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"... but it has its price": Cycles of alienation and exclusion among pioneering Druze women☆

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ABSTRACT

The positive aspects of women from traditional societies acquiring higher education have been widely documented, while the loss and pain entailed in the process, involving transition and changing gender roles, have usually been ignored. This narrative research explores the experience of Druze women who were the first or among the first, from their villages to study at Israeli universities, focusing on their return home following their studies. Studying in university involved crossing boundaries of gender and culture, leading the women through a path profoundly different from that of their families or childhood friends. Upon return, feelings of pride and accomplishment were accompanied by alienation, hybridity and pain. These aspects, previously overlooked in research literature, are discussed in the present article, adding a new dimension to the understanding of emotional and social facets in the lives of women from so-called 'traditional' societies who seek higher education.

1. Introduction

"Yes, education—it's connected to a person's doing something different from what is expected ... As if everyone always writes about how fine it is, in women's literature ... you know ... but it has its price ... yes, yes ... I have paid a price. I tell you, I have paid a heavy price." (Nihaya).[1]

Nihaya, a Druze student from a Galilee village in northern Israel, describes the difficulties encountered by women in Druze society who acquire higher education and academic degrees. I became acquainted with Nihaya, a graduate student, at my place of work. This was the first time I had met a Druze woman outside of her village. At work, we developed a friendly relationship and I learned of Nihaya's difficulties as the only girl in her village who had received an academic degree. Our conversations revealed the great complexity involved in a young Druze woman's leaving her village to study, the apprehension and anxiety that accompanied her and the times she actually feared for her life. The subject of higher education, that appeared almost trivial to me at the turn of the century, suddenly lost its familiar features. I decided to research the topic and try to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what was involved in the processes of change that women were undergoing in traditional societies.

The first Druze women applied to university at the end of the twentieth century, despite traditional prohibitions and despite the social and religious exclusion that was imposed at times on the women and their families.

This paper centers on one aspect of the personal experiences of pioneering Druze women who attained higher education, focusing on the exclusion and silencing they experienced, as well as the pride and admiration they inspired. The return to their home villages as educated women placed them in a different position and a new status: Along with success and a sense of achievement, there was pain, exclusion and marginalization.

While the positive aspects of acquisition of education are often mentioned in the literature and in research, the unavoidable losses that accompany the changes in educated women's lives are ignored, Examining the "other side" – the price, the difficulties and the pain involved in a breakthrough, in achieving higher education, as well as the change in positionality – contributes to a greater understanding of the processes involved in transition and trailblazing.

The following section presents a short description of the Druze community, along with a discussion of the status of women and the process involved in their quest for higher education. The implications of this quest for women from patriarchal societies will then be explored according to the relevant literature and theoretical background. Three terms missing from current literature on academically educated women returning to their

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[1] All participants' names were changed.

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home culture – hybridity, alienation and exclusion – will be explained in the last part of the theoretical section. The findings, presented in a separate section, differ from those commonly observed in research on related issues.

2. Background

2.1. The Druze in Israel—the status of Druze women

100 000 Druze live in Israel, comprising a unique religious and social community representing 1.5% of the country's population, inhabiting 16 villages in the hills of the Galilee and two large villages in the Carmel Mountains. Additional Druze communities are located in the mountains of Syria and Lebanon.

Although the Druze share certain customs and traditions, as well as the Arabic language, with Islamic cultures in the Middle East (Dana, 1998), they also manifest certain unique characteristics. The Druze constitute a closed and delimited community with a largely secret religion (Firro, 1998) whose tenets include belief in reincarnation.

The Druze enjoy total religious freedom in Israel, as do other minorities. Druze religious courts were established in 1963 and were granted jurisdiction parallel to that of rabbinic courts (Falah, 2000; Layish, 2000). The Druze are considered a favored minority in Israel. Druze maintain strong positive ties with the Jewish population and take an active part in defense of the state. Signs of amity notwithstanding, however, the Druze also suffer from some measure of discrimination.

The Druze community is a collective society consisting of extended patriarchal and patrilineal families, manifesting a clear internal hierarchy in which women are positioned at the bottom (Katz, 1990; Layish, 2000). Women are entitled to equal rights according to Druze religious law. In practice, however, their status in the Druze family is inferior to that of men. The will of the father rules the family (Farraj-Falach, 2005). The father holds sole authority for the property of the family and is responsible for the distribution of its resources (Dwairy, 1998; Sharabi, 1987; Barkat, 1985).[2] A woman is economically dependent on her father or husband and a male family member must be responsible for her (Hassan, 1999; Nashef, 1992). According to tradition, it is forbidden for a woman to leave the village unaccompanied by a family member (Farraj-Falach, 2005). Women are prohibited from driving (although in the last decade, more and more women have been driving despite the ban); women are forbidden to be in public places, such as cafés or shopping centers (Weiner-Levy, 2004). The same gender prohibitions prevent women from going to movie houses, museums, concerts or theaters. Traditional and religious norms prohibit women from spending time in men's company (Farraj-Falach, 2005; Weiner-Levy, 2004, 2008). In the past few years, changes have been occurring in gender practices (Weiner-Levy, 2006b). Two decades ago, however, when the first Druze women began to study, these restrictions were strictly upheld.

2.2. Druze women and higher education

Until the end of the 1980s, the idea of girls leaving their homes to study at university was considered a breach of the Druze principles of modesty and purity (Falah, 1991). This was because higher education involved leaving the village, studying in the company of men, and at times, sleeping away from home. In addition, many parents believe that studies are unnecessary for girls, as a woman who marries moves to the home of her husband and his extended family and becomes a member of his family. Hence the money and the time invested by the girl's family do not benefit the family but become the property of her husband and his family. Opposition to higher education is also a result of parents' belief that it will make girls more independent and assertive and that they may acquire qualities that contradict Druze social norms, including male dominance (Nashef, 1992).

In spite of the cultural prohibitions, at the end of the twentieth century, a number of Druze women and their families breached cultural gender norms by requesting higher learning. This challenge to the way of life intended for girls and to Druze cultural norms led religious leaders to excommunicate the girls and their families, excluding them from Druze religion and society, even though this severe punishment is intended by Druze religious law only for murderers and adulterers.[3] Some of the participants and their families suffered from excommunication and its religious implications, including expulsion from the faith and a decline in social status. It is forbidden to speak to a family that has been excommunicated, to visit their home or "to have a cup of coffee, to drink a glass of water at the home of someone who has been excommunicated." The excommunicated are not invited to special events in the village, nor do villagers participate in the celebrations or mourning ceremonies of an excommunicated family.

2.3. Intercultural passages in formal higher education, women in non-western societies: available literature

The departure from the village by Druze girls seeking education, as well as their return after they have completed their studies, involve intercultural passages. Universities in Israel are characterized by secular Western culture that influences the campus and teaching methods. At university, Druze students were exposed to theories that emphasize the central role of the individual in society. They experienced a variety of academic theories and diversity of knowledge, as well as the demand for critical thinking that stressed the legitimacy of challenging theories, notions of "truth" or authority as the source of knowledge. They became familiar with a system of relationships between men and women that was different from the one they had known, as well as the possibilities open to Jewish secular women. After overcoming the initial difficulties of studying in Hebrew and English (languages used in Israeli universities) and conforming to academic require-

[2] Because of the small number of studies researching Druze women, I sought the assistance of research on Arab women. These studies are relevant because of the similarity between Druze and Arabs regarding customs and way of life. By doing so, I did not intend to blur or minimize the uniqueness of the Druze community or its religion, that is distinct from Islam, nor to reflect in any way on the complex relationship between Druze and Muslims (Research on the Druze community was conducted by Firro, Falah and Farraj-Falach (Druze), as well as Kats, Layish and Weiner-Levy (Jews)).

[3] The subject of excommunication is not described in literature about Druze and the information that follows comes from personal interviews. Some of the religious implications are that excommunicated individuals are not only forbidden to come to the *Hilweh*, the house of prayer, but also to pray at home. According to the explanation I received, if a person ignores the prohibition and does pray, the religious punishment is doubled. No one from the community participates in the funeral of someone who has been excommunicated and the blessing that is meant to support the soul after death is not recited as the person is buried. S/he is interred as "someone who has no value ... as though s/he is not considered a human being."here were those who pointed out that an excommunicated individual in this life will continue to be excommunicated in following lives, although this opinion was not universal, while others maintained that if excommunication is lifted before death, the person will not be excommunicated in following lives. The principal victims of religious excommunication are those who are religious. As most women "accept religion" with their marriage and men become religious at a later age, married women, i.e. mothers, incur the most harm as a result of family excommunication.

ments, they acquired Jewish and Arab friends and their overall experience was a positive one. Once they achieved their undergraduate degrees, they sought out ways to continue studying for advanced degrees.

The participants described changes in their sense of self-worth that were partly inspired by feelings of equality between male and female students and the personal and financial independence they experienced at university. They expressed patterns of a "new," "independent" identity, conceptions typical of individualistic societies (Markus and Kitayama, 1994), along with an identity structuring process: "It shaped my personality" (Amal); "It's also a new personality, a strong personality" (Suhad); "It sharpened my values, my opinions, what I want" (Amal) – and initiative – "I even took control and initiative" (Iman). The transitions in identity were described in terms conforming with Western humanistic conceptions emphasizing the central role of the individual in society. They sought to be distinguished from their family and collective group identities and developed their personal voice that seeks to express itself.

At the end of their studies, Druze women returned to their villages, to the accepted norms and way of life. Most worked as teachers[4] in the village schools because cultural norms prohibit women from leaving the village unchaperoned or working with men. Various studies have evaluated the acclimation of students attending universities with a culture from their own. In general, students at Western universities have found it difficult to adapt to a new culture and have experienced feelings of alienation and disappointment (Cushnir, 1991; Grove and Torbiorn, 1986; Weaver, 1986; Bennett, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Hoff, 1979). The effects of return to one's culture of origin have barely been studied, however.[5]

The numerous recent studies that investigated the effects of higher education on the lives of women from so-called "traditional" cultures (for example, Ahmad-Fauzia, 2001; Aronhold, 2000; Bahemuka and Van Der Vynct, 2000; Katjavivi, 2000; Baburajan, 1998; Aref, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Viveros, 1992; Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973; Stonequist, 1935) point to the positive implications of education on the lives of the women themselves, the change in social status and economic power and the progress and access to knowledge that had been denied women for many years. Studies researching the effects of education on women in the Arab or Muslim world and dealing with the breach of accepted gender norms (for example, Weiner-Levy, 2006a,b; Pessate-Schubert, 2003; Ahmad-Fauzia, 2001; Bubtana, 2000; Perry, 2000; Abdel-Kader, 1987) indicate the positive implications of higher education as well, but do not discuss how the women contend with their return to their previous way of life at their parent's home or with their husbands.

Education has been found to improve both the status and the economic, social and emotional circumstances of the Arab woman. In Israel, as in other countries, higher education is considered a key indicator of social change and has increased self-awareness among indigenous women (Pessate-Schubert, 2003; Mazawi, 2002; Erdreich and Rapoport, 2002). However, there are still religious and cultural limitations on the lives of women in the Arab world (Othman and Gorkin, 2001; Al-Haj, 1998), restrictions that continue to play a role in the lives of educated women.

As mentioned in the literature, education has, in many ways, improved the lives of the first Druze educated women, but it has also increased their awareness of their status in society and placed them in a different positioning that enables empowerment and change but also involves pain and exclusion.

2.4. Social exclusion, hybridity and alienation

Social exclusion is not usually connected to feelings of success and accomplishment, or the satisfaction of achieving a breakthrough and attaining higher education. Exclusion signifies social isolation, non-integration, diminished cooperation and lack of influence and empowerment in deprived social groups (Stryer, 2001). It is mentioned in contexts of social inequality and poverty and usually refers to the mentally ill, to immigrants and to those who lack social and political rights (Silver, 1995). The concept of "social exclusion" is complex, unclear and ambiguous (Stryer, 2001; Silver, 1995) and includes both emotional dimensions and social expressions, at times evolving from social practices. In recent years, it has been widely discussed in international social research and is associated with the dominant ideological–cultural mood of the times (Stryer, 2001; Schram, 2000). The various aspects of exclusion and its manifestations have been investigated in terms of population and circumstances, so that the definitions and characteristics of exclusion have changed frequently. Room (1995, quoted by Stryer, 2001) lists three general conditions for a definition of exclusion: multi-dimensionality, duration through time and social space and significant disconnection from the central stream of society.

The term "hybridity," like exclusion, includes outsider-related features, focusing on the inner feelings of individuals who sense alienation, as well as cultural and social estrangement. It has been applied in contemporary professional literature in an attempt to describe and understand new patterns of ethnic alienation in connection with post-colonial globalization and migration (Bhabha, 1990; Gilroy, 1996, in Lucey, 2003). Bhabha (1990, 1996), who linked the term "hybridity" to political oppression and inequality, describes the discourse of duality, although not binarity. The sense of duality and the emotional effects of living in two cultures have also been described by Sarup (1996), an Indian psychologist living in the UK who described "hybridity" as a state of multiple identities and the feeling of being located simultaneously in two or more cultures. Various concepts are included in hybridity, such as "border existence" (mentioned by Grossberg, 1996, p. 91) and the "third space," a term coined by Bhabha (1990, 1996), characterizing the identity of the contemporary individual in an era of globalization and intercultural migration who is affected by colonialism and post-colonialism. Although such concepts prevail in postmodern writings, the sense of marginality resulting from exposure to different cultures was already mentioned at the beginning of the 20th Century in the writings of Park (1928, in Stonequist, 1935), who coined the term "marginal man" to describe a person torn between two different cultures and experiencing exclusion from both of them.

In summary, the research literature dealing with the positive aspects of women from so-called "traditional" cultures who choose to obtain higher education has ignored the problematic cultural and personal effects involved in change, breaking through and the subsequent return to the original culture as a "different," educated person with new social positioning and an unfamiliar personal space. This study attempts to clarify these features according to the results of interviews with Druze women who returned to their villages with an academic education.

[4] One of the first educated Druze women worked as an engineer, another was a doctor (gynecologist), another a lawyer and a few were counselors.

[5] Kidder's unique research (1991) studied male students who returned from the United States to the Far East and showed that the return could lead to unexpected crises.

3. Methodology

The findings presented constitute part of a broader study[6] that took place during 1998–2003, examining the lives and aspects of identity of the first Druze women who had acquired higher education (Weiner-Levy, 2004). To assess the effects of higher education on the lives and identities of these women, a phenomenological narrative methodology was chosen that analyzed experiences and social realities from the subjective standpoint of the relevant individuals (Geertz, 1990; Taylor, 1998). Social effects of race, gender, status, ethnicity and religion are included in each life story related (Sarup, 1996), so that every participant perceives his or her identity as a "logical" result of this story in cultural terms (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). The framework, patterns and thought codes that the speaker formulates from his/her culture thus facilitates the story's interpretation (Peacock, 1984).

3.1. Participants

34 women from Druze villages on the Carmel and in the Galilee who were the first or among the first women in their communities to seek higher education. At the time the interviews were held, there were still several villages in which higher education was not an option for women. Most participants were married at the time they were interviewed and had applied for studies at the end of the 1980s or the beginning of the 1990s.

The sample of participants was chosen according to the purposive sampling method, as distinguished from a random sample. This method chooses individuals that are of particular interest (see Miles and Huberman, 1994). I received names of the first students mostly from women I interviewed and people I knew in the Druze community. All the women I approached except one were willing to be interviewed and tell their stories.

There were two parts to each interview: The first part was carried out according to the method developed by Rosenthal (1993). The participants were asked to talk about their lives in an undirected manner, with emphases and content that were relevant to them. This enabled an examination of internal and dynamic processes from their own subjective standpoints and as they perceived them.

The second part was semi-structured, referring to a list of subjects and questions I wanted to raise. After a few interviews, several subjects were eliminated from the original list, while others were added. The interviews took place from 1998 to 2002.

3.2. Interview location and language

Interviews took place at the participants' homes in their respective villages. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew, a language in which all participants were fluent.

3.3. Interview analyses

To achieve categories of significance, interviews were analyzed in a structured and methodological manner according to a system developed by Giorgi, 1989, based on division into categories of significance, similar to that of Corbin and Strauss (1990).

[6] Findings have been taken from research for a PhD dissertation submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

3.4. Researcher's positionality

My alienness as a researcher was not limited to the cultural sphere but also manifested more intensive and substantive features, namely the alienness of a Jew from the majority society studying a minority and of a Western female researcher examining the East (Weiner-Levy, in press). Extensive literature on ethnographic research considers the researcher's positioning as an outsider or insider by the culture studied and assesses various implications originating in bipolar positioning (Bolak, 1997; Martin, 1987; Merton, 1972; Levy-Strauss, 1979 in Weiner-Levy, 2004). In this study, however, positioning as an outsider or insider was not fixed but rather a kind of mobile social positioning: Although I was an external researcher, I found myself positioned along a continuum and shifted from internal to external according to the interview topic: In some cases, I was an "outsider" not understanding the culture and religion, not aware of the various meanings of the customs and words. When other topics were discussed, however, I was treated as an "insider" since I was one of the few people with whom the participants could talk about the experiences of their education and the different world to which they were exposed, a world to which I belonged. By contrast, it was the Druze village women who were at times perceived by the interviewers as different or "outsiders" and as such incapable of understanding the participants and the culture to which they were exposed. Moreover, my alienness apparently enabled participants to speak freely about their difficulties in their society, to expose their inner worlds without apprehension over their community's reaction, a finding compatible with those noted by Simmel (1921, in Simmel, 1950).

The findings presented constitute only part of the general picture observed in the broader study (Weiner-Levy, 2004), indicating that, along with pride, a sense of achievement, personal freedom and the ability to work and to earn one's living, the process of change also involved aspects of exclusion, marginality, pain, and loss. The dynamics presented probably involve some unique cultural features. Aspects of the overall process may be subject to generalization, however, applying to women from so-called 'traditional' societies who experience role change.

4. Findings and discussion: "on the border"—a personal feeling and a social reality

This section will describe the feelings and experiences of Druze women as they returned to their villages after having completed their studies. It includes four subsections describing aspects and attributes of estrangement and exclusion as derived from an inner source, from the approach to women in among Druze community members and from the restrictions imposed by men in society. The last subsection briefly describes ways of coping within society and reflects on the changes in attitude towards women's education that have occurred within the Druze community since these women returned from their studies.

The women's return to their original culture after having earned an academic degree was affected by cultural norms. In Druze society, educated women are obligated to return to the village at the end of their studies and to live with a male family member – a father, brother or husband – who will protect and care for them.

4.1. Alienation and exclusion as a personal feeling: "stuck between two worlds"

At the end of their studies, against the backdrop of return to Druze villages, the participants described the changes in their perceptions that had occurred during their studies at university,

years during which they had been exposed to a different way of life and to diverse theoretical and philosophical approaches. The years of education affected their socio-cultural status, comprehension and perceptions. Iman describes the gender norms that she experienced after returning from her studies as restricting the personal freedom of women:

> Before marriage, the girl is always compared to glass; if it is broken, it stays broken forever. (. . .) And her name must be sparkling. . .but that's not that way, because a woman is actually a person. She has disadvantages and advantages and if she wants to maintain her social image, she gives up the personal things. I think that an ordinary woman, who has always been told what to do, who has always been directed, doesn't deal with this dilemma. Anyone who has gone out and studied and had these experiences begins to know herself better, to recognize her desires, her rights. But who can she demand these rights from? From whom? It's very difficult. (Iman)

Iman perceives herself as different from "an ordinary" woman. Her new schemas of interpretation challenge cultural norms. Leaving the village, studying and being exposed to a different way of life all increase her awareness as well as her distress. Siham also describes how her new status and transitions in her identity raise obstacles on her return:

> Leaving to study and then returning . . . it's a kind of shock, a trauma, first fun, enjoyment and afterwards, another shock. (. . .) You feel that you have changed, the fact that you have left the village, had other experiences than just being here, it also does something (. . .) but if I look at myself and other girls in the village, I say to myself, 'Wow! I really received a gift, to be there and to be exposed to that world, but on the other hand, it also harms you, because, in the end, you come back here and you have to communicate with all of the people who haven't been exposed to this world (. . .).

Returning to the Druze village, the participants describe their situation as being on a border between the Druze collective and patriarchal society and a secular individualistic society, the story of their lives affected by the two cultures to which they have been exposed. The sense of alienation is an immanent feeling in the descriptions—alienation in the world from which they came and alienation from a world that they cannot enter. The dual perceptions are reflected in Siham's ambivalent attitude towards her studies as a "gift" on the one hand and as "harmful" on the other. Her studies, that exposed her to different knowledge and another lifestyle, have placed her "between two worlds" without her former personal and social position and resources:

> "And I . . . am stuck between two worlds," continued Siham, ". . . and I cannot fit into the modern world, nor can I return to the village and be Siham, the village girl, the way I left . . .."

Sarup (1996, p. 10) described feelings similar to those of Siham, brought about by immigration: "S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. Strangers often seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition that they have already left and the mode of life that stubbornly denies them the right of entry".

Similarly, Salua expresses her divided position. Her inner sense of duality becomes clear as she speaks:

> Where are you? Where are you? You cannot live here nor can you live there (. . .). It's impossible to live in two places when they are, uh . . . at opposite extremes.

Salua continues, discussing the need to decide and choose only one of the "worlds," seeking to avoid the experience of hybridity and the feeling of living on a borderline. The essence of influence by the duality of living in two cultures has been described by Sarup (1996), who represents hybridity as a situation of multiple identities and living simultaneously in two or more cultures as a stranger. Amal describes the emotional feelings that accompanied her return and her new situation as "losing the way," involving loss of future perspective as well:

> When you leave and then return, your proportions get lost; you really lose the knowledge of how to weigh things, how to deal with the surroundings. You are so deep in thought about how to deal with this that you lose the solutions, you lose the way.

The women who returned to their communities after their studies describe their position as the "borderline of society" (Simmel, 1950), neither belonging to their own society nor to another, neither inside nor outside yet temporarily both outside and inside. They describe feelings of marginality (see: Stonequist, 1935; Park, 1928 in Berry, 1991) in their social lives, maintaining that because they are educated, they have become "different."

4.2. Alienation and exclusion among women: "she is betraying her culture"

The participants describe themselves as positioned between two cultures, but their sense of being foreign or different did not originate in inner feelings alone. Although the educated women tried to disguise the changes they had experienced and behaved according to traditional Druze gender practices, at times, their feelings of being situated "on the border" were strengthened by social realities.

The unique status of the women who had been the first to receive higher education attracted attention to and surveillance of their behavior, engendering gossip that spread through the social network woven by village women.

Amal describes the difference between her and the other women of the village that years of university studies had created, a difference that caused feelings of distress stemming from inability to communicate with her former friends on topics that were important to her.

> In my daily life, there is really a great difference (. . .) Many of the relationships I had with friends were cut off because most of my friends were already married and had a few children, and very few had continued their studies. Even when we meet at events in the village, especially weddings, we have things to talk about but you don't feel that you belong. You don't feel that you can speak to them about issues that concern you; things that bother me, I can't talk about them (. . .) If, for example, I sit down and talk the way I am talking to you about things that irritate me in the village, they'll say: "Wow!" or "She's . . . What's happening to her? She's betraying her culture." . . . It's hard . . . This change has really harmed every aspect of my life.

The personal changes engendered by education have caused feelings of estrangement and of alienation, as well as fear of criticism by village residents. Inability to speak openly without being accused of conceit or of lack of respect for one's own culture has also affected Suhad, who was accused of arrogance when she spoke in a different register. Suhad returned from university and wanted to teach in the village school using the type of language to which she had become accustomed during her academic studies. The use of "higher" levels of language usually grants symbolic

social power and distinctions between different types of language may be indicators of social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Grillo, 1989). For Suhad, however, knowledge of a higher language register yielded criticism rather than social power:

> If I start to talk in class in a different style or on another level, they begin to say: 'Oh, you've studied for a few years, so now you come back and act like a professor or a philosopher or something. You have to know where you are, that you have your limits.'

Social pressure for cultural uniformity not only dictated the language register for Suhad at her job but also limited the location and type of work available. Higher education enabled Suhad to gain a profession but the range of occupations open to her, was limited to one—teaching. This profession ensured that she would not be working with men, leaving the village, driving or remaining far from her home, family and the watchful eyes of the community. Nawal describes the feeling of estrangement that was immanent in her life because of the different perspectives she encountered while studying:

> I speak to women in the village and they are cut off from the world. It hurts me that this is so. They have a kind of worldview that is completely different, completely different ... So, here in the village [her husband's village, to which she moved after her marriage], I am completely detached from my surroundings. I have no friends; I don't know anyone ... You come from a different background and you can't think the same way.

The feeling of estrangement accompanies Nawal not only in the Druze village but also in her workplace outside the village, among Jews:

> At work, in Haifa, I am again a kind of ... how would you term it ... a black duck. There, everyone is Jewish, everyone is Russian, and you are Druze ....

Nawal tries to adjust her external appearance to the social demands of the village: She wears a long dress with long sleeves "even in the heat of mid-August" and makes sure to wrap herself in the traditional scarf. In spite of her efforts to respond to cultural demands, however, she hears women criticizing her profession. She describes a meeting at which she spoke to Druze women about her job and her education, seeking to introduce new options:

> I once spoke to Druze women about my work. I expected that they would have an attitude of: 'Great! Someone who studied! Well done!' But instead, their attitude was: 'What are you talking about?! How could you have done that – exposing yourself to men in your profession and working with them? How dare you?' And these were women talking, women! ... (...) Women play an important role in restricting other women. Everything is accomplished through talk and gossip (...) and a good part of that belongs to women.

Nawal, who wanted to contribute, was rejected by the women and was censured for seeking an education and for choosing an occupation that included professional discussions with men. A less direct censure expressed by Druze women was described by Nassrin. Before she was married, her parents allowed her to go to university independently. After her marriage in the 1980s, her husband (who was more conservative than her parents) forbade her to travel to university alone in an attempt to preserve "family honor." He conditioned continuation of her studies as a married women on her being accompanied by a male member of his family to, from and at university. As her husband was in the standing army, the role of escort was assigned to her brother-in-law. Her sister-in-law, who was not happy with the idea that her husband would have to accompany Nassrin to university, began to spread gossip censuring Nassrin and her studies. This added difficulty, exacerbating the discomfiture of having and escort to "guard her honor," led Nassrin to drop out during her third year. Yet even after she terminated her studies, the gossip did not end. It now focused on her unconventional activities, that included learning to drive. In an interview, she directed some of her anger at the women of the village, who determined and limited the norms and personal space of people like herself by spreading a web of gossip throughout the villages, gossip that affects the honor and status of both women and families:

> And I am angry at the women themselves, who should not gossip about me, about my taking driving lessons. This comes from the women themselves, not from the men! If, instead of gossiping, they would come with a call that we are equal, that we are not worth any less and are not inferior, we would not be in this situation.

Nassrin maintains that while it is the men who impose cultural prohibitions, the women make sure not to allow these norms to be violated and preserve patriarchal power through their gossip.

Gallia, who works as a teacher, talks about her attempts to speak to village women in an attempt to establish an authentic relationship[7] and her desire to share with them the things that interest her, such as her experiences as a high school teacher. She describes the rejection she felt from these women, as well as from her sisters-in-law who complained to Gallia's husband that "she is arrogant. She only talks about school; she is very strange." Gallia perceived these reactions as underscoring her need to forgo the possibility of establishing honest and open relationships. Nevertheless, she expresses some pain regarding her isolation: "I have no contact with people because I am different—and to live without people is not good. It embitters you. It's impossible to live without people, without friends."

The educated women describe the differences between them and the other women of the village, the feelings of estrangement, alienation and the social and emotional gaps that have opened up between them and their childhood friends. Deviation from accepted norms leads to gossip and criticism by other women, besmirching them and their families. Billson (1995, p. 370) states that women's preservation of restrictive norms helps maintain male dominance and control. Women tend to adhere to laws and customs that engendered male superiority over the years (Henning and Jardim, 1976; Billson, 1995; Weiner-Levy, 2004), whether consciously or otherwise, thereby perpetuating their own inferiority.

4.3. Discrimination and exclusion enforced by men

"Men dictate everything, what she is allowed to do and what she is prohibited from doing." Explained Soha. In spite of the rising accessibility of education for women, control of male interpretation of the spiritual and religious sources in various cultures and the unwillingness of men to share power, hinders women's advancement and achievement of equality (Aronhold, 2000; Bubtana, 2000; Ronning, 2000). The exclusion of women from public space, preservation of a limited field of activity and the prohibition on deviating from the traditional cultural norms are dictated by the male patriarchy and forced on the women.

[7] See Gilgan and Brown, pages 40–41 on this subject.

Even fathers who did not discriminate between their sons and daughters and allowed the girls to acquire higher education were concerned when their daughters returned to the village, imposing restrictions on them to preserve their "good name" and that of their families. The sense of discrimination and inequality, that was absent from descriptions of childhood, appeared in narratives about returning as educated young women. Yasmin, who described her father as open and considerate during her childhood, spoiling her, tucking her in every night and having "deep long discussions" with her, expresses her feelings of inequality in the family on returning from university. Distressed, considering her education and her senior position at work, she describes how her brother, who was 18 years old, could go out to the city and have fun until late at night, while she, although 30 years old and holding an important professional position, was not allowed to be out after sunset. Yasmin continues to question but refrains from expressing herself to avoid the pain and the unexplainable. "Why do I have to request permission to go to the city? Why can't I go to the movies or the theater when my younger brother does whatever he wishes? ... I try not to bring these questions up, because it only makes me feel bad." (Yasmin).

Siham also describes the freedom that her brother has in contrast to the social limitations that are placed on her as a woman, "My brother can take the car, drive to the city, to the sea, wherever he wants to go ... And I—I can't even leave the village." Siham, who has a master's degree, teaches in primary school[8] because traditional norms preclude her from leaving her village alone.

This issue of discrimination between boys and girls in the family is often discussed in Arab feminist literature. Al-Saadawi (1988) describes the discrimination between herself and her brother, and the answer – "He is a boy and you are a girl" – she received when she asked why his rights were far more extensive than hers, "an answer that always moved me to be even more insistent ... At this point, my old grandmother would intervene in the discussion that she always described as 'a blow to good manners' and would scold me severely: 'I have never seen a girl with a tongue as long as yours. It is clear that you are not like your brother. Your brother is a boy, do you hear? I wish you had been born a boy' (Al-Saadawi, 1988)."

"We are a male society and the man decides all: Where she may go and where it is prohibited, with whom she can speak and with whom it is forbidden." (Siham) The negation of women's rights, perpetuated by male control, is expressed by Nawal, who explains how women can improve their situation:

> When you are unmarried or divorced, you are in such a terrible situation. It's a hard life, let's say, ... Because you are under the control of the males in family, you are not allowed to be your own master, to lead your life the way you want to. There is always someone interfering with your life and telling you what to do and where to go and what ... someone always has to control you, and it's your father and all your brothers. If you are married, you only have to deal with one – your husband." (Nawal)

Exclusion of women from social activities and from public places and the limitations on their lives derive from men's wish to control and to rule over women, maintains Al-Saadawi (1988). Their unchallenged authority enables the adoption of Western practices by men while the strict norms retained regarding women contradict gender equality and grant a clear advantage to the man (Shoked, 1998; Narayan, 1997; Mernissi, 1988; Al-Saadawi, 1988; Abdel-Kader, 1987). Women's penetration of professional considered "masculine" creates anxiety, evoking social reactions against an incursion described as destructive to culture and tradition (Mernissi, 1988). To prevent changes in practices defined as feminine, dominant male voices call for safeguarding tradition, considered possible only when women return to "their places" at home and are out of the public domain (Mernissi, 1988). Women's adherence to their cultural roles and to genderial norms and practices continues to be designated as fundamental to maintenance of the culture's identity and community pride (Al-Saadawi, 2000; Narayan, 1997). Religious institutions represent an obvious system that does not claim to discriminate against women but only to safeguard the embers of culture or tradition. However, a guiding hand may be discerned that selectively determines both overt and hidden mechanisms: Under the auspices of religion, men continue to direct women's lives.

4.4. Higher education as an obstacle to marriage

Having been exposed to narratives of love, intimacy and free choice of spouse, women who left their villages to study oppose arranged marriages. The perception of marriage as an agreement between clans and a celebration for the close and extended families (Haj-Yahia, 1996) has been undermined by higher education. Educated women sought to experience marriage as a personal event and an act of free choice. At times, they succeeded in refusing arranged marriages to relatives, but the practices they live by have not always enabled them to meet a spouse in any other way. One difficulty stems from their tendency to marry at a later age than other women in their community. Another originates in education itself, that deprives women of the "feminine beauty" that Arab culture perceives as originating in three qualities: Silence, fixedness and obedience (Shaaban, 1998): "Men here do not look at an educated girl; it is simply that way. It really bothers me," says Nura, who mentions that five of her friends who studied at university did not get married. "And there is another problem, I think. Every educated young woman begins to think differently, she becomes more selective and more aware of issues that she never thought about when she was 17."

Amal also expresses the difficulties: 'Men say they want a quiet, gentle girl who will not give them a headache; they want to educate her themselves ... There is prejudice against educated women; perhaps they are too smart, too argumentative. That may be true (laugh) (...) An uneducated woman is not very good, and an educated woman is terrible (laughs)."

The life of an unmarried or divorced woman in a patriarchal society adhering to traditional values, embodies more difficulties than that of married women; family life is perceived as a guarantee of social stability (Engineer, 1992) and status. An unmarried Druze woman is obligated to live in the home of her brother or father and to obey them. The already limited freedom accorded to women is further diminished because of the inferior status of unmarried or divorced women and the fear of gossip. Marriage to a man outside of the Druze community is prohibited. Women who violated this rule sometimes paid with their lives (Hassan, 1999).

The status and rights of the Druze woman returning to her village are determined by the male at her side. Despite the higher social status of married women and the decrease in number of males who control them, marriage does not always increase the amount of freedom or the range of options open to a woman, as these remain dependent on the responsible patriarch.

[8] Two years after the interview, Siham holds senior position outside of the village after her parents permitted her to drive to work some distance from the village.

5. Struggling with family and society

Educated women who return to their villages observe and interpret events from within the territory created by their marginal position between two cultures. These observations create new insights, different from those of their friends or families. Previously accepted norms were now perceived as restrictive and were to be circumvented or challenged in the struggle for greater equality.

The ''innocence'' and ''silence'' admired as feminine qualities in so-called ''traditional'' societies (Nashef, 1992; Mernissi, 1988; Narayan, 1997) also prevent women from complaining. Women are silenced by public criticism that does not allow them to express thoughts or pain that may shame the household and society (Al-Saadawi, 2000; Narayan, 1997, p. 11; Mernissi, 1988). Educated women have tried to oppose this silence,[9] recognizing their right to speak out and express their positions. Despite feelings of exclusion and hybridity, the educated women mounted a gradual, inexorable struggle aimed at bringing about change.

The first students were placed in a novel social position; they penetrated boundaries of gender and culture and were exposed to personal and social difficulties. The women perceived their decision to study and the courageous acts they performed not only as personal change but also as fulfillment of a social role whose goal is to pave the way towards acquisition of higher education for other women (Weiner-Levy, 2006a). On their return, they indeed struggled to change social boundaries and limitations, to change their own lives and to improve the status of Druze women. Sometimes, these struggles against the male patriarchy were supported by men of the family. Such support was vital because without it, the women would have had difficulty accomplishing anything. The young women who returned from university and began to teach provided role models for young girls. Despite their inner feelings of hybridity and their unusual social positioning that created distance and criticism, in time they also managed to attain a respected place in the community thanks to their decisiveness and their achievements (Weiner-Levy, 2004, 2006b). As educated teachers, they encouraged their pupils not to marry at an early age and persuaded parents to allow their daughters to continue their studies in the upper grades. Over the years, these first women paved the way for others; at present, there are hundreds of Druze women attending universities, outnumbering their male Druze counterparts.

The educated women's influence was not limited to their role as teachers but also extended to their individual struggles for change in various aspects of their lives: Permission to drive, to work outside their villages, to work with male colleagues, to choose a husband for themselves and to be heard. These struggles were conducted in a manner compatible with their culture and were integrated into everyday community life. The women diverted cultural norms gradually and persistently, constantly striving for changes in gender practices (Weiner-Levy, 2006a, 2004).

[9] Research on changes following education in Arab Muslim countries has found an increasing tendency to reflect on religion and personal life among educated men and women alike (Whalley, 1998, p. 106). Reassessment of religious authority, the diminishing authority of religious leaders and the reapportioning of the ''religious truth'' once held exclusively by small elite groups of religious leaders have also been described by Eickelman (1994), who investigated effects of higher education on Islamic religious perceptions. Similar changes were found in Indonesia and India (Bowen, 1991, pp. 242–257, in Eickelman, 1994). Druze women were interested in such discourse, but the secrecy of the Druze religion was used to justify its prevention.

6. To be first—aspects of estrangement and exclusion: summary and concluding discussion

The decision to acquire higher education accorded these women far more than theoretical and academic knowledge. The years they spent at university involved crossing borders of tradition, status and gender. Their studies placed them in a new space from which they could observe and interpret, a ''third space'' created from their marginal location between two cultures, where new schemata of interpretations affected their worldviews.

In Israel, as in other countries, higher education is considered a key indicator of social change (Pessate-Schubert, 2003) and has increased the introduction of approved Western norms, such as independence and empowerment, among indigenous women (Erdreich and Rapoport, 2002; Mazawi, 2002). Education is considered to enable social, cultural and gender mobility, a notion strengthened by the large amount of research describing successful endeavors of this type (for example: Ahmad-Fauzia, 2001; Aronhold, 2000; Katjavivi, 2000; Bahemuka and Van Der Vynct, 2000; Baburajan, 1998; Aref, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Viveros, 1992). Breakthroughs such as achieving education in patriarchal societies, however, that embody a crossing of social boundaries and classes, also manifest emotional features and inner difficulties ordinarily ignored in research literature (Lucey, 2003). Transition across social and cultural borders, relocation and becoming different from close family or childhood friends demand emotional preparation, as well as changes in identity and personal perception. Along with the positive implications of breaking gender norms and obtaining higher education, the transitions are accompanied by distress and feelings of hybridity and pain that have hardly been mentioned in the relevant literature. A deeper understanding of the complex process of change is vital, as is a more thorough comprehension of the emotional aspects involved in transitions and breakthroughs.

The educated women interviewed in this study experienced social exclusion throughout their lives. Feelings of estrangement and exclusion appeared in the narratives even after certain social prohibitions had already been violated. On returning from their studies, the educated women described feelings of marginality, noting their position on the margins of two cultures. The sense of hybridity and perception of duality expressed during the interviews are mentioned in research literature of Third World theoreticians who described psychological–social aspects in the post-colonial era or in the context of globalization and migration (Narayan, 1997; Sarup, 1996; Bhabha, 1996, 1990). In the present study, however, such feelings do not arise as the result of migration or transition to a new culture, but rather on return to one's culture of origin. Furthermore, the sense of not belonging and defamiliarization that arose on return to the society in which they had grown up appeared even more severe than the parallel feelings described by people attending foreign universities. While one may anticipate the difficulties entailed in joining a new and foreign culture and prepare for them – at least to some extent – both practically and emotionally, the sense of alienation that participants felt on returning home was wholly unexpected. The findings of this study describe an unanticipated crisis, reflecting the complexity and uniqueness involved in returning to one's society of origin as educated and different.

The feelings of hybridity and estrangement were a result of an inner experience that was strengthened by social reactions. Despite their efforts to conceal it, the change that occurred in these women was not only manifested as inner feelings of separation but at times also accompanied by condemnation of the way of life they chose for themselves. The breakthrough and improvement in social mobility upset accepted norms, leading

some community members to opt for exclusion (according to the features cited by Room et al., 1992, as quoted by Stryer, 2001).[10] The concept of "social exclusion," referring to social isolation and non-integration, has usually focused on the exclusion of people in economically distressed segments of society or social classes perceived as weak (Stryer, 2001; Schram, 2000). By contrast, the present study describes social exclusion directed at women who made striking advances in patriarchal societies and who gained academic and professional achievement. Exclusion may be either formal (such as excommunication by religious authorities and the community) or informal. One way or another, the power of exclusion and the damage it may inflict were mediated by the educated women's social position, emotional strength, confidence and pride that helped alleviate the pain they felt. In contrast to other excluded populations who were located outside the social framework (Schram, 2000), these women remained active within society, seeking to challenge patriarchal norms and influence other women (Weiner-Levy, 2006a). The extent of their effect as a minority may be understood according to the theory of Moscovici et al. (1969), explaining how rejection of a consistent and incisive deviant minority results in that minority's exerting an influence on the majority.

Seeking higher education and choosing a lifestyle different from that of their mothers and friends imparted a sense of achievement, success and pride, although it also involved loss and anguish. Academic education diminished their overall exclusion as women in practical terms, as it broadened their legitimate space.

Knowledge and education enabled the women to work and support themselves and strengthened their feelings of ability and self-confidence. To a great extent, however, their studies increased their consciousness of the prohibitions and limitations affecting their lives, as well as their lack of equality. From certain perspectives, education that granted a wider range of freedom also increased feelings and actions of exclusion and awareness of oppression as women. Along with the pride and honor the participants earned as trailblazers, they also experienced loneliness, pain and isolation.

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[10] See *Hybridization, Alienation and Social Exclusion* above.

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