

The Double Exclusion of Bedouin War Widows

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Abstract

We critically examine the officially declared policy vis-a-vis the actual fulfilment of minorities' equal rights in Israel. According to the theory of democratic exclusion, minority groups are tacitly disadvantaged despite formal policies and laws aimed at ensuring equality. We showcase this phenomenon in a hitherto unstudied minority sector in Israel, namely Bedouin Israel Defence Forces (IDF) war widows. Analysis of in-depth interviews has led us to expose a failure to take the unique religious and cultural imperatives and restrictions into consideration, as well as a paradox of Bedouin war widows' entitlement to equal rights while reporting suffering discrimination, exclusion, and marginalisation. In the name of these silenced Israeli citizens we call this severe violation of civil rights to public awareness and propose some practical suggestions as to how to adjust the provision of treatment and support to their cultural features, in order to truly adhere to the democratic vision.

Keywords

Bedouin Israel Defence Forces (IDF) war widows – bereavement – democratic exclusion – minorities – rehabilitation – war widows

1 Introduction

Israeli society is composed of a variety of ethnic and religious sectors, and therefore faces many problems and tensions stemming from the interrelationships

among these sectors. A major controversy relates to resource allocation for each segment, which is accompanied by implicit and explicit struggles over limited resources. Israel is a democratic state that champions policy making in various realms for achieving equality, justice, and tolerance of multiculturalism. Despite the formal policies and laws aimed at ensuring equity, some sectors protest practices and behaviours which they experience as discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation, and alienation. Our project showcases a failure of policy makers to take into consideration the diverse religious and cultural imperatives and restrictions of minorities when planning professional interventions. We point to a lacuna in the current rehabilitation policy under a democratic regime which categorically claims to support policies that enhance multiculturalism.

1.1 *The Aim of the Project*

An official document relating to the treatment of bereaved families was submitted in July 2010 to the deputy chair and head of the rehabilitation unit in the Ministry of Defence by the committee he had appointed. Recommendation no. 4 is as follows:

Unique needs of minority populations and adjustment of the treatment

The committee recommends that the treatment of bereaved families should be adjusted to the special needs of minority populations. It is necessary to invest efforts in developing culturally sensitive expertise which is able to evaluate and cope with the socio-political changes that occur within these communities. National identity and women's status necessitate special attention.

In light of this formal, yet general and vague guideline, we sought to examine whether Bedouin war widows are satisfied with the support provided by the authorities and whether they are truly able to receive and utilise all the kinds of support to which they are entitled. Since these widows are excluded and discriminated against in a democratic state, we believe that Kook's theory of democratic exclusion is highly useful for the purpose of providing an analytical framework for exploring this hitherto unstudied topic.¹

The article is constructed as follows: we first present the theory of democratic exclusion and present the Bedouin war widows as our case study. We then

¹ R.B. Kook, *The Logic of Democratic Exclusion: African Americans in the United States and Palestinian Citizens in Israel* (Lexington Books, Oxford, 2002).

describe the main features of Bedouin society, Bedouin military bereavement and describe the lives of Bedouin widows. A brief methodological section describes our sources of data and then follows our interpretation of the analysed data. We conclude by proposing theoretical and practical recommendations for the provision of social services to members of minority groups, which are designed to decrease the level of democratic exclusion.

1.2 *The Theory of Democratic Exclusion*

Kook proposes a theorem that provides a description of the exclusion of minorities in democratic regimes. She maintains that democracy should be evaluated by the wellbeing of minorities and the level of their inclusion in society. Analyses of the status of Africans in the US and Palestinians in Israel have led Kook to point out a paradox wherein democratic societies succeed “not *despite* the exclusion of different groups, but rather *through* the maintenance of such exclusionary policies”.² Kook explains the exclusion of minorities from entitlement to rights and benefits by the efforts of democratic regimes to ameliorate legitimacy from the public. Most often the exclusion is based on national identity which grants certain groups accessibility to public goods and services while other groups are denied these privileges. As she puts it: “Relying on the rigid and exclusive boundaries of nationality enables democracies – regimes that are committed to principles of equal and universal membership – to maintain exclusive and exclusionary entrance criteria, while at the same time maintaining a façade of democratic legitimacy”.³ Since exclusionary practices lessen state costs and minimise free riding, exclusion seems to be a good mechanism for democratic societies to gain stability.

It is noteworthy that Kook views exclusionary performance not as a failure to fulfil the ideal of democracy, but rather as an inherent component which fuels the engine of the system. Exclusion serves democratic regimes in enhancing the formation of a shared national identity, which is conceptualised by Kook as inherently exclusive.⁴ In her view, Palestinian citizens of Israel are discriminated against and cannot fully utilise the rights to which they are entitled. Democracies are responsible for providing their citizens with three categories of public functions: a) national defence; b) public order and the administration of justice; and c) elementary provision of public services. Relevant to our case study is the third kind of public ‘goods’ which includes, for example, public schools, water or electricity infrastructure and the like, all to be financed

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

by taxation.⁵ In order to enforce public contribution to the state budget, the state may encourage a collective contribution and discourage those who do not cooperate with the prescribed system. To decrease the number of consumers for these state-funded services, democratic regimes tend to define imagined boundaries between in-group and out-group members; the latter would be denied access to public goods and services if they do not contribute to the production of these goods.⁶

1.3 *Bedouin Society in the State of Israel*

According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the Israeli population in April 2015 was 8.345 million people. The Arab sector is about 20.73% of Israel's population, of whom approximately 84% are Moslems (including 3.5% Bedouin), 7.8% Christians, and 8.1% Druze.⁷ The Bedouin are a small minority group within the Arab sector in Israel that maintains a relationship with other Bedouin communities in other countries.⁸ The Bedouin population in Israel is estimated to be approximately 260,000, with 200,000 Bedouin in the Negev and 60,000 Bedouin in northern Israel. They were granted full Israeli citizenship in 1967, rendering them equal entitlement to all civil privileges and duties, like all other Israeli citizens.⁹ As a minority within a minority, they experience a higher level of economic, social, and political marginalization than the Arabs who live in urban areas of the country.¹⁰ Half of the Bedouins of the Negev live in designated Bedouin-Arab villages, and the remaining half reside in unrecognised villages.¹¹ Hence, there are some 45 villages in the Negev that are not recognised by the State of Israel and lack basic services, such as water, electricity, health services, and education.¹²

5 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

7 *Israeli Population by Religion*, 2015, CBS, <http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton66/sto2_02.pdf>, visited on 27 March 2016.

8 A. Al-Krenawi and N. Slater, 'Bedouin-Arab Children Use Visual Art as a Response to the Destruction of their Homes in Unrecognized Villages', 47:3 *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (2007) pp. 288–305.

9 Y. Ben-David and A. Gonen, *The Urbanization of the Bedouin and Bedouin-Fallakhin in the Negev* (The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, Jerusalem, 2001) (Hebrew).

10 S.C. Dinero, 'Special Education Use among the Negev Bedouin Arabs of Israel: A Case of Minority under Representation?', 5:2 *Race Ethnicity and Education* (2002), visited 15 April 2016, doi: 10.1080/1361332022000030897.

11 S.C. Dinero, *Settling for Less: The Planned Resettlement of Israel's Negev Bedouin* (Berghahn, London, 2010).

12 S. Abu Rabia-Queder, *Dropout by Teenage Girls from Bedouin Schools in the Negev: Fear, Discrimination and Otherness, Report* (Center for the Study of Arab Society in Israel, Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 2004).

The Negev makes up the southern half of Israel and is characterised by a desert climate and topography. The community cultural practices are traditional and conservative, and great significance is attached to the collective rather than individual identity, an identity which is based on concurrently belonging to a patriarchic family, an extended family, and a tribe.¹³ Because the Bedouin war widows lost their husband during military action in an army in a state where they constitute an ethnic minority, the following section presents a brief overview of Bedouin servicemen in the Israeli army.

1.4 *Bedouin Military Service in the IDF*

Although military service is not mandatory for Bedouin, they have served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) ever since the 1950s on a voluntary basis. Most of them serve as trackers in minority units, and the rest choose to volunteer in other military units. There are two central Bedouin units: the desert patrolmen battalion that includes 20% of the Bedouin soldiers, and the unit of trackers which includes 40% of Bedouin soldiers. Seven per cent of Bedouin soldiers serve as border patrolmen. Military service in the IDF is a controversial issue, and there was a decline in the number of Bedouin who enlisted after the second *intifada* (uprising) and the rising influence of the Islamic movement in the Bedouin society. Currently every year 300–400 Bedouin men enlist in the military.

When analysing the narratives of 24 Palestinian soldiers, Kanaaneh has concluded that “many of the soldiers spoke extensively about contradictions, hesitations, dilemmas, regrets, and changes of minds”.¹⁴ Another observation made by Kanaaneh is that these soldiers stress that they try to be “fair” and “good” to Arabs while performing their duties, and make efforts to provide kind and gentle treatment to the Arab citizens.¹⁵ These findings correspond to the research literature that documents the ways soldiers of ethnic minorities are at high risk of psychological problems following the performance of military missions in war zones.¹⁶ Like other veterans from minority backgrounds, the Bedouin servicemen are considered to be at a high risk of developing trauma-related

13 A. Al-Krenawi and J.R. Graham, ‘Social Work and Blood Vengeance: The Bedouin-Arab Case’, 27:4 *British Journal of Social Work* (1997), pp. 515–528, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjsw.a011239>.

14 R. Kanaaneh, ‘Embattled Identities: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military’, 32:3 *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2003) 5–20.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

16 R.A. Kulka et al., *Trauma and the Vietnam War Generation: Report of Finding from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study* (Brunner/Mazel, New York, 1990); P.B. Sutker et al., ‘Assessment of Psychological Distress in Persian Gulf Troops: Ethnicity and Gender Comparisons’, 64:3 *Journal of Personality Assessment* (1995) pp. 415–427, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa6403_2.

problems.¹⁷ Another source of trauma among Bedouin soldiers is their involvement in military operations against Palestinians, their fellow Muslim Arabs, who took part in the first intifada; This complex situation has led to identification with the victims of combat.¹⁸

1.4.1 Arab Widows in Israel

An understanding of the social position of Arab war widows in Israel is best attained in the wider context of the status of women as well as the nature of family life in Arab society. These women live in a patriarchal order¹⁹ and are weakened by both structural factors, i.e. a low rate of participation in the labour force, as more than 90% of the women are unemployed²⁰ and also by cultural beliefs and practices which regard women as men's property and allow men to marry more than one woman. Abu Rabia estimates that 30% of marriages in the Bedouin society are polygamous, and she sees polygamy as part of the reality of the lives of Bedouin women. In her view, polygamy reflects the ongoing oppression and exclusion of Arab Bedouin women who try to resist a patriarchal tribal society that wishes to perpetuate the social supremacy of men. She expresses her disappointment with the criminal justice system, the Islamic (Shar'ia) system, and the Palestinian leadership in Israel, which are each expected to protect these women and fail to do so.²¹

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- 17 O.Y. Slobodin et al., 'Resource Loss and Posttraumatic Responses in Bedouin Members of the Israeli Defense Forces', 24:1 *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (2011) pp. 54–60, doi: 10.1002/jts.20615.
- 18 A.J. Marsella, C. Chemtob, and R. Hamada, 'Ethnocultural Aspects of PTSD in Vietnam War Veterans', 16:4 *National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Clinical Newsletter* (1990) pp. 17–26, doi: 10.1177/1534765610388062.
- 19 A. Al-Krenawi and V. Slonim-Nevo, 'The Psychological Profile of Bedouin Arab Women Living in Polygamous and Monogamous Marriages', 89:1 *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* (2008) pp. 139–149, doi: 10.1606/1044-3894.3718; M.M. Haj-Yahia, 'Toward Culturally Sensitive Intervention with Arab Families in Israel', 17:4 *Contemporary Family Theory* (1995) pp. 429–447, doi: 10.1007/BF02249355; H. Herzog et al., 'Absent Voices: Citizenship and Identity Narratives of Palestinian Women in Israel', in A. Kemp (ed.), *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies Identities and Challenges* (Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2004) pp. 236–252; A. Sa'ar, 'Contradictory Location: Assessing the Position of Palestinian Women Citizen of Israel', 3:3 *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (2007) pp. 45–74, doi: 10.2979/mew.2007.3.3.45.
- 20 Ma'an – Forum of Women's Organizations in the Negev, *The Arab Woman in the Negev: Reality and Challenges* (2005), visited 15 April 2016, <http://www.iataskforce.org/entities/view/140>.
- 21 S. Abu- Rabia-Queder, 'Higher Education as a Platform for Cultural Transition: The Case of the First Educated Bedouin Women in Israel', 65:2 *Higher Education Quarterly* (2011) pp. 186–205, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00477.x.

Family life in Palestinian society is collective: each individual is expected to show concern for the wellbeing of the extended family and the tribe. Hence, family members from wider circles, not only from first and second orders, are expected to demonstrate mutual concern and assistance, especially in difficult situations. Arab widows preferred receiving emotional and social support from their family of origin, however, were disappointed when their own relatives failed to fulfil these needs.²² These widows could not also benefit from official state-funded welfare services, which is experienced as disappointing, inefficient, not transparent, and unavailable, thus causing feelings of rejection and discontent; this is due to a lack of consideration of their unique cultural features.²³ Therefore, they had to turn to non-familial sources such as psychologists, spiritualists, and feminist activists to receive the psychological support needed.²⁴

Meler conducted a field study among divorced, separated or widowed Israeli-Palestinian single mothers.²⁵ The accepted custom is that after marriage, women leave their family of origin and live near the husband's family, a custom that in itself grants the husband greater conjugal power. If the husband dies, it is unacceptable for a woman to leave her deceased's husband tribe and move with her children to another place, an act which is negatively sanctioned by informal marginalisation. If a widow does return to her own family, in line with patrilineal and patrilocal norms she is usually required by her deceased's husband relatives to leave her children with them. This is in sharp contrast to Israeli law that grants her full custody of her children.²⁶

A Jewish war widow serves as a national symbol and is expected to commemorate her fallen husband, thus perpetuating cultural values of patriotism and heroism.²⁷ Since the Al-Aksa intifada in 2000, there has been a similar

22 D. Giveon-Sinai, *The Relationship between Support Systems and Personal Wellbeing of Arab Widows* (Master's Thesis, University of Haifa, 2000); S. Grushka-Lazover, *The Arab Single-Headed Family in Jaffa: The Influence of Social Support, Feeling of Coherence and Attitudes Toward Single Parenting on the Sense of Wellbeing, by Comparing to Jewish Single-Parent Families* (Master's Thesis, University of Haifa, 1999).

23 Giveon-Sinai, *supra* note 22.

24 T. Meler, "I Do What I Please, but Even so, I see a Psychologist": Palestinian Divorced and Widowed Mothers in Israel, 11:3 *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (2015) pp. 306–324.

25 T. Meler, 'Currencies of Social Support: Israeli-Palestinian Single Mothers in their Families and Communities', 13:3 *Comparative Sociology* (2014) pp. 315–341, doi: 10.1163/15691330-12341307.

26 T. Meler, "A Widow is from Allah, so a Widow is Better than a Divorced": Israeli Palestinian Widows: Central Issues, 2 *Migdar: A Journal of Gender and Feminism* (2013) (in Hebrew).

27 S. Ben-Asher and U. Lebel, 'Social Structure vs. Self-Rehabilitation: IDF Widows Forming an Intimate Relationship in the Sociopolitical Discourse', 1:2 *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology* (2010) pp. 17–28.

appropriation of the private bereavement over dead Palestinians who fought against Israel. Bedouin soldiers have fallen during their military service and have left many widows behind. As mentioned above, polygamy is customary in this population, hence some of the fallen soldiers have left two or three widows, and hence a relatively large number of children were left orphaned. Their societal position should be evaluated within the patriarchic order²⁸ that forces them to stay within the domestic sphere and refrain from participating in the labour force. According to Ma'an,²⁹ 80–90% of the Bedouin women are unemployed and leave their house or village very rarely, usually for receiving medical care or shopping for certain products. Arab widows are subject to strict control and monitored regarding where they go and with whom, or who visits them.³⁰ Furthermore, some widows reported that their husbands' relatives appropriate the financial support that these widows receive from the authorities, which further increases their emotional and economic vulnerability. Others who did manage to have control over their pensions and obtain them in full from the authorities, felt that people were jealous of them for receiving a monthly pension, and were therefore forced to support men from their family of origin.³¹ The widow usually needs financial support from family relatives, and this is a source of additional tension and conflict within the extended family.³²

2 Methodology

Prior to beginning the study, ethical approval was secured from the Committee for the Approval of Research Involving the Participation of Human Subjects (IRB) of Bar-Ilan University. We embarked on a phenomenological research project aimed at exploring the subjective experiences of Bedouin women whose husbands died while they were serving in the armed forces of the state to which their community harbours some animosity. It is important to mention here that the project was conducted in an area and an atmosphere of conflict, which was more intense than usual during the time of the interviews (from the end of 2015 to the beginning of 2016) when violent conflicts between

28 Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo, *supra* note 19; Haj-Yahia, *supra* note 19; Herzog et al., *supra* note 19; Sa'ar, *supra* note 19.

29 Ma'an, *supra* note 20.

30 Meler, *supra* note 26.

31 K. Abu-Baker, *Family and Class among the Arab Society in Israel* (The Open University, Tel Aviv, 2007) (Hebrew); Grushka-Lazover, *supra* note 22; Meler, *supra* note 26.

32 Giveon-Sinai, *supra* note 22; Meler, *supra* note 25.

Jews and Arabs occurred almost every day and sometimes several times a day, followed by public mass demonstrations by both sides. For social scientists, a field of ongoing dispute and hostility poses unique challenges stemming from the loaded interrelations between them and the study population,³³ including issues of balance of power and asymmetry between the researchers and their objects of inquiry. Understandably, accessibility to our prospective interviewees was restricted, to say the least, and the compliance rate was lower than in our previous studies. The undertaking of studying a field under violent conflict is much more difficult if the researcher belongs to one of the parties³⁴ and is most likely to be perceived as identifying with the enemy, as was the case in our project. The authors are Jewish women employed in Israeli academic institutions and their knowledge of the Bedouin culture is limited to what is written in academic articles. Hence, the analysis and interpretation of the narratives necessitated a thorough and extensive reading about Bedouin culture in general, and military bereavement and the social status of women in particular. We believe that collaborating with an Arab-speaking scholar could have contributed both to the communication with our interviewees and to the validity of our analysis and interpretations.

2.1 *Sampling*

The sampling was aided by members of the personal and professional network of the second author. She contacted several leaders of the Bedouin community and family relatives of widows whom she had previously met in other circumstances. Hence, trust relationships were built on the basis of shared acquaintances. The consent to be interviewed regarding the experience of being an IDF widow was accompanied by much hesitation; therefore, the location of the interview became an issue, unlike other studies that involve personal interviews. All the interviews except for one were conducted in the presence of a female family relative. These relatives arrived for two purposes: to drive the widow to the place of the interview and to translate the accounts told by the widow, whose Hebrew was poor.

Our data is based on interviews with seven widows, of whom the youngest is 34 years old and the oldest is 60 years old. Because of the small size of their communities, and the close interrelations between members of each extended family and/or tribe, any further information about the number of their

33 T. Arieli and N. Cohen. 'Policy Entrepreneurs and Post-Conflict Cross-Border Cooperation: A Conceptual Framework and the Israeli-Jordanian Case', 46:3 *Policy Sciences* (2013) pp. 237–256.

34 *Ibid.*

orphaned children, the circumstances of the husband's death, or the number of his wives is likely to reveal their identity, and hence we refrain from providing any socio-demographic or additional information other than age. Each interviewee is cited in the results section under a pseudonym.

2.2 *Research Tool*

The interviews with the Bedouin widows included open-ended questions which related to the circumstances of the first introduction/meeting the husband; the circumstances of the husband's death; perceptions of their family and societal status; relationships with the husband's family and, if he was married to additional wives, the relationships with them before and after his death; expectations of the IDF and the state regarding instrumental, psychological, and financial support; and finally their own ways of coping with the loss. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and a half and were documented in writing during the interview, after obtaining the consent of the interviewees. Special attention was given to nonverbal cues, such as crying or facial expressions. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and were informed that they may contact the interviewer, if they wish.

2.3 *Data Analysis*

Microanalysis of the text³⁵ to identify common themes was conducted as follows. At the beginning of the data analysis stage, each author separately conducted a thorough reading of the interview protocols and proposed the themes that seemed to emerge from the narratives. Later, the authors conducted an iterative reading and checked whether the themes proposed in the previous phase were reflected in the narratives of more than one interviewee. Hence, the data analysis phase constituted an iterative process, in which data from one interview were compared to data from other interviews in order to refine the theme identification as it emerged from the data.³⁶ The narratives were analysed using Glaser and Strauss's constant comparison approach to qualitative analysis.³⁷ The analysis yielded the identification of four themes which are presented in the following section. The two authors reached a consensus on 75% of these items. Unclear or ambivalent themes and disagreement between the authors were discussed until a consensus was reached.

35 A.L. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1998).

36 Y.S. Lincoln and E.G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Sage, Beverly Hills, 1985).

37 B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Aldine, Chicago, 1967).

3 Findings

Analysis of the widows' narratives yielded four major themes; each one of them illustrates the pain and suffering of the interviewees, most of which could have been avoided or lessened by adopting culturally sensitive rehabilitation policy. We observed two main areas where the difficulties arise, one relates to the very first moments and hours after the death and the other relates to the loneliness, sorrow, and pain that are created in the widows' interactions long after the 40 days of mourning have ended. The assistance given to her immediate needs following the husband's death are occasionally undercut by the failure to inform the widow of her husband's death and the lack of choice between a traditional Bedouin funeral ceremony or an honorary military funeral, owing to the patriarchic norms of the tribe. The widows continue suffer to pain long after the traditional 40 days of mourning had passed, and these negative experiences accompany them for many years. One of the two major sources of their distress stems from outside their community, hence we labelled it "ambivalent attitude toward the support provided by the authorities (the Ministry of Defence and the army as its executive branch)" and the other derives from within their own extended family and community, and we labelled it "community alienation, exclusion, shaming and strict control over the widow's life". We present hereafter these four themes and provide examples of each one by quoting our interviewees.

3.1 *A Failure in Being Informed of the Husband's Death*

The sequence of failures of the extant policy and procedures starts immediately after the soldier dies. The IDF has strict and clear guidelines about how and when to inform the family of a fallen soldier of his death. Understandably, the very first moments following the receipt of this message, known as "the imprinting moment", become an eternalised memory and the mode of message delivery has a crucial role in forming the bereaved person's attitude toward the incident and the official figures that arrive to deliver the message, and consequently may have an impact on coping and recovery. However, some of the widows told us that they received the message after a delay of several hours, and one widow was not informed at all, because the team in charge of this task delivered the message only to the deceased's parents. Also, when the team had to give notification of the death of a man who had been married to two wives, they informed only the first wife and were not aware of the need also to inform the second wife. Fathma, who was a second wife, says:

His family was already informed about his death at 3 a.m. I was not told at all. My brother was with him and knew he died. He called me in the

morning and asked me what I was doing ... I felt something bad happened. I watched TV and they said a Bedouin soldier was killed. I called my sister and asked her [if it is my husband]. She did not tell me it is him. At 10 a.m. some of his cousins arrived and told me Mohamad died. No one came from the army to tell me.

The failure to properly deliver the death notification may also happen to widows who were the sole wives. Manal describes the moments she knew about the death:

It was Saturday. I saw a man and a woman arriving at my mother-in-law's house. I thought they arrived because his mother was sick, so I decided to go to her home. I took my 13-year-old son and went to her house. The woman who arrived with the man prepared me a cup of tea and then my son entered the room and said 'He's finished'. I asked 'who is finished?' and he said 'dad'. I asked him 'who told you this?' ... He knew it from this man and woman ... After a few seconds all of the family arrived. All of them knew and I was the only one who did not know.

Similar descriptions were received from three other interviewees, and only one widow told us that the team arrived at her house and delivered the message in person. These narratives reflect great surprise and disappointment at the delay or absence of a personal message, which might have led the widows to feel less valued or inferior to the husband's parents and/or his first wife.

3.2 *Enforced Choice of a Traditional Bedouin Funeral Ceremony Instead of an Honorary Military Funeral*

If a Bedouin soldier dies, he can be buried according to either of the following two practices: in the community's cemetery with a traditional Bedouin funeral ceremony or in a military cemetery with military rites. If the soldier has been married, officially the choice is to be made by the wife; however, the soldier's parents and family are those who decide, owing to the traditional custom of honouring the elderly. All the interviewees told us that their husband was buried in the traditional way and in the territory of the tribe.

Amira relates the type of funeral:

On the day he died, the commanders arrived and asked me whether I choose a traditional or a military funeral. I told them 'his parents will decide whether to conduct a traditional or a military funeral ceremony'. His parents opted for the traditional ceremony.

In a traditional Bedouin funeral ceremony, only the men participate and the women stay at home, including the widow, the mother, and the sisters of the deceased. Maha refused to accept this custom, and asked a friend of hers to drive her to the cemetery. Her friend told her she would agree only if Maha stayed in the car during the ceremony. Naserin is exceptional, as she challenged the basic beliefs and customs, and is the only interviewee who attended her husband's funeral, while completely and deliberately ignoring social reactions.

When a Bedouin man dies during his military service, a majority of the community leaders and members react with either indifference or hostility. Sometimes they even express happiness over his death, followed by boycotting the family. In sharp contrast to the practice of embracing bereaved families who lost their beloved ones in civilian circumstances, military bereaved families are ignored and marginalised. This was reflected, for example, in a case where the president of Israel arrived at the ceremony to pay last respects to a Bedouin soldier, but the mayor refrained from attending the ceremony. The boycotting of soldiers is reflected, for example, in refusing to attend a mosque built by a bereaved father, or refusing to marry off a daughter to a present or a former IDF soldier.

3.3 *Ambivalent Attitude toward the Support Provided by the Authorities*

We observed bitterness and frustration at the partial support and failures of the Ministry of Defence and the army as its executive branch. It should be clarified that some part of the inability to provide the widow with the usual support is due to the involvement of the extended family that may jeopardise support provisions for various reasons and interests. In Bedouin tradition, there are three days of mourning during which the close relatives of the deceased remain home to visitors who arrive to express their condolences and support. On the 40th day it is customary to organise a wide-scale memorial ceremony that includes serving a traditional dinner to these guests. Manal talks about her monetary and physical difficulties in organising this dinner, whose cultural importance for the bereaved widow is ignored:

During those days I was at the beginning of a pregnancy, but I prepared the dinner for the memorial day by myself. I bought many sheep and soft drinks, a lot of rice and cooked everything by myself. I do not have a car to carry all these things and we live about 5 km away from the main road. There was an old Jewish man who helped me and arrived with his car twice and helped me carry and deliver everything.

Along with her disappointment, Manal does express satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Bedouin social workers from the Ministry of Defence.

She mentions receiving help in building a solar energy heating system, and referring her daughter to higher education studies that eventually provided her with a profession and a job. We felt that much ambivalence is conveyed in her words; on the one hand, satisfaction with the monetary support, but on the other hand, expecting something more than money: "The Ministry of Defence gives me only money, they do not help with other things". This anger is a typical and widespread emotional response of bereaved individuals, and is scientifically embedded in the professional literature of loss trauma and bereavement.³⁸

A large part of the privileges and rights aimed at supporting bereaved families is irrelevant and not applicable in the Bedouin sector. For example, support with purchasing a house cannot be provided if the family resides in an unrecognised village; alternatively, purchasing a house in a recognised village is expected to lead to leaving the tribe and detachment from the community; either alternative is not allowed by the leadership of the community. Furthermore, even if hypothetically it were allowed, it would lead to loneliness and alienation due to living within a tribe to which the widow does not belong. Similarly, the entitlement to purchase a private car is not applicable, as most women do not have a driving licence, owing to the norm of forbidding them from leaving their domestic space. This is a major reason for the infrequency of utilising the psychotherapy that is provided to IDF widows and orphans. A Bedouin social worker told us that the community is very suspicious of social workers, even if they are Bedouin and female. The arrival of a Bedouin social worker at the widow's house as an educated person with Western-style clothing threatens the traditional norms and is unwelcome. Visiting a widow who resides in an unrecognised village necessitates that a Bedouin tracker soldier drive the social worker, an embarrassing situation in itself. Accordingly, Amira told us that when the social worker asked her where she preferred to meet her, Amira invited her to a meeting in the house of her husband's parents, "for their honour".

Another source of trouble in receiving support or utilising privileges stems from the custom of polygamy. If a Bedouin soldier has been married to two women, when he dies, both must share the support and divide it between themselves. Naserin, who was a second wife, describes the difficulty that came to a happy end only after a legal battle:

The Ministry of Defence recognised me as an IDF widow although I am the second wife. At first they gave me only half of the monetary support

38 E. Kübler-Ross and D. Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 2014).

and other payments in kind. I said 'It's ok for myself, but why should my children receive only a half?' I wanted to purchase a car, but they told me that I will receive only half of the sum of money for buying a car ...

When describing the first hours after receiving the message of her husband's death, one widow levelled criticism at the soldiers who were near her husband when he was injured, wondering why they did not help him although they could have, as she understood the incident. She told us that his life could have been saved had they tried. Fathma was critical toward the army for not sending a team to notify her in person of her husband's death, while Amira saw the army as a source of economic and occupational stability and security for her son. Therefore, despite the fact that she lost her husband in military circumstances, she encouraged her son to enlist in the army. It seems here again that the widows hold ambivalent attitudes toward the army, as they do toward the Ministry of Defence.

3.4 *Communal Exclusion, Shaming and Strict Control over the Widow's Life*

The involvement of the extended family and community in the widows' narratives appears to be quite intensive, and was experienced negatively as being intrusive and abusive rather than supportive. Perhaps the most indicative account that attests to the marginalised status, to say the least, of IDF Bedouin widows in their community is reflected in the following report: "I arrived at my son's school and the teacher said: 'Your child knows his father betrayed his people'". The widow feels that members of the tribe are envious of the money she receives from the authorities or the new car she bought with the aid of this pension. However, envy is just the tip of the iceberg; we heard similar stories from several widows about their husband's brothers who asked for or actually took some of the money given for the purpose of rehabilitation.

On this issue, Sahar related that "My neighbours look only at the money I receive ... or if I bought a new car ... they do not care how I feel". Naserin told us of a bereaved mother who was divorced and how her husband, who then remarried, took the entire pension for himself. She herself also remarried, and was disappointed to find out that her new husband does not live with her at all; he arrives to ask for money whenever he wants, while ignoring the new babies she gave birth to with him.

Amira spoke about her oldest son, who apparently felt he must replace the missing paternal figure. He started beating his sisters after he heard some gossip about their alleged inappropriate behaviour. The family feels they live under a magnifying glass and try to conform to traditional ways of behaviour as

much as possible. Having described the multiple and diverse sources for the widows' stress and inability to use the support formally available in detail, we turn now to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our project.

4 Discussion

Our research project explores the silent suffering of Bedouin war widows and their experience of being marginalised and excluded both by the authorities and their communities. We wish to use this academic forum as a platform for articulating these women's unspoken suffering. While the attitude of the Bedouin members of their local network cannot be changed by any kind of intervention except for that which potentially comes from the leadership, it is much easier and more applicable to try to adjust the state support system to their unique needs. As we have shown in this paper, Kook's thesis of democratic exclusion is demonstrated in the widows' inability to fully benefit from the rehabilitation program.³⁹ Kook stresses that segments who contribute less to the state budget, are excluded in elusive and tacit ways. Indeed, as Bedouin women are forbidden to participate in the labour market, they cannot contribute income tax and additional monetary payments to the national pool of resources.⁴⁰ Some payments are remitted to the state budget indirectly; for example, the Ministry of Transportation receives the yearly licensing fee for all vehicles, and most Bedouin women do not own a car. It emerges that while IDF widows are not subject to specific intentional and explicit discrimination, we believe that most of the widows' suffering, that which stems from failures to adjust the modes of support provision to their culture, can be prevented or lessened by adopting appropriate policy and working procedures.

As in previous studies of Arab widows,⁴¹ participants in our study were bitter and disappointed about the lack of emotional and social support from their deceased husband's family. Not only do they receive no monetary support from them, but the deceased husband's brothers exert pressure on them and intimidate them when visiting frequently to ask for, and sometimes actually to take, the widow's money. Since this monthly pension is delivered from the Ministry of Defence to help the widow who remains with no breadwinner to provide for her family, the husband's brothers ignore their nephews' and nieces' needs,

39 Kook, *supra* note 1.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Givon-Sinai, *supra* note 22; Grushka-Lazover, *supra* note 22.

and try to exploit the widow for their own financial benefit. The widows who took part in our project expressed very similar feelings to those conveyed by Meler's interviewees: a despairing sense of being unable to retain their basic human dignity and retain some degree of independence and liberty, to the extent which married women have.⁴² Meler contends that the custom of staying to reside near the husband's family of origin constitutes a cause, among other things, of their relatively low marital and societal power.⁴³ If we assume that the husband used to protect the welfare and interests of his wife and his children when he was alive, then after his death the widow becomes a marginalised and unprotected figure, who fights for every penny to provide for basic needs for herself and for her children. Therefore, our findings are in line with the extant literature that shows how and why Arab widows feel rejected and discontented.⁴⁴

However, IDF Bedouin widows' societal status and their position in the inner hierarchy within their community seems to be much worse than that of "ordinary" Arab widows. These widows face a much more humiliating attitude and alienation owing to the circumstances of their husbands' deaths. They are perceived by a large part of their community as widows of men who betrayed their people and heritage, and are subject to boycott practices, though not necessarily explicitly. This societal position places them at the bottom of the communal hierarchy; they cannot fully live their lives within their community, nor can they leave it. This conclusion seems to be relevant also to Naserin, the only widow of our interviewees who expressed subversive attitudes toward the Bedouin legacy and practices. Furthermore, even if the widow has inner powers and strengths (with or without professional support such as psychotherapy) and she manages to participate in the labour force and earn a salary, the envious relatives are more motivated to expropriate her monthly pension. They may also criticise her active lifestyle, in contrast to the expected behaviour of agony and grief.⁴⁵

42 Meler, *supra* note 26.

43 Meler, *supra* note 25.

44 K. Abu-Baker, 'Between Independence and Control: The Case of an Arab Widow', in S. Abu-Rabia-Queder and N. Weiner-Levy (eds.), *Palestinian Women in Israel: Identity, Power Relations and Coping Strategies* (The Van Leer Institute, Hakibutz Hameuchad, Jerusalem, 2010) pp. 7–26; Giveon-Sinai, *supra* note 22; Grushka-Lazover, *supra* note 22; Meler, *supra* note 26; Meler, *supra* note 25.

45 A. Al-Krenawi, 'Group Work with Bedouin Widows of the Negev in a Medical Clinic', 11:3 *Affilia* (1996) pp. 303–318; Giveon-Sinai, *supra* note 22.

4.1 *Implications for Practice*

The rehabilitation policy of the Ministry of Defence has been recently updated⁴⁶ and a core principle of it is the view of bereavement as a life crisis. The basic premise of this approach is that practical recommendations for the treatment of bereaved families should take into account the bereaved as more than an individual, since no bereaved widow is an island. Rather, every bereaved person is embedded in a socio-cultural context and is a member of a wider network which includes, among other things, the religio-cultural imperatives and constraints, including the negative implications attached to the circumstances of the husband's death. In light of this understanding, every single decision she may make, e.g., place of residence, economic decisions as a sole breadwinner or whether to remarry, would have an impact on the community's response to these decisions, owing to the collectivist nature of the Bedouin society.

We therefore propose three areas in which work can be done to minimise the exclusion and discrimination of these widows:

1. Enlisting the traditional Bedouin tribal leadership to establish a support system. Respected figures are, for example, the Bedouin Sheikh or the local school principal or doctor who would collaborate with a present or former Bedouin commander and an educated family relative of the widow. This triadic team would collaborate with a professional social worker from the Ministry of Defence to grant the widow legitimacy and an optimal platform for gaining relative liberty while minimising the influence of potential opponents.
2. Establishing a sub-unit in the Ministry of Defence that would specialise in providing psychosocial support for the widows that is adjusted to their cultural and religious legacy. This department would also provide the financial and instrumental basis for conducting support groups for bereaved IDF widows.
3. Reassessing the extant support practices to enable the widows to fully benefit from the privileges they are entitled to by adapting them to their real-life conditions. For example, if housing grants or professional training are not applicable or acceptable in their community, they would receive other grants that are in conformity with their tradition. It should also be mentioned with regard to this point that a second wife does not have privileges equal to those of the first wife. Hence, entitling the second

46 D. Drori-Gohar, *Model of Social Workers Treatment for Bereaved Families* (Ministry of Defense, Israel Bereaved Families and Commemoration Department, Holon, 2011).

(and sometimes the third) wife to equal rights and status is expected to significantly contribute to their wellbeing.

4.2 *Study Limitations*

Along with the important insights gained by the current study, some research limitations bear mentioning. Any qualitative social research raises the question of whether and how a researcher is able to fully understand his interviewees' authentic experience.⁴⁷ The interviews were conducted by Jewish researchers of European descent, belonging to the upper middle class and employed as academic faculty members in academic institutions. The interviews were carried out in Hebrew, and a relative (a sister or a niece) of the widow was present in some cases in order to help and translate. Hence some of the nuances and the linguistic richness in describing feelings may not have been transmitted to the interviewers. In addition, a social desirability effect might have been at work more intensely than in other face-to-face interviews, owing to the presence of the widow's relative. Another limitation relates to the relatively small number of interviewees, who were difficult to find and whose consent to participate in the study was hard to get, as they belong to the excluded and weakened Arab sector, while the researchers belong to the elite group of the hegemonic Israeli establishment. This is a contextual factor that is taken into consideration when conducting studies in areas of ongoing dispute and conflicts.⁴⁸

5 Conclusion

Our study contributes to the extant literature on discrimination and exclusion of ethnic and social groups as well of individuals by exploring some disquieting findings from a qualitative study of war widows whose husbands fell during military operations as soldiers serving in the army of the state perceived as an enemy who had conquered their homeland. We expose the extremely painful experiences of widows who are weakened, abused, deceived, excluded and victimised by various sorts of threats as well as through emotional, verbal and economic violence by their community, while the army and other state authorities who are in charge of their wellbeing have limited awareness, if at

47 R. Josselson, 'The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion', 14:1 *Narrative Inquiry* (2004) pp. 1–28; R. Josselson, 'Introduction to Qualitative Psychology', 1:1 *Qualitative Psychology* (2014) pp. 1–3.

48 Arieli and Cohen, *supra* note 33.

all, to their problematic status within the inner hierarchy of their community; this status is the result of their being positioned in an extremely paradoxical socio-political conjuncture, a position that seems to be the primary cause of their plight. Understandably, there are individual differences between the widows as to their personality traits, resilience and coping styles; the challenge of a democratic society is to learn the complexities of each of the ethno-cultural and religious features that eventually hinder the widows of each segment from rehabilitating their lives. It is our hope that the present project will supplement the extant scholarship of minority rights and illustrate inequality as well as injustice experienced by hitherto unstudied minority group members, namely, Bedouin war widows.