

Clashing identities in the military bereavement of a minority group: The case of Bedouin IDF widows in Israel

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INTRODUCTION

When people look at the world around them they want to feel that they understand its logic, the rules whereby it functions, and the connections within it. They want to feel that the world is predictable, that there is consistency within it, and based on past experience to understand how to act in the present and the future. In-depth observation of how people live reveals that although beliefs, values, social discourse, and various actions performed by individuals and groups are often inconsistent, they coexist without members of the group being required to choose between them.

The present article presents Bedouin Israel Defense Forces (IDF) widows who have to contend with the personal tragedy of losing their husband and the resulting damage to their social status, coupled with the social alienation associated with the circumstances of his death as a soldier in the IDF, which represents occupation of territories populated by Palestinian Arabs. The

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widows adopt the hegemonic social representations of the Bedouin society to which they belong. The prevailing social representation pertaining to the IDF is negative, but at the same time they receive financial assistance and emotional support from Ministry of Defense social workers that stems from the state's responsibility for the widows whose husbands were killed during military service.

How do Bedouin IDF widows conduct their life in a world of contrasts and contradictions, i.e., hostility toward the IDF and what it represents while maintaining close contact with the Ministry of Defense that represents it? And, what do they do to enable their full integration into Bedouin society that requires them to display weakness and obedience, and at the same time construct an independent identity for themselves, which becomes possible due to the economic strength they gain from state benefits and assistance from the Ministry of Defense?

To examine these questions we chose to observe the study findings through the theoretical prism of Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 1961, 1976, 1988) while focusing on two principal concepts: cognitive polyphasia, and hegemonic and conflictual representations.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY TO THE CASE STUDY

In the mid-twentieth century, the desire to understand human behavior led to the development of behaviorist theories and cognitive explanations that link stimulus response with independent and dependent variables. The criticism leveled against this approach led to the development of an approach that positions people at the center as motivated by desires, goals, and the meanings created within social groups, and which are associated with the group's norms, purposes, and goals. Additionally, it was argued that human beings tend to interpret events and understand their social and physical surroundings within the cultural and political context in which they live (Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, & Valsiner, 2015). The shift toward social research gained significant momentum with the development of Social Representations Theory by Moscovici (1961, 1976, 1988). Moscovici blazed a new trail when he expanded the perception of classical "objective" science to "commonsense" science, and the principal notion he presented was that social representations exist simultaneously in social communication and in people's minds. He contended that research should address and analyze these representations from both directions:

from the social and sociological direction, and from the social psychological direction. This approach in effect led to the development of a school of research in social psychology as part of sociology out of recognition that social representations are dynamic and constantly changing in accordance with social changes. Thus, culture, history, myths, beliefs, and language are not a personal psychological matter, but are shared by multiple people in the same society. Moscovici described social representations as “a guide for action”. This does not only refer to the act itself, but also to perceptions and emotional attitudes toward different parts of reality. The individual internalizes and interprets the collective cultural values of his society, and transforms them into personal resources that are separate from the dominant and institutionalized values (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). The theory presumes that these representations are simultaneously social and individual: they are the product of constructing reality by means of communication between group members in a specific social context, and consequently possess a collective social aspect. On the other hand they are also individual since the understanding of the world is constructed separately by each individual. In every society some representations are **hegemonic representations** that define the society’s identity in relation to other societies. However, in every society people and subgroups have the freedom to also relinquish the hegemonic representations in favor of **emancipated representations** that give expression to differences between individuals and subgroups. A third type is **conflictual representations**, representations which ostensibly belong to an outgroup with which the ingroup generally disagrees. Adoption of an outgroup’s representations by some ingroup members results in the ingroup’s boundaries being undermined and engenders opposition in other group members (Orr, 2007; Ben-Asher & Wolff, 2014).

Durkheim’s (1924) historical perception of shared collective representations was replaced by Moscovici’s notion whereby social representations in the public milieu are diverse (Jovchelovitch 2007; Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, & Valsiner, 2015). Since every individual is also a member of a group, these representations are shared, at least partially, with other members of the group (Hayes, 2005; Wagner & Moscovici, 1984). Social Representations Theory enables an understanding of the constraints acting on the cognitive systems created as a result of the constant dialogue between personal and social meanings.

Moscovici (1984) coined the term **cognitive polyphasia** to express the coexistence of multiple social representations whose basic premises are inconsistent with one another (Friling, 2012; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Moscovici argued that people rely on different types of knowledge

to understand the world around them. Whereas **cognitive monophasia** represents a strategy whereby people choose one type of knowledge that seems logical to them, cognitive polyphasia represents simultaneous utilization of different types of knowledge that seem logical even though the different types of knowledge are incongruent with one another (Provencher, 2011). The term “polyphasia” expresses the coexistence of multiple fields of different and sometimes conflicting representations (Jovchelovitch, 2008; Moscovici, 1985). The question is how an individual can contain contradictions and act in different ways in different situations. Beliefs and knowledge are constructed by means of social negotiation through personal interactions, shared history, shared culture, and shared practices. Since interaction between individuals in society and different social groups is dynamic and changing, different types of representations emerge that will not necessarily be consistent with one another. Therefore, polyphasia represents the simultaneous utilization of different kinds of knowledge within the contexts of a changing reality (Ben-Asher, Wagner, & Orr, 2006).

Jovchelovitch (2007) contends that social communication is rife with disagreement. Individuals and communities possess different knowledge and experiences and consequently they hold beliefs about life and view them as logical even though they often clash. Moscovici (2001) emphasized the simultaneous existence of inconsistent representations not only in different societies, but within individuals as well. Wagner noted that contradictory meanings in everyday thinking can be explained through these representations (Wagner & Hayes, 2005).

Whereas the studies mentioned thus far focused on individuals, Provencher (2011) focused on groups and communities that formulate different types of representations pertaining to the same subject. The question she raises is how cognitive polyphasia exists on group and community levels. Is it a case of employing different social representations in different social situations when the partners to the communication are different? Provencher studied the thinking of British mothers concerning vaccinating their children and found that they are influenced by different sources (newspaper articles, interviews with experts, and personal and group interviews with other mothers). Her study shows that there are different ways of processing information, and that there is a connection between the social situations and the interactions to which the mothers were exposed and the opinion they formed. Wagner (2007) presented the notion of “discursive polyphasia” whereby the types of knowledge utilized by individuals and the group depend on two

principal elements: the setting in which the social discourse takes place, and people's individual circumstances.

In summary, cognitive polyphasia alludes to the possibility of different systems of knowledge existing simultaneously within an individual in the social domain. Jovchelovitch (2008) argues that the lifeworld simultaneously includes multiple components: common sense, general knowledge, social intelligence, popular knowledge, and habitus, all of which function together. This is diverse subjective knowledge that the individual is required to logically organize and act in accordance with. Social representations are grounded in social frameworks and are expressed in accordance with the partners in the communication, and guide diverse social interactions that are adapted to changing situations (Sammut & Howarth, 2014). It should be noted that cognitive polyphasia differs from conflictual representations since the inconsistent representations are part of the overall group representation, and not necessarily another group's "mirror-image representation" that has penetrated the group's hegemonic representations. One of the questions that will be examined in the case study presented in this article is whether the different representations adopted by Bedouin IDF widows in the wake of their personal tragedy are polyphasic representations or conflictual representations.

To understand the Bedouin IDF widows' social frameworks and the inconsistent representations in their lives, a brief background on Bedouin society and on the status of women in general and of the widows in particular is required. This background constitutes the basis for understanding the study presented below.

BACKGROUND: THE BEDOUINS IN ISRAEL

The Bedouins are a minority group within the Arab sector in Israel. Approximately 220,000 Bedouins live in the Negev, Israel's southern region. Bedouins have been entitled to full Israeli citizenship since 1967. There is a prolonged, ongoing dispute between the Negev Bedouins and the state over their demand for recognition of their ownership of the land (Meir & Gekker, 2011). Processes of Palestinization have been taking place over the past twenty years in which the emotional ties of the Bedouins in Israel with the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Gaza Strip have strengthened. Also evident is an ongoing process of Islamization wherein there is an increasing and growing shift toward religiosity and the roots of Islam (Yiftachel, 2003).

Concurrently with this trend, the Islamic Movement has been gaining strength in the Bedouin localities, dominating the mosques and religious services, and bearing considerable influence. Consequently, the Bedouins are Muslim by religion, Arab from a cultural aspect, Palestinian in terms of nationality, and citizens of the State of Israel. This is a complex identity containing contradictions and inconsistencies that influence multiple aspects of life associated with the relationship between the state and its Bedouin citizens (Katsap & Silverman, 2016). Military service is not mandatory for the Bedouins, but Bedouin soldiers have been serving in the IDF on a voluntary basis since 1950. The motivation for enlisting in the IDF is mainly economic. A Bedouin soldier earns a relatively good wage compared with the earning possibilities available to young Bedouin men, especially those who do not pursue higher education. There has been a significant decline in the number of Bedouins enlisting in the IDF in recent years (Cohen & Ben-Zikri, 2016). Hamas, the Palestinian Resistance Movement, exerts pressure on the leaders of the Bedouin tribes in Israel to prevent their members from enlisting in the IDF (UPI, 2004). IDF estimates show that one of the reasons for the decline in enlistment is Israel's military activity in which the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, which has family ties with the Negev Bedouins, has suffered (Shoval, 2015). Another reason for this decline is that many families have first-degree relatives in the Gaza Strip and Hebron, against which some of the military activity is directed.

WIDOWS IN BEDOUIN SOCIETY

192 Bedouin soldiers have lost their lives in the course of their military service or in circumstances associated with combat. Their families are entitled to financial benefits and social and psychological rehabilitative assistance from the Ministry of Defense. Bedouin IDF widows number a few dozen. Although these families receive all the benefits they are entitled to from the state, they attempt to conceal as much as possible the circumstances of their son's death and their connection with the IDF due to Bedouin society's attitude toward the IDF and those serving in it (Yahav, 2011).

The social situation of the Bedouin widows in Israel should be examined in the wider context of women's status in a patriarchal society (Al-Krenawi & Slonim-Nevo, 2008; Haj-Yahia, 1998; Herzog et al., 2004; Sa'ar, 2007). 80-90% of Bedouin women are unemployed and do not venture beyond the confines of their home other than to shop or for health purposes (Ma'an,

2005). Cultural beliefs in Bedouin society view women as the property of men, and consequently polygamy is common. It is estimated that 30% of marriages in Bedouin society are polygamous (Abu Rabia, 2011). When she marries, a Bedouin woman leaves her family and goes to live close to her husband's family. This move is not only physical, but is also associated with the perception of the woman as "property" that belongs to the husband's family and is one of its assets.

Bedouin society is tribal. "*Al-asabiyya al-kabaliyya*" is a concept expressing loyalty to the tribe and constitutes a central value in the life of Bedouins. The individual learns that belonging to the tribe, making sacrifices for it, and defending it are supreme values. Bedouin culture in the Negev is part of the general Bedouin culture shared by all Bedouins in the Middle East, which is typified by sanctification of *al-asabiyya* as a supreme value, and the individual born into the tribe is expected to obey traditional codes, support relatives and the tribe in general, obey parents and adults, be proud of his family and tribe, and defend his, his family's, and his tribe's honor (Masarwa, 2012).

If and when a woman is widowed, the children belong to her late husband's family. The community considers widows part of their late husband's extended household, and when he dies they usually remain close to his family's home, where they moved when they married. If the widow returns to her family of origin, she is required by her husband's family to leave her children with their father's family. The widows are very vulnerable and subject to strict social supervision that significantly limits their independence and ability to venture beyond the confines of their home. When their husband dies, Arab and Bedouin widows lose the relative independence they had when they were married. In Meler's (2013, 2014) study, the Arab widows she interviewed reported that their husband's relatives question them, and check where they are going and with whom, or who visits them. Moreover, several widows reported that their husband's relatives threatened to take all or some of the financial support they receive from the authorities, and conditioned receipt of the benefits on control over them (Abu-Baker, 2010). In the internal social hierarchy the social status of an Arab widow is considered lower than that of a married woman, and she is expected to display weakness as a symbol of the strength of the marital relationship that ended when her husband died (Abu-Baker, 2010; Givon-Sinai, 2000).

A Bedouin proverb states: "*Al-maut haq*" (الموت حق), death is a right. Bedouins believe that from the day they are born, the day of their death is inscribed on their foreheads, and they cannot challenge what is "*maktoub*", destined. According to the cultural and social traditions, Bedouin

IDF widows, too, are expected to display dependence and live under the strict supervision of their husband's family. However, unlike other widows, their financial support comes from the state by means of the Ministry of Defense, which enables them to establish economic independence, and the emotional support they receive from the Ministry's rehabilitation workers encourages self-empowerment and autonomy.

The research question examined in the present study sought to shed light on how Bedouin IDF widows contend with the tragedy they suffered: How they act in a situation whereby they belong to Bedouin society that by and large objects to military service and does not acknowledge the value of their husband's death and sacrifice in military circumstances. Another question referred to the way the widows have to adopt identity representations of weakness suited to the social perceptions expected from them, and at the same time develop and strengthen their capacity and ability to cope with managing their family following the tragedy. How, then, can Bedouin IDF widows express action representations of independence and autonomy and incorporate them into social representations of submissiveness? The study attempts to examine how the widows act when these different social representations coexist as social representations typified as cognitive polyphasia or conflictual representations.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative phenomenological study in which an attempt was made to understand, describe, and document the unique subjective world of Bedouin IDF widows from the perspective of the study participants.

A study conducted in a conflict environment poses a challenge due to the mistrust and suspicion typifying the participants' attitude toward the researcher. A conflict environment presents the researcher with challenges pertaining to the reciprocal relationship between researcher and participants, accessibility to data, its analysis, interpretation, and presentation (Gagliardone & Stremlau, 2008; Goodhand, 2000). The issue of trust, equality, and reciprocity in an interpersonal encounter is particularly evident when the researcher is identified with one of the sides in the conflict (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). The Bedouin widows' agreement to meet with the Jewish researchers was attended by hesitation in all the participants. The desire to agree to the request of the contact person (usually a relative or dignitary from the tribe) was attended by the participants'

fear of contact with a representative of the establishment. The participants' suspicion resulted in the need to hold the meetings in agreed locations (the widow's home, a neutral public institution, and even the home of one of the researchers), and at times in the presence of additional family members of the widow. When researching "hidden populations" it should be borne in mind that these populations intentionally try to protect themselves against exposure (Watters & Biernacki, 1989). In the case of Bedouin IDF widows there is a dual threat: the Israeli establishment which is perceived as being involved in a political and social conflict with the Bedouins, and Bedouin society itself. Given this situation, it was impossible to reach a large number of participants; consequently, several different information sources were triangulated in order to obtain a broader picture. In addition to seven widows with whom extensive in-depth interviews were held, the researchers also interviewed a relatively large number of public officials involved in taking care of IDF widows, religious figures and community leaders, and social activists in the community who have close familiarity with the world of Bedouin widows in general and IDF widows in particular. Altogether a total of 18 interviews were held with people who were able to provide us with comprehensive information on the widows' life in the Bedouin family and tribe. Due to the reservations of the interviewees, the researchers did not record the interviews, but took written notes during the interviews.

The interviews were analyzed by examining central themes that emerged and which generalize observation of the issue of Bedouin IDF widows beyond the personal case of each one individually. The interviewing researchers added their remarks to the written notes of each interview.

All the interviewees gave their informed consent to participate in the study. Throughout the entire study and its writing the researchers strictly maintained the interviewees' confidentiality and respected their need for protection against possible exposure. All identifying details have been omitted from the article, pseudonyms have been used, and no reference is made to personal events that were related in the interviews if there were concerns that they might reveal the interviewee's identity.

FINDINGS

The common themes that emerged engaged with receiving notification and the beginning of bereavement, the Ministry of Defense's attitude toward Bedouin IDF widows, the relationships with Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers, and coping with bereavement after the tragedy.

The main findings emerging from the widows' stories are presented in accordance with these themes.

Receiving notification

The Bedouin IDF widows' first encounter with the Ministry of Defense takes place immediately after notification of the soldier's death is received, and shortly before the funeral. This is a traumatic time, and the widows are overwhelmed with difficult emotions. When they describe this time they reconstruct all the details, which are imprinted on their memory. The presence of Ministry of Defense representatives is hardly mentioned, and it seems that the shock, the crowds of people in the house, and preparations for the burial leave no room for the widows to get to know the officials on behalf of the state who are meant to help the widow and her family. One widow recounted that a Ministry of Defense representative came on the day of the funeral, but he spoke in Hebrew and she didn't understand what he said (interview with Noor).

Bad news is perceived as a negative life event. Receiving the notification disrupts the individual's familiar knowledge, causing a rupture between the past, present, and future, and puts him in a new situation to which he has to adapt (Ben-Asher & Shalev, 2015; Snyder & Ford, 1987). The process of notifying a soldier's family of his death is structured and grounded in a standard procedure in accordance with Ministry of Defense and IDF regulations, and is carried out by a special IDF unit. Emerging from the interviews with the widows is that despite the strict observance of protocols customary in this area, the IDF has difficulty in implementing this procedure with the families of Bedouin IDF soldiers. It appears that the procedures are not adapted to the Bedouins' living conditions and the absence of accurate addresses, to their culture, and to their religious and traditional customs.

Baile et al. (2000) described a model of steps for delivering bad news: choosing a suitable, secluded, quiet place and involving a significant other in the encounter; assessing the relative's knowledge and perception of their situation, clarifying with them what information they are interested in receiving, gradually conveying the information with emphasis on suitable language,

expressing empathy with their sorrow, and encouraging the expression of emotions, and addressing plans for the near future (see also, Baile, 2015).

The stories of the Bedouin widows about receiving the bad news do not correspond with any of these steps. Almost all of them described a disordered notification process. Most of them received the news from a random, unofficial source without any appropriate professional support. It seems that the process of notifying the fallen soldier's parents was conducted in an orderly fashion, but the procedure was not followed with regard to notifying the widows. One widow, Noor, recounted that her husband's family received the bad news during the night, but she was not notified and only heard about it the next morning from her brother.

At ten o'clock in the morning my uncle's children came and told me Muhammad is dead. No one from the army came to me. Suddenly they came and told me. I felt bad, and I didn't believe it. I didn't believe he was dead. Two months later I went back to my family. [Amani]

I saw people in his parents' house. I went to ask. I saw his mother sitting down with a lot of people around her. I don't know how I knew. No one told me in an orderly manner. Maybe they came to [notify] his parents, but not to me. [Najiya]

I called his phone and he didn't answer. I called again and he didn't answer. His brother came and he was crying. I asked him, Why are you crying? He told me his brother is dead... [Maha]

Another widow received the notification from the sheikh who came to her home.

I saw a pickup truck I don't know with strangers by the hut. I ran home. I lifted my dress and ran. I saw a soldier and our sheikh. The sheikh said, It's over, he's dead. He spoke to me and cried. Within seconds the whole family arrived. The whole family knew, only I didn't. [Samira]

In Samira's case the sheikh assumed the role of the close significant other, both in religious terms and as a respected family authority. The sheikh knew how to deliver the notification in suitable language, with sensitivity, and respect.

IDF soldiers who are killed during their military service can be buried in one of two ways: in a military or civilian funeral. This is the first decision the family has to make. In the Jewish population, if the fallen soldier was married, the decision is made by his wife. In a Bedouin family, the wife is approached but in fact it is her husband's parents and family who make the decision.

On the day he died, the COs came and asked if it should be a military funeral or a regular one. I said, His parents will decide. His parents decided to have a regular funeral, but there were lots and lots of soldiers. [Najiya]

They came from the army and asked what kind of funeral he should have. I don't remember who came. I don't know what they said to me, and back then I didn't know Hebrew yet and I didn't really understand what they said. [Maha]

The gender division is clear: the men express acceptance of death as God's will, and the women keen and give expression to the emotional aspect. In Bedouin society the deceased's burial place is not a site that is visited or where memorial ceremonies are held, especially for women. The grave itself is plain, with a stone inscribed with the deceased's name and burial date. Not one of the widows described visits to the cemetery. The *Day of Remembrance* for the *Fallen Soldiers* of Israel and the ceremonies held in the military cemeteries are not part of the culture and tradition of Bedouin society, and consequently the commemoration processes – in which the meaning of the fallen soldier's death is transferred to the public domain – do not take place in Bedouin society, and as a result the attendant benefits of social acknowledgement and respect are denied to the families of the fallen. According to Islam, the dead are mourned for three days (*hidad*), after which the widow is required to begin organizing her new life. For Bedouin IDF widows this also involves the two partners to the bereavement: the husband's family of origin and the Ministry of Defense, which is responsible for accompanying them in their long rehabilitation process.

Examination of these testimonies in the context of Social Representations Theory clearly reveals that Western social representations, on which Ministry of Defense notification procedures are based, are not suited to the representations of Bedouin society. This not only refers to technical issues such as finding the widow's place of residence (which unlike recognized localities is not marked with a street name or house number), but to different cultural traditions. More on this in the Discussion section. It would seem that in an encounter between the social representations of different cultures in such a difficult and dramatic event it would be incumbent upon the one seeking to provide assistance to learn as much as possible about the beliefs, customs, and norms of the other.

Attitude toward the Ministry of Defense and the state: “It’s like they take care of me, but they don’t”

The Ministry of Defense is responsible for taking care of bereaved families. The basic component of this relationship is the monthly benefit, but it is also attended by important psychosocial services, including contact with a social worker and volunteers, and encouragement and support with regard to employment. The Ministry of Defense is also responsible for erecting a headstone, maintaining the military cemeteries, and commemoration. Details of the various areas of responsibility can be found on a public website². The main banner on the website's homepage states: “With eyes that see, ears that listen, and a heart that cares”, but the website is in Hebrew without Arabic translation, and is consequently inaccessible to people who only speak Arabic.

One of the first tasks facing the widow is preparing for the memorial forty days after her husband's death, which entails preparing a meal for a large number of participants at considerable expense (tradition dictates that she serves mutton, which is more expensive than beef or chicken and are perceived as inferior, and hence serving them does not honor the memory of the deceased or the attendees). This is the first time she has to independently organize an event. At this stage, the role of the Ministry of Defense representatives and the right to receive assistance is not yet clear or known to them:

² <https://www.mishpahot-hantzaha.mod.gov.il/mhn/widowhood/Pages/default.aspx>

When he died my pregnancy was just in the beginning so I was the one who prepared the memorial on the fortieth day. I bought sheep and drinks and rice and **prepared everything on my own**. There was one elderly Jew who helped me. I didn't have a car and we live five kilometers from the road. He came twice and helped me. A woman from Tel Aviv also came. Her name was Ilana. She was already old. Maybe she's already dead. And Nimer who works at the Ministry of Defense also came. He's after the army and he helps them [the Ministry of Defense]. **The Ministry of Defense, they didn't help me, nothing, nothing.**
[Yasmeen]

Although the widow describes a number of people, Ministry of Defense representatives or emissaries, who helped her, she still feels that she was alone. Recurring in almost all the interviews are descriptions of considerable assistance from Ministry of Defense representatives attended by the experience that it does not help them. In the widows' representations the Ministry of Defense is identified with documents for receiving their benefits, with no personal presence or a human face: 'The Ministry of Defense only gives me money and doesn't help me with anything else' [Yasmeen]. The non-personal, technical representation of the Ministry of Defense is reinforced in the widows' sense of foreignness when they receive the publications on their rights and benefits only in Hebrew:

For more than sixteen years I get mail only in Hebrew. It should be written in Arabic. Why do they give us a booklet in Hebrew? There isn't one word here in Arabic [shows the booklet], why not in Arabic? I lost a lot of rights because I don't read Hebrew, but I do read Arabic... [Maha]

The Ministry of Defense is identified with the general establishment representation of the State of Israel, and some of the hostility toward it is associated with the state's handling of the of the prolonged land conflict with the Negev Bedouins and their struggle to settle in unrecognized villages by means of illegal construction. The tension between the state's respect for the Bedouin widows and the alienation expressed in enforcing the law is evident in the following story:

On Remembrance Day they brought me flowers and the Israeli flag and told me they hadn't forgotten me. Next day fifty people from the Border Police, the unit my husband served in, came and demolished my son's house which I built for him. The house was demolished by the Border Police and they fought against an army widow and orphans. [Maha]

Evident here too is the presence of the different social representations in Western society and Bedouin society. Absence of mediation between the two representation systems by means of a common language (e.g., translating official documents concerning the widows' rights from Hebrew into Arabic) results in a situation in which one group is in effect stronger since the information on resources is accessible to it. In contrast, the other group (which in this case only speaks Arabic) is disadvantaged since it cannot read the information on its rights. The experience of inferiority does not end in the cognitive aspect and has multiple implications for the emotional aspect and the possibility of developing polyphasic representations of distance and closeness toward state institutions.

Relationships with Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers

All the interviewed widows maintained regular contact with Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers. The emerging picture is one of support and assistance for the widow, both in organizing her family after the loss and in emotional support over many years. Some of the widows faced pressure from their families to hand over their financial benefits and accept the status of a needy woman under the family's control. This period is often described in war terms.

His parents made my life even harder than what happened to me. They don't understand that it's hard for me because the children were young and they started making problems for me. All the time the family thought how much money we got out of him and they tried to get money. The family thought they'd get millions. It was a harder period than the war. It was a war with my husband's family and we disconnected. The war started. [Najiya]

In the struggle to protect their entitlement to the monthly Ministry of Defense benefits, the position of the Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers was firm and unequivocal: they supported the widows and encouraged them to remain independent, and not hand over their benefits to their husband's family. They encouraged them to open a bank account and learn how to manage the family finances. 'Hedva said, We give the money to the children and it's all done through the mother because they're minors' [Najiya]. When the social worker tells the widow 'we give money' she means the state by means of the Ministry of Defense. The widows do not view the rehabilitation workers as representing the state, which is an abstract, undefined entity, but with multiple negative associations. The rehabilitation workers are perceived personally, and the attitude toward them is personal, not institutional. They support and encourage the widows: 'They tell me, You're a strong woman. I go everywhere on my own. I don't need anyone to take me' [Munira]. 'If I was a weak woman I don't know what would have become of me, but in my character I'm strong' [Maha].

The psychosocial assistance is not limited to empowering the widows and encouraging them to be independent, but covers many aspects of life: education, placement frameworks for the children, treatment when an adolescent gets into trouble with the law, and help in the enlistment of boys in the IDF. Some of the assistance pertains to new challenges the widow faces, activities that in the past were reserved exclusively for the men in the family: 'I built a house and the social worker helped me with the solar heating' [Munira]. Despite the considerable assistance, there is still a sense of dissatisfaction since the assistance provided by the Ministry of Defense is partially perceived as ineffective in contrast with the assistance required:

What I want from the Ministry of Defense is for them to not only come on holidays and say *mabrouk* and bring presents and wish me Happy Holiday. I want them to help me with my eldest son who's dropped out of school. Now he takes my car even though he doesn't have a license.

The impression is one of regular contact, part of which is initiated by the rehabilitation workers and part by the widows: 'The Ministry of Defense social worker calls all the time. He helped with the car and with dental treatment' [Noor].

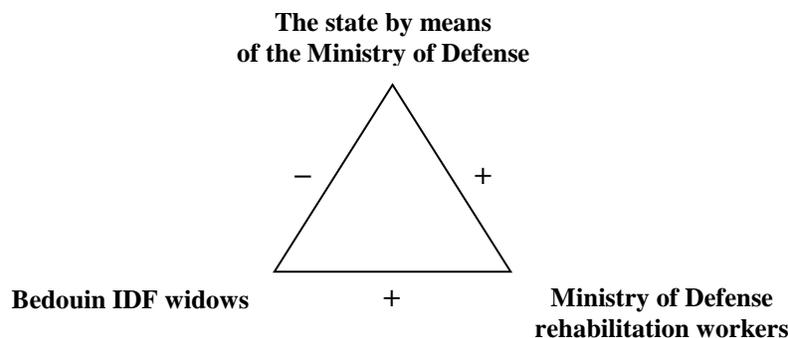
The identity of the rehabilitation workers as Ministry of Defense employees is known to the widows:

After he died, Idit was my social worker. She would come every week and then every ten days, and she'd give me guidance. She was from the Ministry of Defense and looks after the Bedouin IDF widows... **The Ministry of Defense only gives money and doesn't help with anything else.** [Najiya].

The confusion regarding the Ministry of Defense as a beneficial or alienated body, and the role of the social worker as an empathic mediator for the widow is expressed by a widow whose husband died from an illness during his military service.

The Ministry of Defense didn't recognize us³. It says Muhammad died because of the illness. For eight years I was in the courts and it wasn't put right. I cried constantly. There was a social worker who came to me and I'd tell her what was happening with me, and because I cried so much she cried too. **It's like they take care of me, but they don't.** [Najiya]

In the complex three-sided relationship between the Ministry of Defense (which is identified with the state), the rehabilitation workers, and the widows, polyphasic representations gain expression.



³ The husband's death was not caused by military activities, but by illness.

Figure 1: Social representations of Bedouin IDF widows toward the Ministry of Defense and the rehabilitation workers

The diagram (figure 1) shows the coexistence of positive representations toward the rehabilitation workers and negative representations toward the Ministry of Defense. Despite the inconsistency between them, they are not conflictual representations whereby the widows adopt the representations of Israeli society, but cognitive polyphasia that does not create tension in the widows. They refer to the monthly benefit awarded to them by the state and the assistance of the social workers as an expected and normal reality of life. They do not require a logical explanation that demands an examination of the relationship and the connection between the rehabilitation workers and the Ministry of Defense, and between them and the social workers and the state. In contrast, conflictual representations emerge toward the husband's family and the expectation for them to display weakness and dependence. These conflictual representations will be described in detail in the following section.

Coping with bereavement and the journey of rehabilitation

The situation of Bedouin IDF widows is complex: on the one hand, the benefits they are entitled to from the Ministry of Defense provide them with economic power, but on the other these benefits create severe tensions with the husband's family and weaken their connection with it. Some of the support the widows received from the rehabilitation workers is described through the struggle with the husband's family over the benefit money and the children's upbringing. The widows are aware of men's power, and view the very fact of keeping the money for themselves as an achievement: 'I know a widow who remarried and the new husband takes the Ministry of Defense money from her every month. I didn't let him [her current husband] come near my money' [Munira]. An example of the struggle over the benefits emerges from Najiya's account.

A month after he died his brother came to see the social worker with lots of documents and told her that she has to transfer the money to his account, not mine. The social worker said that the money is given only to the mother of the children. His family didn't want to see me anymore. All this strengthened me even more. Every blow and blow strengthened me more.

From the interviewed widows' accounts it emerges that their independence is connected to the regular financial resource and the rehabilitation workers' support. Some of the strength and encouragement to be independent comes from the support groups initiated and organized by the Ministry of Defense. In these groups, facilitated by two social workers, the widows developed awareness of their power.

In addition to the monthly benefit the most important resource is the Ministry of Defense support in developing their mobility, with driving constituting a symbol of the widows' struggle for independence. In the widows' accounts, the story of obtaining a driving license features as a significant achievement in their positioning in relation to their husband's family. Noor related that it is not customary in her family for a woman to drive. When her father found out she was taking driving lessons, he summoned her and demanded that she stop since she is not allowed to leave the vicinity of the family home. Noor responded by saying that she has to bring the children home from school after the annual school trip or take them to the clinic when they are sick. Her father continued to object and forbade her to continue her driving lessons. Noor did not back down, and with help from her brothers she secretly continued learning to drive, sometimes covered in a veil.

There's a man who knows me and he saw me, but he thought I was someone else and didn't say anything [...] I passed the test on my fourth try without anyone knowing. The license came in the mail to my parents' address, and my father opened the mail and discovered that I'd got my driving license.

The widows spoke about the encouragement they received from the rehabilitation workers to learn how to drive, about the enjoyment they derive from driving, and how driving their own car led to the emergence of a positive self-image and a sense of competence.

Six years after I became a widow I took the test for a driving license and passed the first time. Then I bought a car, and I do all my shopping and errands myself. The people in the Ministry of Defense, they tell me: You're a strong woman. I go all on my own. I don't need anyone to take me. [Samira]

The IDF widows' journey of coping with bereavement is complex and complicated: building a new intimate relationship and remarriage is virtually only possible within the husband's family, and in any event it would be a polygamous marriage. Traditionally, a Bedouin widow is perceived as needing the patronage and protection of a man, for which she has to pay a high personal price, especially with regard to relinquishing her wishes and needs. However, the monthly benefit from the Ministry of Defense opens up new possibilities for her, different from the traditional ones. The driving license, the car, and the encouragement they receive from the Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers to study and become independent, all bring with them perceptions of new possibilities: 'Before my husband died I'd never been into a bank [...] When I went to study I didn't tell anyone from my family. They didn't know. I went to study on my own money' [Maha].

The interviewees' personal growth and their contact with the Ministry of Defense also confronted them with the need to contend with the negative attitude of Bedouin society toward the Ministry of Defense as representing the State of Israel.

How can the new representations of independence, efficacy, and power be adopted into the hegemonic representations, whereby the widow is expected to display weakness and dependence, without them becoming conflictual representations? From the widows' accounts it emerges that the way they achieve this is through individual conversations with the social workers, in the support groups where they discuss the sense of personal empowerment and satisfaction they gain from autonomously managing their life in their own home, while outwardly they display submissiveness and weakness in order to fit into the patriarchal social world they belong to and to which they are committed.

DISCUSSION: COGNITIVE POLYPHASIA, CONFLICTUAL REPRESENTATIONS, AND GROWTH OUT OF CRISIS

The stories of the Bedouin IDF widows reveal the social and emotional difficulties they face. The patterns of bereavement and social attitudes toward them are grounded in tradition and religion, but also in the political reality of national and military struggles. The monthly benefit they receive from the state does not strengthen their sense of identification with the state, but formally arranges the state's responsibility toward them. In their everyday life the widows face the need to rehabilitate their life within a maze of clashing beliefs and messages. The unique way the widows

found to live within clashing identities and conflicting needs is by distancing and rejecting the social representations of identifying with Israel as a nationality and with the state's official institutions. They separate their appreciation of and gratitude to the rehabilitation workers from their organizational and institutional belonging to the Ministry of Defense as a state organ.

In his book, *Resolving Social Conflicts*, Kurt Lewin (1948) writes that all the individual's actions are based on the need to feel stable on the ground he walks. This stability is achieved first and foremost by a sense of belonging. He posits that for most of his life the individual belongs to more than one group, and pressure is exerted on him to simultaneously be part of the group but also to act in accordance with his unique needs that are more suited to another social group. Bedouin IDF widows are part of the Bedouin family and tribe, which they do not challenge, and they adopt the hegemonic identity representations. Their exposure to other representations creates a situation wherein people sometimes ignore the background and focus on the figure and the event (Lewin, 1948), in other words they act in cognitive polyphasia. The widows almost consistently avoid entering into conflicts, and they act in such a way that the encounter between these two types of representations does not lead to the creation of polemical representations. Since the role of social representations is to guide them to act in accordance with shared codes and thus facilitate a sense of identity and social cohesion, the widows continue to cling to these representations. It is evident how a social representation reflects the internalization of expectations and representations associated with the individual's place in his society (Tajfel, 1981). Sammut and Gaskell (2010) and Jovchelovitch (2008) contended that social positioning is grounded in social and cultural practices, and hence social representations are consequential by the very fact of the widows being Palestinian, Bedouin, and women. As Palestinians they are expected to express reservations toward the State of Israel and its institutions. Their attitude to Israel and its institutions is not an independent choice, but part of the hegemonic representations in the society in which they live, and a result of historical, political, and social circumstances.

How do the widows manage to reconcile this hegemonic representation with the new information and experience that exposes them to tangible assistance from the state and Ministry of Defense rehabilitation workers? The widows greatly appreciate the rehabilitation workers when their assistance is relevant, but they do so while separating it from their distant attitude toward Israel. As Israel's executive organ the IDF represents demolition of houses in unrecognized Bedouin villages and fighting against their relatives in the Gaza Strip. This separation creates a

picture of the world that does not require harmony or coherence, but “common sense” that helps them to act in complex situations (Lloyd & Duveen, 1990).

Three loci can be identified with regard to the nature of bereavement and ways of representation in Bedouin society compared to those customary in Jewish society: The notification of death, the funeral, and commemoration. The procedure of notifying the wife of her husband's death is performed in accordance with the codes and procedures adopted by the IDF, which are based on Western traditions. The IDF has not made any fundamental changes to its procedures when it is required to notify a Bedouin family. However, due to the Bedouins' living conditions, in all the cases described the official notification was given first to the husband's family (parents and brothers), and the widows received the news of the tragedy later and indirectly. The greatest disparity between the representations of bereavement in Western culture and those in Muslim Bedouin culture pertains to commemoration ceremonies. Annual commemoration ceremonies, written or photographed commemoration, or memorial monuments, and initiated activities (memorial races, scholarships, and so forth) are not customary in Bedouin society. The social representation of remembrance is non-remembrance. It was found that the Bedouin widows do not adopt new representations, and adhere to the hegemonic representations belonging to the tradition with which they are familiar.

The greatest clash between the hegemonic and the new, emancipated representations appears in the third locus of their social status as IDF widows. The widows are expected to behave like weak women who need the patronage of the family in general and of men in particular. The economic status of IDF widows changes the picture since unlike other widows who have to rely on family support, IDF widows do not need to rely financially on the extended family. This change leads to the widow's need to build a new worldview both of herself and with regard to her behavior within the family and the tribe. A driving license as a symbol of independence presents the emergence of emancipated representations. All the widows in the present study underwent a process of personal development, sometimes referred to as post-traumatic growth, as a result of new knowledge and ideas they acquired after their husband's death. The ability to maintain economic independence, mobility, to make family decisions, and decisions about the rest of their life (place of residence, remarriage, employment, and acquiring an education) lead them to act in a way that invites the emergence of polemical representations.

The social identity of Bedouin IDF widows as belonging to the family, the tribe, the Negev Bedouin sector, the Palestinian people, and Islam, does not change when their husband dies. The widows expend considerable efforts to avoid arousing frictions or clashes between their new social representations and the hegemonic and traditional representations: they learn how to drive in secret (at times with their face veiled), they endeavor to acquire an education without leaving their residential area, and continue to outwardly treat men with respect. From the interviews it emerges that when the widow develops personal resilience, which is manifested in activities she did not perform before, but does so with respect and consideration, in most cases their society eventually enables adoption of the new emancipated representations into the hegemonic representations in terms of expanding the accepted social possibilities. In this way society acknowledges the legitimacy of diversity, as two interviewees from the community expressed with a tone of respect for one of the widows in the tribe: 'She's a strong widow'. Worthy of note in this regard is the Bedouin widows support group organized by the rehabilitation workers who help them, by means of support and solidarity between the widows themselves, to view the new representations as legitimate and as being able to coexist with prior representations in the form of cognitive polyphasia, wherein different systems of knowledge exist simultaneously in the social domain, naturally and without being confronted with one another.

The present study shows that the road to Bedouin widows being accepted by their society as independent and empowered is still a long one. The community of Bedouin IDF widows is very small and has no social attribution. The widows' bereavement is not valued in Bedouin society, and at times the circumstances of the husband's death will even be considered "just". This positions them as a highly vulnerable group. The creative means Bedouin IDF widows employ to navigate their lives through the maze of clashing representations are typified by guarding against public exposure and the constant need to remain vigilant to ensure their rights are not taken away from them, while rehabilitating their and their children's life after their husband's death. In this complex situation the state institutions responsible for supporting IDF widows need to gain a much deeper familiarity with the hegemonic social representations of the society in which the Bedouin widows live. The assistance to these widows in rehabilitating their personal and family life needs to be provided out of respect for the traditions, identity representations, and bereavement representations of traditional Bedouin society, and by constructing action representations of empowerment and autonomy suited the new reality of bereavement. The

findings of the present study can in all likelihood apply to other ethnic groups possessing similar cultural characteristics to Bedouins. For instance, like Bedouin IDF widows, Brahmin widows are considered inferior, and although they are physically alive, socially it is as though they died together with their husband (Rose & Sreedharan, 2005). Nigerian widows undergo humiliation, abuse, and oppression (Ezejiolor, 2011), and society expects Indian widows to display inferiority and passivity, they lose the freedom to wear attractive saris, and like Bedouin widows, they live under the strict supervision of men (Ullrich, 2011). In their study, Wagner et al. (2012) compared the views of Muslim women in India and Indonesia on wearing a veil. The findings show that religious minorities construct their identity with their membership group by submitting to its familiar markers and norms. Identity representations are constructed in a process of negotiation, in connecting the similar and the different, and stereotypical representations are an inseparable part of power relations, of pooling rights within a discriminatory society. Consequently, it is of paramount importance to respect the norms and traditions of women in minority groups and their need to adhere to them as a significant component of their identity.

The findings of the present study reinforce the need to listen to the voices of Bedouin IDF widows as a unique group, and providing them with rehabilitation assistance should be founded on familiarity with the traditions, religion, culture, and mindset in Bedouin society. Every stage in the treatment of these widows needs to be adapted, from notification and accompaniment during the first days of bereavement, through assistance in economic, family, and personal coping during the prolonged rehabilitation process, all of which have to be suited to the widows' cultural-social codes in addition to being grounded in the extensive body of knowledge in the field of loss, bereavement, and the factors that strengthen resilience and reinforce post-traumatic growth.

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