014	2000	2005	2010	2014	2000	2005	2010	2014	2000	2005	2010	2014
Australia	27	32	38	42	31	38	44	48	19	24	30	33				
Austria	(–)	25	28	30	(–)	31	34	38	(–)	18	20	21				
Belgium	27	31	35	37	36	41	44	44	17	22	26	26				
Canada	40	46	50	54	48	54	56	58	28	36	42	45				
Czech Republic	11	13	17	22	11	14	23	30	9	11	12	15				
Denmark	26	34	33	36	29	40	38	42	18	27	28	29				
Finland	33	35	38	42	39	38	39	40	23	27	30	34				
France	22	25	29	32	31	40	43	44	13	16	18	20				
Germany	23	25	27	27	22	22	26	28	20	23	25	25				
Greece	18	21	25	28	24	26	31	39	8	12	17	21				
Hungary	14	17	20	23	15	20	26	32	12	15	16	17				
Iceland	(–)	29	33	37	(–)	35	36	41	(–)	20	23	29				
Ireland	22	29	38	41	30	41	48	51	13	17	22	24				
Italy	9	12	15	17	10	16	21	24	6	8	11	12				
Japan	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)	(–)				
Korea	24	32	40	45	37	51	65	68	9	10	13	17				

Luxembourg	18	27	35	46	23	37	44	53	13	19	25	32
Mexico	15	15	17	19	17	18	21	25	7	8	12	13
Netherlands	23	30	32	34	27	35	41	44	18	24	26	27
New Zealand	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	40	(-)	(-)	(-)	29
Norway	28	33	37	42	35	41	47	49	20	24	27	32
Poland	11	17	22	27	14	26	37	43	10	13	13	14
Portugal	9	13	15	22	13	19	25	31	5	7	9	13
Slovakia	10	14	17	20	11	16	24	30	8	12	13	14
Spain	23	29	31	35	34	41	40	41	10	14	18	21
Sweden	30	30	34	39	34	37	42	46	23	25	27	30
Switzerland	24	29	35	40	26	31	40	46	18	22	28	31
Turkey	8	10	13	17	9	13	17	25	6	8	9	10
Great Britain	26	30	38	42	29	35	46	49	19	24	30	35
US	36	39	42	44	38	39	42	46	30	37	41	41
OECD average	22	26	30	34	26	32	37	41	15	20	22	25

Source: Table A1.4a. [3/3] Education at a Glance 2015, OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2015-en>

In this regard, it is notable that the transition in the role of higher education in modern societies was also evident in direct public expenditures for schools of higher education. Most Western European countries evidenced a rise in direct public expenditures in these institutions despite budgetary cuts and despite second thoughts about the limitations of social welfare policy. Surveys show that in France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Austria, the rise in expenditures during the 1990s was modest. Nonetheless, it was consistent. In Great Britain and Denmark, the rise was significant. In Finland and Belgium, it was moderate but still considerable (CHEPS 2001).

Eventually the academic diploma became a popular norm, reminiscent of the high school diploma in the twentieth century (Allen and Allen 2003). The era of higher education as the exclusive claim of the elite had ended. The challenges now confronting higher education were planning, designing, managing, and funding of a comprehensive system. Contemporary discourse focused on the transformation, in a demand to improve access to higher education as a matter of social justice. As stated in the British Robbins Report from 1963, “Courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them” (Tonks 1999).

Not less important in this respect – in fact, some say even more significant – is recognition of the contribution of higher education to economic growth, which requires that its availability be improved at all costs. Economists say that education creates human capital, which directly affects the accumulation of knowledge and thus the rise of productivity. Furthermore, education is important for successful research activities, which have their own significance for increasing productivity. The literature on empirical growth draws attention to the following conclusions, with their effect on the economic significance of higher education on the national level:

- The economy of countries in which employees have a higher schooling average tends to grow faster than that of other countries under similar circumstances.
- OECD countries that expedited the expansion of their higher education since 1960 enjoyed effective economic growth.
- There is evidence that education affects the investment of physical capital in the economy, which in turn enhances income growth.
- It has been proven, both conceptually and empirically, that higher education may raise the revenues of a country beyond those it would have achieved if its level of schooling had been lower.

Certification Inflation and Inequality in Higher Education

Calls to Transform the System of Higher Education

The massification of higher education was accompanied by calls to transform the system from a reflection of the social structure to a gateway to social mobility while improving access to higher education. Even those who believe that “where there is a will there is a way” have to admit that in the human capital economy currently dominating the world, decency and hard work alone are not enough to ensure

success. Both personal well-being and social well-being are increasingly determined by formal education. Human well-being is currently dependent on educational achievements more than any other factors. On average, higher education can be said to consistently generate a higher income and a higher standard of living, and that is what most people strive for (Mortenson 2000). This association between income and education has intensified since the early 1970s. Due to the growing association between education and income, the life of the uneducated seems to be becoming more desperate and hopeless as explained in this chapter.

The demand to improve access to higher education has raised, in turn, interest in the effects of higher education expansion. In simple words, what is the connection between “who studies where” and students’ socioeconomic background and history of previous studies? At present, there is a pointed battle between two approaches, the *diversity approach*, representing the functionalist paradigm in sociology, and the *stratification approach*, represented by the conflict paradigm in sociology.

The Diversity Approach to the Massification of Higher Education

The diversity approach sees the massification of higher education as a process that contributes to educational and social equality by developing a wide range of institutions of higher education that operate side by side with classic research universities and aim to meet the different unique needs of various student sectors. In contrast, the stratification approach sees the massification of higher education as no more than competition between various institutions that offer different levels of education, which reflect the existing order and constitute a mirror of the social class structure.

In short, the diversity approach sees the wide array of higher education schools in a positive light. Its proponents contend that this diversity has contributed to a real change in the composition of the student population. It has enabled a considerable increase in the number of students aged 25 and older. This is also true of students from ethnic minorities or from other sectors that have so far been underrepresented. For example, the unprecedented increase in the number of higher education students in France from the mid-1940s to the late 1960s (see Table 1) led to an opening of the higher education system to new social strata, particularly from the lower middle class (Auron 1999, 16). Various representatives of this orientation have repeatedly claimed that different schools of higher education attract different consumer sectors. According to this concept, the variety of universities is “horizontal” and not “vertical.” Namely, the system of higher education is neither stratified nor hierarchical by nature (Meek et al. 1996; Goedegebuure et al. 1993), although the varied institutions reflect the needs of groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Stratification Approach to the Massification of Higher Education

The stratification approach has a completely different view of the massification of schools of higher education. Its general perspective is that the higher education

system replicates and intensifies social inequality (Archer et al. 2003). It claims a strong correlation between students' socioeconomic status and the various types of higher education institutions at which they study. The British system is brought as an example. It is widely agreed that the British system is very stratified (Scott 2002). The change in the demand for higher education transformed the map of higher education. On the one hand, there are the older universities, which in the past were intended to serve the elite but then came to focus on research excellence (Farnum 1990). On the other, there is a fairly varied array of institutions of higher education. Thus, besides the traditional elite universities, the UK has a variety of other schools of higher education, such as civil universities established toward the end of the Victorian era to supply the professional and commercial elites with alternatives to the traditional universities and to represent the growing strength of industrial Britain. This category also includes the "red brick universities" founded after World War I. To this were added the newer universities established by various governments who sought to develop world class science and technology universities. Also opened were colleges for advanced technology, known today as technological universities. Finally, the polytechnions were opened in the 1960s. Some called these "people's universities" (Scott 2002). The stratification was intensified in the UK by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), which funds universities according to their achievements in research and teaching (Watson 1999). Britain is not the only country with a stratified system of higher education. A study conducted in the UK, Australia, Japan, France, and the Netherlands showed that all these countries have a very stratified system of higher education (Teichler 1988).

The British and American Higher Education Systems in the Eyes of the Two Approaches

As stated, the British system is taken as an example. In recent decades, Britain's system of higher education has grown and expanded significantly. Nonetheless, nontraditional social groups show consistently limited use of this system (Archer 2000). Once again, this state of affairs is well known in many other industrial countries as well (Schuetz and Wolter 2000).

A survey held in the UK indicated (Archer 2000) that most respondents thought that only the less prestigious universities were accessible for working class students. "Dream colleges and universities" are considered accessible for members of the middle class and upper classes who have the necessary financial resources and social status and whose families were able to plan for the future. In contrast, respondents from the working class recognized that a combination of social and financial factors compels them to study at second-rate local universities. Thus, it is no surprise that another survey found that while 39% of all 18-year-olds in the UK belong to the two highest socioeconomic classes, some 70% of those admitted to the long-established acclaimed universities came from these two social classes (Hasley 1992).

This appears to be the situation in the USA as well. Here too the highest socioeconomic classes have advantage in admittance to the acclaimed universities

as claimed by Mortensen (2000). Some claim that both private and public venerable universities and colleges have become more selective in the last generation. Thus, the USA is rapidly retreating from its affirmative action policy in higher education, intended to ensure inclusion of the weaker groups (Mortenson 2000). Hence, the massification of higher education did not itself open the gates to equal opportunity in higher education (Bok 1998). It may even have intensified a preexisting problem.

Furthermore, some have already drawn attention to the fact that in the elite system of higher education, advanced degrees help those who earn them attain attractive administrative and professional jobs (Brown 1997). Nonetheless, the increasing competition for academic degrees is an undeniable social reality. It stems from the strict selection process embraced by employers in light of the mass pursuit of advanced degrees. Adding to all this, the excess supply of academic graduates – a result of the massification of higher education – has formed a new problem, that of “degree inflation” (Dore 1976).

Degree inflation, or the “diploma disease,” has contributed to inequality in education. It increased competition for degrees awarded by the most elitist and prestigious institutions of higher education, since academic degrees are ranked on an academic and social hierarchy according to the institutions that issue them. One’s range of opportunities is affected by one’s diploma, and the status of the diploma is directly affected by the status of the institution that awarded it. The most sought after and prestigious institutions do not offer equal access. Thus, the higher education system has not become a great equalizer; on the contrary, it occupies the role of doorkeeper, preventing free access.

Nevertheless, the massification of higher education was certainly intended to realize the “Knowledge Nation” policy, as known in Australia (Breen 2002, 18), defined elsewhere as the government’s commitment to provide anyone capable of benefiting from higher education with the opportunity to do so. Massification of higher education also contributed to expanding the opportunities of minority groups to attain higher education as one of their key challenges (SHEFC 1999).

The Expansion of Higher Education in Israel

Israel’s Higher Education Until the 1990s

Israel is an excellent case in point. Its system of higher education underwent a process of expansion and significant change beginning in the early 1990s, applying to both types of higher education massification.

The foundations of Israel’s higher education system were laid in the 1920s, when the Technion (which offers degrees in science, engineering, and related fields) and the Hebrew University opened in 1924 and 1925, respectively. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, these were the only two institutions of higher education in the country. The population increase and social and economic developments generated a significant demand for higher education, and as a result, five universities were established in the 1950s and 1960s: Bar-Ilan University, the

University of Tel Aviv, Haifa University, the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and the Weizmann Institute (CHE 2003).

From the mid-1970s another stage began in the development and diversity of Israel's higher education system. The Open University began to operate as the country's first distance-learning institution (admitting everyone irrespective of formal education) that offers academic degrees, and its activities rapidly spread to the entire country. Teachers' seminars, previously operating as advanced study institutions, were transformed into colleges of education, i.e., higher education institutions that awarded their graduates B.Ed. degrees and in time also M.Ed. degrees.

During the 1990s the system of higher education underwent another process of expansion, when the tenth amendment to the Higher Education Law allowed the establishment of various types of academic colleges: general colleges, technological colleges, and colleges specializing in a specific discipline. In 2002, Israel's system of higher education included 8 universities, 24 fully recognized academic colleges (colleges that offer bachelor degrees), 26 academic colleges for training teachers (colleges that specialize in education and offer bachelor degrees in education), and 12 academic programs in academic colleges affiliated with one of the universities (in these programs, students study on the campuses of the colleges, but their degree is awarded by the university that sponsors the program) (CHE 2003). As of 2015, Israel has 9 universities (including the Open University), 42 academic colleges, 25 academic colleges for education, and 4 CHE-recognized branches of foreign universities. This forms a total of 80 institutions of higher education.

When the State of Israel was founded in 1948, about 1,600 students were enrolled in the two existing academic institutions. By the end of Israel's first decade, the number of students had risen to approximately 9,000. The 1960s saw a significant increase (about 14% a year) in the number of students, and by 1970 it had reached 35,000. This rapid growth continued in the 1970s, and by 1980 the number of students reached 56,000. In the 1980s the increase continued at a rate of 2.5% a year, and in 1990 the higher education system encompassed 76,000 students (CHE 2003). In the 2013–2014 school year, the system included 263,428 students (CBS 2004).

The Preponderance of Undergraduate Students in the Colleges

The most important process this entailed was that since the 2002–2003 school year, more undergraduate students have been enrolled in colleges than in universities – although in that year the number of students at universities (76,581) exceeded that of students at colleges *excluding* branches of foreign universities whose activity in Israel was approved by the CHE (68,115) (CBS 2004). The total number of students at academic colleges in the 2013–2014 school year was 96,927 (CBS 2004, Table 8.59). This adequately reflects the greater accessibility of higher education for many students (Brodet 2003). The colleges facilitated a process that opened the gates of higher education to students who had previously been excluded from academic tertiary education. The most significant fact related to this process is that the number

of rejected requests for admission dropped from 30% to 34% in the 1990s to a mere 19% in 2000 (Kimmerling 2000). This was precisely the intention of the CHE when, in the early 1990s, it awarded a long list of colleges the authority to grant academic degrees. The decision of the CHE was accompanied by an explanation (Council for Higher Education 2014) whereby, from then on, the system of higher education would consist of two tiers or components. The first component included the universities. This tier was expected to focus on research and on awarding advanced degrees. The second component included the colleges. As mentioned, it was supposed to actively assist in the realization of social justice and social equality principles by increasing the registration of marginal social groups and categories to academic institutions. In this way, these institutions can be seen as a global counterpart as defined in this book.

Originally known as regional colleges, these institutions became known as academic colleges after being certified to offer academic degrees. Gradually, regional colleges have become accredited and are now academic colleges. As summed up by the Association of Regional Colleges (Council for Higher Education 2014), at the time the number of potential students rejected by the universities was 25,000. This impossible situation motivated colleges to invest additional resources in admitting another 15,000 students by the end of the decade and thus taking part in the national effort of solving the serious problem of insufficient slots for undergraduate students.

Israel's Higher Education as a Dichotomous or Binary System

Israel's higher education is defined as a dichotomous or binary system (Guri-Rosenblit 1999). The universities engage mainly in "autonomous functions" (Trow 1974), i.e., in imparting high culture, encouraging science through research, and awarding degrees to elite groups. The colleges engage mainly in "popular functions" (ibid.). These include the introduction of new sectors of the population to the contents of high culture, awarding degrees necessary to ensure a respectable job, and providing practical services to the community, based on knowledge and information.

This dichotomy has aroused fierce controversy. As mentioned above, some scholars believe that the binary system promotes equal opportunity in higher education (Guri-Rosenblit 1999). Others claim that there is currently no real equal opportunity in higher education. Those living in central areas of the country have a much greater chance of utilizing the new opportunities than residents of peripheral areas. Students raised in high-class families, from privileged ethnic groups, and graduates of academic high school tracks have a greater chance of attaining a tertiary education (Ayalon and Addi-Raccah 2003). Colleges offer students with lower education levels an alternative to the selective universities. Nonetheless, on these levels only the financially well-off classes can afford to send their children to study the most attractive fields (Shavit et al. 2003a). The private colleges that offer studies in these attractive fields are not subsidized by the government. Therefore, tuition is very high, and studies at the

colleges are too expensive for common people. Others claim that the degrees awarded by these colleges are lower-level degrees awarded to peripheral groups in Israeli society (Swirski and Swirski 1998; Davidovitch and Iram 2014).

The Effect of the Change on Israel's Weaker Population

In light of the controversy mentioned above, several questions are in order:

1. Has the recent change in higher education increased the chances of participating in this system?
2. Has it reduced the social selectivity of higher education?
3. Has the change resulted in real equal opportunity to register for the most attractive disciplines, or has such opportunity increased only in the less selective disciplines?
4. Finally, are the opportunities offered by the new colleges inferior to those offered by the more veteran universities?

Official data published by the CBS (2004) show that in 1989–1990, the number of undergraduate students studying at universities was five times higher than that of students at other institutions of higher education. In 1994–1995 the ratio was 3:4. In 2000–2001 it was 1:3. As mentioned, in 2002–2003 the number of undergraduate students at colleges was higher than those studying at universities (Brodet 2003), although as stated, when the number of students studying at branches of foreign universities is deducted, the number of undergraduate students at universities (76,581) was higher than at colleges (68,115) (CBS 2004). In the 2013–2014 school year, the number of college students was 96,927 (CBS 2004, Table 8.59). Finally, it should be recognized that in the 1960s and 1990s, the system of higher education changed dramatically. The number of students tripled, and the chance of entering the system increased by 50% (Shavit et al. 2003b). Notably, the long-standing universities were hardly affected by this change. They grew at a rate commensurate with the population increase. Most of the total increase in the number of students resulted from admissions to colleges, the second tier of the public and private education system. From 1989–1990 to 2000–2001, registration to undergraduate programs at colleges grew by 19.2% a year on average, while at the universities, annual growth was only 3.6% on average. As evident from Table 2, the rate of undergraduate

Table 2 Students enrolled in undergraduate programs by type of institution in the 1989–1990, 2000–2001, and 2014–2015 school years in Israel

Year	Number	% universities	% colleges	% Open University
1989–1990	253,68	8.68	1.12	1.19
2000–2001	980,165	6.44	4.34	9.20
2014–2015	95,593	42.9	48.8	NA

Source: Council for Higher Education (2014)

students at colleges almost tripled from 1991 to 2000. In three popular fields – business administration, law, and applied arts – the number of students was higher than in the universities. In other words, the growth rate of colleges was 5.3 times that of universities. By 1999–2000, there were colleges in 15 towns divided among 6 districts, compared to 9 towns in 3 districts in 1989–1990.

Differences Between the Cross Sections of Undergraduate Students in the Two Tiers

The critical question is whether there are differences between the cross section of undergraduate students in the two tiers. CBS (2004) data indicate that there are indeed differences. The first of these is students' age. The median age of college students is higher than that of university students (26 vs. 24, respectively). The most common age group among college students in 2000–2001 was 25–29. It encompassed 44% of all students. However, this same group encompassed only 25% of university students. Moreover, the proportion of relatively older students (30+ age group) in the colleges is almost double that of universities (14% vs. 7.5%). In contrast, with regard to the younger age group (ages 19–24), its relative weight at universities (67%) is much higher than at colleges (38%) (CBS 2002a).

Thus, it is possible to deduce once again that colleges offer what is known as a “second chance” to a significant number of students to acquire a higher education that they had missed out on previously. The relative weight of those who receive such a chance at universities is much lower since registration to colleges is much less selective than to universities and since colleges pursue older students and offer them special programs.

The second significant difference between college and university students is their ethnic origins. In many societies, ethnicity plays a major role in social stratification. Most Israeli sociologists see the ethnic rift as one of the country's main axes of stratification. In general, it is recognized that Jews of Western (Euro-American) origin manage to attain more desirable social positions than those occupied by Jews of Eastern (Afro-Asian) origin. The latter account for most of what is defined as the social margins (Yaish 2000). CBS (2004) data draw attention to several interesting points in this regard. First, there is no significant difference between the proportions of Israeli-born students at institutions in the two tiers. Second, the proportion of Eastern Jews studying at colleges is higher than that of Western Jews. For example, 32% of Eastern Jewish undergraduate students study at colleges versus 25% of Western students, i.e., one third versus one quarter (CBS 2002a). This means, once again, that colleges offer marginal groups easier access to higher education. It is obvious that this group has chosen to utilize this “window of opportunity” since graduation in these institutions is easier to attain than in the universities.

In a study held recently on the effect of higher education expansion on ethnic inequality as manifested in the rate of studies, the authors reached an interesting conclusion. They showed that the more the system expanded, the more all groups increased their rate of studies. However, the most significant increase was evident

among the privileged groups (Bolotin-Chachashvili et al. 2003). Nonetheless, as mentioned, CBS (2004) data reveal an important fact, namely, about two thirds of students registered at colleges study the highly desired subjects of engineering and architecture, law, and business administration. Some 64% of Eastern students attending colleges in 2001 studied these attractive subjects. Once again, it is possible to conclude that a high proportion of the marginalized groups received a chance to earn a degree in prestigious fields that had previously been unavailable to them.

The third difference is the students' geographical distribution. Israel has six districts (excluding the Judea and Samaria district in the West Bank). Geographically, the country has two peripheral districts – the northern district (encompassing 17% of the population in 2002; in 2013 it numbered 1,341,500 residents) and the southern district (encompassing 14% of the population in 2003; in 2013 it numbered 1,168,000 residents). Thus, 31% of the population can be defined as geographically part of the periphery. These two districts are also defined as peripheral from a socioeconomic point of view. The CBS (2004) has classified all local authorities as belonging to ten clusters based on their demographic-sociocultural cross section, as determined by an aggregate measure comprised of a list of variables. Cluster 10 includes the highest scoring authorities and cluster 1 the lowest scoring authorities (CBS 2002b).

The two peripheral districts appear to be the weakest. Over 65% of all authorities in the southern district are in the three lowest clusters. Only 13% of the authorities in this district are in the two highest clusters. Nearly 60% of local authorities in the northern district are in the three lowest clusters. Only some 10% of these authorities are in the two highest clusters. No other district comes even close to this sad state of affairs.

The question in order here is to what degree did the new colleges boost the peripheral districts by improving residents' chance of receiving access to higher education? The answer seems clear: the accelerated development of public colleges began in the early 1990s as part of the declared policy of transferring educational resources from the central districts to the periphery, i.e., to the southern and northern districts. The establishment of colleges in peripheral areas was intended in particular to allow peripheral groups to receive a higher education at the lowest possible cost. Gradually, students in the southern and northern districts came to constitute the majority of students at colleges, indicating that the availability of local colleges contributed significantly to increasing the accessibility of higher education. Taking note of the socioeconomic cross section of the population in these two districts, it may be assumed that local colleges enabled registration of students who otherwise would have missed out on their chance of a higher education, this despite the fact that they know they will be discriminated against.

The alert demand for undergraduate programs in the regional academic colleges caused a far-reaching change in the structure of the higher education system. Since the 1990s, the number of undergraduate students in the country tripled and peaked in 2014 with 710,192 students nationwide, indicating that growth of the higher education system is slowing down. However, growth of the regional colleges continued: The 2015 was the first year in more than two decades in which the number of undergraduate students declined. In 2009, for the first time, more than 50% of the

nation's undergraduate students were studying at regional colleges, and this percentage continued to increase until, in 2015, only 33.8% of all undergraduate students were attending universities.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Noting the extended opportunities for acquiring a higher education, and considering the increased achievements of higher education among the weaker groups (the working class and minorities), it is now necessary to examine the issue of reduced inequality. A hypothesis formulated recently under the designation maximum maintained inequality (MMI) was formed in the early 1990s (Raftery and Hout 1993). It strongly rejects the assumption that the expansion of educational systems per se reduces social gaps. In fact, the MMI hypothesis claims that new educational opportunities are first utilized by less talented students who belong to privileged groups and much less by students from peripheral groups. The former, who have more considerable financial resources (and probably also cultural and cognitive resources), are capable of better utilizing the new opportunities. Advantages stemming from social background factors help students from upper classes ensure themselves their own distinguished place. According to Raftery and Hout (1993), the central dominant groups retain their advantage for purposes of registration to higher education until their participation in this system reaches a saturation point. Only at this point does the expansion of education systems begin to contribute to reducing social inequality in registration. The MMI hypothesis was confirmed by various studies (e.g., Gerber 2000; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). All these studies indicate that inequality in education tends to remain despite the expansion of education systems. The MMI hypothesis might be particularly relevant for higher education, due to the fact that students and parents from different social classes vary in their levels of familiarity with the system. Thus, members of privileged groups are better able to manipulate the system to answer their needs (McDonough 1997).

CBS (2004) data lead, in this context, to four important conclusions. First, the relative weight of the two lowest sociocultural clusters among Israeli college students is negligible. They comprised only 1.7% in 2000–2001. Second, the four highest clusters comprised a great majority of 60% in that year (CBS 2002a, 34). Third, the data indicate that the middle class dominated in the colleges. The four middle-class clusters, 5–8, comprised a majority of 69% in 2000–2001. Fourth, the sociocultural composition of college students changed over the years. The proportion of the lowest clusters (1–4) rose from 5.4% in 1995–1996 to 13% in 200–2001, an increase of 230% in 5 years. The proportion of the two highest clusters (9 and 10) diminished over the same period from 23% to 19%. The proportion of the middle class also diminished from 72% to 69%. In short, it seems that while the weight of the privileged groups among college students is decreasing, that of the weaker groups is growing.

However, as mentioned above, this is not the full picture. While colleges provide less educated groups with an alternative to selective universities, the upper classes have a much greater chance of utilizing this opportunity and studying the most

attractive fields. Since colleges that offer studies in these attractive fields (law, business administration, and behavioral sciences) are not subsidized by the state, tuition is very high, and members of the working class cannot afford to study there.

Unsurprisingly, the socioeconomic segmentation of students in private colleges, who constituted 40% of all college students in 2001–2002 (CBS 2002a), shows a preponderance of affluent students. The four highest socioeconomic clusters (7–10) comprised 67% of students in private colleges in 2000–2001. In public colleges, their weight was much smaller, only 52%. In contrast, the two lowest clusters (1 and 2) comprised a negligible 0.8% of all students at private colleges versus 1.5% of students at public colleges. The two highest clusters (9 and 10) comprised 23% of students at private colleges versus 15% at public colleges (CBS 2002a). In light of these data, it is no wonder that some concluded that the privatization of higher education, by establishing and expanding the private colleges, also served to enhance the existing inequality in the accessibility of higher education for different groups. This is compatible with the MMI hypothesis. Even more important, perhaps, is the increased inequality with regard to accessibility of the most attractive disciplines (Shavit et al. 2003b). In short, with regard to the effect of the colleges on social inequality, it is certainly necessary to appreciate all the different aspects of this issue very carefully before reaching conclusions.

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