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The Israeli Selective Myopia and the Missing Culturally Sensitive Support for Bedouin IDF War Widows

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Abstract Israel is a democratic state that champions the aspiration for equality, justice, and acceptance of multiculturalism. We critically examine the officially declared policy vis-à-vis the actual fulfillment of minorities' equal rights. In keeping with the rights-based approach to social work, minority groups are entitled to any rights granted to the dominant group in their countries, as they have equal rights to realize their humanity. The present research project showcases a severe violation of human rights in a hitherto unstudied minority sector in Israel, namely Bedouin Israeli Defense Forces war widows. These widows are positioned in an extremely paradoxical intersection as their fallen husband died during service in the Israeli Defense Forces, an army which is perceived by most Bedouins as the force which conquered and expropriated their land. Analysis of in-depth interviews with seven Bedouin war widows has led us to expose an abuse of their human rights, due to a failure to take into consideration their unique religious and cultural imperatives and restrictions. We explore their paradoxical lived experience of being formally entitled to equal human rights while reporting suffering discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization. In the name of these silenced Israeli citizens, we call for public awareness of this severe violation of human rights and propose some practical suggestions as to how to adapt the provision of social work support to the cultural features of these recipients, in order to truly adhere to the democratic vision.

Keywords Bedouin · Bereavement · Culturally sensitive · Human rights · Minorities · War widow

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Introduction

Since the beginning of 2017, we have witnessed a series of jarring governmental actions around the globe that violate human rights (Mapp and Gatenio Gabel 2017). Indeed, in most countries, current social welfare policies often do not reflect the basic rights of citizens (Pyles 2006). The present article joins existent scholarship about such institutional violations and exposes the abuse of human rights in a hitherto unstudied society, namely the Bedouin minority sector in Israel, with the aim of increasing awareness, as a necessary though insufficient step toward providing a remedy. Israeli society is composed of a variety of ethnic and religious sectors and therefore faces the challenge of multiculturalism alongside 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 the limited resources. Israel is a democratic state that champions the striving for equality, justice, and tolerance to multiculturalism. Despite the formal policies and laws aimed at ensuring equity, some sectors protest practices and behaviors which they experience as discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, and alienation. Our project showcases failure to provide culturally sensitive support for Bedouin war widows under a democratic regime which categorically claims to support multiculturalism. This failure stands in sharp contrast to the widely accepted rights-based practice and therefore casts doubt on the fulfillment of

the Bedouin minority's human rights in Israel. Our mission is to call worldwide attention to the need to adjust social work programs for the bereaved aimed at helping them adapt to living with their losses and grief to the social, religious, and cultural motifs of silenced minority citizens in multicultural democratic states.

Rights-Based Practice: an Overview

Our point of departure for examining whether the human rights of war widows of a minority group are fulfilled is the rights-based approach. The gist of this approach is that the right to realize one's full humanity is at the core of an idea of human rights (Ife 2012). Policy makers and social workers are expected to act to empower those who cannot exercise that right, among them Indigenous People living in oppressive structures, such as the Bedouins in Israel. The rights-based approach assesses the success in realization of human rights using the assumption that rights holders are individuals and groups who are entitled to them, and that duty bearers are obligated to make sure these rights are met (Gatenio Gabel 2016). A claimed right cannot be considered a "human right" unless there is widespread consensus for it across cultures and societies (Ife 2012). *Rights-based practice* for Bedouin widows should be based on the premise that human rights of ethnic minorities in colonialist regimes should be fully respected (Ife 2001). To be more specific, rights-based practice is grounded in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966) which recognizes "the inherent dignity of each individual and undertakes to promote conditions within states to allow the enjoyment of civil and political rights. Countries that have ratified the Covenant are obligated 'to protect and preserve basic human rights…'," with special attention to Article 27 which focuses on minority protection. Additional obligations stem from the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966). Article 11 includes the continuous improvement of living conditions, and Article 12 recognizes that everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable physical and mental health. Human rights are universal, and therefore, they are not dependent on social values or perspectives; as such, they constitute the legal basis to ensure the fulfillment of human needs by adequate social policymaking. Accordingly, social workers are expected to assure that the combination of policy and practice enables each individual to realize the basic human rights to which she is entitled (Cox and Pardasani 2017).

Recent decades have witnessed the diversification of the rights-based approach and the evolvement of the need to find the right balance between the universalized vision of human rights and attention to selective human rights standards. Paradoxically, one of the consequences of globalization has been a backlash to localization (Ife 2001). Therefore, the social work profession must adapt itself to contemporary zeitgeist and operate effectively at both the local and the global levels. Social workers must also find the golden mean between cultural sensitivity, cultural relativism, and globalization, so the gold standard should ideally allow diverse voices and experiences (Pease and Fook 1999) while keeping in mind, at the same time, the interrelations of converging forces in a globalizing world (Ife 2001). In sum, human rights in the contemporary era are constructed as the result of a continuous transnational dialogue about what constitutes the important elements of common humanity and global citizenship for people of diverse cultural legacies (Donelly 1999). Concern for common humanity is raised thanks to concentrating efforts for realizing human rights in the public arena; in so doing, human rights discourse unwittingly contributes to the violation of the rights of women and children, since much human rights abuse is prevalent in the domestic sphere (Ife 2001). We hope our research project will contribute to enhancing our understanding of mechanisms underlying the human rights abuse of war widows of a minority group in both the domestic and the public arenas in a colonialist though democratic state.

Human Rights and Social Work Practice

The relationship between social work as a profession and human rights can be analyzed by using two distinct perspectives (Ife 2016). The first sees the social workers as activists, by virtue of being involved with various human rights campaigns and supporting human rights initiatives. The second angle is practicing social work while heavily concentrating on the relationship and the social aspect of the praxis; instead of participating in human rights campaigns aimed at legislative reforms, the social worker may invest efforts in helping people achieve their true human potential, and contingent upon each client's cultural context (Ife 2016, p. 7). Both of these two perspectives of achieving human rights are consistent with the core values of social work because of the significance of values of social justice, the importance of human relationships, service to others, and the dignity and worth of all citizens (Banerjee 2005; Martínez Herrero and Nicholls 2017; Rice et al. 2017). Additionally, a human rights framework connects social work with larger entities, such as international human rights organizations, the United Nations, and disciplines concerned with global poverty such as economics and public health (Pyles 2006, p. 82). The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW 2008) includes guidance and expectations for how social workers should interact with clients, colleagues, and employers and also how should they treat the social work profession as a whole, as well as society at large. A focal point in this code is the mission of the social work profession of enhancing human well-being and helping meet the basic human needs

of all people, with attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (NASW 2008). According to Staub-Bernasconi (2016), who reviewed texts and documents written by the pioneering social workers, the profession of social work has a tradition of human rights of more than 100 years, yet formal/official principles of human rights and guidelines for their implementation have been explicitly stated in key documents of various social work associations only since 1992. The most recent guidelines are presented in "The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development—Commitment to Action (2012)" (Staub-Bernasconi 2016).

Despite the relatively long period of a century, where social work policy and practice have been inspired and informed by a human rights perspective, the profession has received only limited external recognition of its role in human rights, and hence, strengthening its impact and visibility is highly recommended (Healy 2008). According to Martínez Herrero and Nicholls (2017), there is much similarity, albeit sometimes implicit, between the mission and core values of the profession of social work and human rights principles and discourses; this congruence is reflected in codes of ethics of social work associations around the globe and also in official statements and theoretical developments. A recent development in the discipline of social work is the broadening understanding of the human rights involved in the social problems of clients. If human rights discourse was connected with the articulation of essential capabilities to which social work policy, practice, education, and research strive, the impact of social work could be more far reaching (McPherson and Abell 2012; Pyles 2006). Hence, the social work profession has been repositioned to be an arena for advocating for human rights and the acknowledgement of its potential contribution to achieving the goal of fulfilling the worldwide collective struggle for human rights and social justice (Healy 2008; Ife 2016, Martínez Herrero and Nicholls 2017).

One of the missions of social workers is to be aware and responsive to contextual factors (Ife 2016; Sewpaul 2016). This responsiveness to local situations should be sensitive, inter alia, to ethnic, religious, and cultural features of the clients (Ife 2016). The social work practice must recognize broader national, regional, and global transitions in order to fully meet clients' human rights (Sewpaul 2016). When comparing Western and non-Western values, the West is usually considered as liberal, expressive, egalitarian, individualistic, and pragmatic, while non-Western cultures are perceived as authoritarian, patriarchal, hierarchal, collective, and idealistic (Sewpaul 2016, p. 33). In England, for example, two out of the nine domains expected from a principal social worker focus on "values and ethics" (domain 2) and "rights, justice, and economic wellbeing" (domain 4) (Martínez Herrero and Nicholls 2017). "Experienced social workers are required to apply 'professional ethical principles to decision making and practice, supporting others to do so using a legal and human rights framework', as well as to 'advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing'" (Martínez Herrero and Nicholls 2017, p. 77). Social workers are also deemed as competent prospective human rights leaders in the future (McPherson and Abell 2012). Therefore, it is useful to proactively incorporate the discourse of human rights into social work education (Pyles 2006).

The Aim of the Project

An official document relating to the provision of psychosocial support to bereaved families was submitted in July 2010 to the deputy chair and head of the Department of Families and Commemoration in the Ministry of Defense 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 sociopolitical 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 multicultural practices are conducted with regard to Bedouin war widows; we therefore start with a brief overview of the topic of widowhood and bereavement and then zoom in to the issue of minorities, equality, and bereavement.

Social Work and Bereavement

Bereavement that occurs due to external traumatic circumstances, such as military casualty, increases the risk of dysfunction, symptomatic difficulties, and complicated grief of the bereaved (Rubin et al. 2017). Similar to major life stressors, the death of a significant other can influence the biological, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal ways of one's being in the world. Hence, good social work practice with the bereaved should be consistent with core social work values and ethics, namely self-determination, inherent dignity and worth, empowerment, and a commitment to the diversity of client experience and meaning (Goldsworthy 2005). Bereavement creates different grief reactions for each mourner because of the unique interactions between the death circumstances, the characteristics of each individual personality, and the cultural and social context of

each society (Bonanno et al. 2008; Rubin et al. 2016). Both the recovery and the well-being of the bereaved, as well as the continuation of the relationship with the deceased, are addressed in Rubin's (1981, 1992) *two-track model of bereavement*. The bereaved person's adjustment is evaluated in this model in two independent dimensions: functioning and continuing one's life, while continuing the relationship with the deceased in one's inner mental world. Cultural variation and differences in the meanings attached to death play a significant role in the adjustment to the death (Rubin et al. 2016). According to Rubin et al. (2017), the bereaved may seek support from both professional and non-professional sources, due to the immense pain of loss and difficulties in returning to function as before the tragedy. Working with the bereaved and recognizing grief and loss issues are one of the major skills necessary for social work practice (Goldsworthy 2005).

Social workers who work with bereaved Bedouins may find their mission a very complicated and challenging one. This is due to the fact that personal, subjective experiences of loss are embedded in a cultural context, and mourning patterns among Muslims are quite different than those in Western societies, including the Jewish Israeli population (Goss and Klass 2005; Rubin et al. 2016; Rubin and Yasien-Esmael 2004). Death is seen by Islam as God's will. Muslim people believe that birth and death are at the God's imperative, and the timing of a person's death is predetermined. The Bedouins believe that the date of their death is written on their forehead from the day they were born, and they cannot dispute or object. Expressions of deep sorrow and disappointment by the bereaved are perceived as dishonoring the will of God (Rubin and Yasien-Esmael 2004). While Jewish war widows serve as commemoration agents to perpetuate the national ethos that caused the death of their husband (Lebel 2011), Bedouin war widows' bereavement is disenfranchised and receives no societal recognition or honor (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017a). Although the Israeli law acknowledges this bereavement, it is perceived by Bedouins as private and lacking any public honorification or national meaning. Furthermore, the grave of the deceased is an arena for yearly commemoration ceremonies and visits by the family. However, this is not accepted in Bedouin society, and women are not allowed to be present at funerals (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017b).

Minorities, Equality, and Bereavement

The public discourse of bereavement in the Jewish Israeli society is imbued with militaristic ethos; hence, the circumstances of death as well as the bereaved individuals and families are not perceived as equal, instead a "hierarchy of bereavement" has evolved (Ben-David 2006; Lebel 2011; Nuttman-Shwartz et al. 2010). Bereaved families whose sons died during military operations earn societal embrace, appreciation, and prestige, whereas those who lost their beloved in civilian casualties are of much less interest or support. The mourners themselves adjust more easily to a death that is construed as serving a supreme goal such as defending one's country (Bartone and Ender 1994). According to Kümmel and Leonhard (2005), the death of a soldier is not a private matter; instead, it is a social death and therefore calls for a public mourning.

A similar yet different concept is Butler's (2004) "hierarchies of grief"; while hierarchy of bereavement is a macro level phenomenon which is the result of different death circumstances, hierarchy of grief is created through the ethnic and/or religious stratification of ethnic groups, including ethnic minorities in a specific society. Butler points to the selective coverage in the American mass media of the deaths of people of certain ethnic minorities. She coined the term "grievability" and argues that some lives do not seem to be grievable, as reflected in the shorter mention, if at all, of their death and an account of the circumstances. Butler attributes this lack of grievability to the press's failure to acknowledge the loss of Muslim lives during armed conflicts in the same way as of Americans'. She asks: "Will those hundreds of thousands of Muslim lives lost in the decades of strife ever receive the equivalent to the paragraph-long obituaries in The New York Times that seek to humanize – often through nationalist and familial framing devices – those Americans who have been violently killed?" (Butler 2004, p. 12). Butler argues that "white Americans do not merely fail to publicly mourn the lives of Muslims, but more fundamentally, that they fail to 'conceive of Muslim and Arab lives as lives in the first place" (Butler 2004, p. 12). Hierarchies of grief are a concept that is reminiscent of a related phenomenon, namely "disenfranchised grief" (Doka 2002). Disenfranchised grief relates to the grief of a bereaved person which is not socially or culturally acknowledged by her community members or the state. This stands in sharp contrast to enfranchised grief which grants the mourner societal recognition and legitimacy for mourning. Both hierarchy of bereavement and hierarchy of grief reflect macrolevel distinctions, whereas disenfranchised grief is a result of a micro-level observation of different types of bonds between the deceased and the bereaved. We will examine later in this essay where the Bedouin Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) widows are located within both the bereavement and the grief hierarchies. Since these widows belong to a cultural and political minority, we proceed to introduce the main features of this demographic sector.

The Bedouin Society in the State of Israel

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the Israeli population in April 2016 was 8.345 million people. The

Palestinian sector is about 20.73% of Israel's population, of whom approximately 84% are Muslim (including 3.5% Bedouin), 7.8% Christians, and 8.1% Druze (Bokek-Cohen and Ben-Asher 2017). The Bedouins are a small minority group within the Arab sector in Israel that maintains a relationship with other Bedouin communities in other countries (Al-Krenawi and Slater 2007). The Bedouin population in Israel is estimated to be approximately 260,000, with 200,000 Bedouins in the Negev and 60,000 Bedouins 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 (Ben-David and Gonen 2001). 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. Half of the Bedouins of the Negev live in designated Bedouin villages, and the remaining half reside in unrecognized villages (Dinero 2010). Hence, there are some 45 villages in the Negev that are not recognized by the state of Israel and lack basic services, such as water, electricity, health services, and education (Abu Rabia-Queder 2004).

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 (Al-Krenawi and Graham 1997). After the establishment of the state of Israel, the Bedouins were encouraged to settle in permanent settlements, either by force or by offering financial incentives; however, villages that were built outside the areas chosen by the state received no state funds for the development of community infrastructure there, because these villages were not recognized by the authorities (Al-Krenawi and Slater 2007). According to political geographer Yiftachel (2003), Bedouins wish to preserve their traditional lifestyle and largely resist moving into towns planned for them by the state. However, Israel practices various forms of exclusion against them by creating segregation in their national definition, space, and time, thereby retaining Jewish majority control (Azaiza et al. 2009). Family life in Bedouin society is collective: each individual is expected to show concern for the well-being 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.

Since the establishment of the state, 192 Bedouin soldiers have fallen during their military service and have left many widows. As mentioned above, polygamy is customary in this population; hence, some of the fallen soldiers left two or three widows, and likewise, a relatively large number of children were left orphaned. The societal position of widows should be evaluated within the patriarchic order (Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo 2008; Haj-yahia 1998; Herzog et al. 2004; Sa'ar 2007) which forces widows to stay in the domestic sphere and refrain from participating in the labor force. A Bedouin widow's social position within the inner societal hierarchy is considered lower than that of a married woman, and she is expected to demonstrate weakness and dysfunctionality as a symbol of the intensity of the lost marital relationship (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017a); expressing negative feelings and emotional suffering is discouraged and considered inappropriate (Abu-Baker 2010; Giveon-Sinai 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that this cultural context has led researchers to conclude that most Palestinian widows live in continuous grief and depression (Al-Krenawi 1996; Giveon-Sinai 2000). The widow usually needs financial support from family relatives, and this is a source of additional tension and conflict within the extended family (Giveon-Sinai 2000; Meler 2014).

Despite the marginal status of Palestinian Bedouins women within their communities, in recent years, they have managed to overcome some cultural blocks and succeeded in achieving opportunities for education and employment, which, in turn, helped them improve their inferiorized status (Azaiza et al. 2009). Usually, women are not allowed to freely choose whom to marry, and their parents negotiate with parents of a prospective husband who seems to suit their traditional marriage norms, and the two families together decide the timing of the wedding. After the marriage, the bride moves to live with the groom's extended family and tribe, a custom seems to contribute to the married woman's relatively lower marital and societal power (Meler 2014). If we assume that the husband used to protect the welfare and interests of his wife and his children when he was alive, in case of his death, the widow becomes a marginalized and unprotected figure, who must fight for every penny to provide for basic needs for herself and for her orphaned children; indeed, the literature shows that Palestinian Bedouins widows feel rejected and discontented (Abu-Baker 2010; Giveon-Sinai 2000; Grushka-Lazover 1999; Meler 2013, 2014).

Bedouins and the Military

Although military service is not mandatory for Bedouins, they have served in the 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 battalion of desert patrolmen which includes 20% of the Bedouin soldiers and the unit of trackers which includes 40% of the Bedouin soldiers. Seven percent of the 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 *intifadah* (uprising) and the rising influence of the Islamic movement in the Bedouin society. Currently, 300 Bedouin men enlist in the military yearly (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017a).

An understanding of the social position of Bedouin military widows in Israel is best attained in two broader contexts: one relates to the status of women as well as the nature of family life in Bedouin society and the other relates to their being an ethnic minority that lives under occupation. The status of women in general is inferior to that of the men; while married women are subject to control by their partners, unmarried women, whether never married or widowed, are monitored by their male relatives, as is the prevalent custom of family life in Bedouin society (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017b). These women live in a patriarchal order (Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo 2008; Haj-yahia 1998; Herzog et al. 2004; Sa'ar 2007) and are weakened by both structural factors, i.e., a low rate of participation in the labor force, as more than 90% of the women are unemployed (Ma'an 2005), 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 (2011) estimates that 30% of marriages in the Bedouin society are polygamous, and sees polygamy as part of the reality of the lives of Bedouin women.

We turn now to the methodological aspects of our research project, which was aimed at examining if and how the Israeli Ministry of Defense performs rights-based and culturally sensitive practices with Bedouin war widows, bearing in mind that the ultimate goal of providing support is to enable and facilitate the realization of their humanity by fully meeting their rights.

Methodology

Prior to beginning the study, ethical approval was secured from the IRB of the Kaye Academic College in which the authors are employed.

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, the 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.

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 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 sociodemographic or additional information other than age. Each interviewee is cited in the "Findings" section under a pseudonym.

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 and the 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 1.5 h and were documented in writing during the interview, after obtaining the consent of the interviewees. Special attention was given to non-verbal cues, such as crying or facial expressions. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed and informed that they may contact the authors, if they wish.

Data Analysis

Microanalysis of the text (Strauss and Corbin 1998) 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 on, the authors conducted an iterative reading and checked whether the themes proposed in the previous phase are 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 they emerged from the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The narratives were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparison approach to qualitative analysis. 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.

Findings

Analysis of the widows' narratives yielded four major themes which converge to attest to the Israeli myopia regarding the cultural uniqueness of Bedouin war widows and a failure to meet their human rights; each theme illustrates the pain and suffering of the interviewees, most of which could have been avoided or lessened by adopting rights-based practice

informed by appropriate policymaking that acknowledges the basic human rights of minority members.

Failure in Informing of the Husband's Death

The sequence of failures to respect the widows 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 (Ben-Asher & Bokek-Cohen 2017b). Understandably, the very first moments following the receipt of this message become an eternalized memory, and the mode of message delivery may have an impact on coping and recovery. Hence, the manner of delivering the death notification and the people who are present can be of support to the relatives. 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 were not aware of the need to inform also the second wife. Fathma, who was a second wife says:

> His family was informed about his death already 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 did not understand why he was so worried about me….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 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 took my 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 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, a failure which might have caused the widows to feel less valued or inferior to the husband's parents and/or his first wife. Since these widows are located at the bottom of the Israeli hierarchy of bereavement (Lebel 2011), it seems that the army representatives were not sensitive or aware of the moral obligation to inform them about the death.

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 honoring the elderly. All of the interviewees told us that their husband was buried in the traditional way and in the territory of the tribe.

Amira relates to the type of funeral:

> On the day he died, the commanders arrived [to me] 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 to drive her to the cemetery where she watched the ceremony from the car. Naserin challenged the customs and attended her husband's funeral, while completely and deliberately ignoring social reactions.

There is a wide consensus that Bedouin soldiers are perceived as betraying their heritage and community (Ben-Asher and Bokek-Cohen 2017a); hence, when a Bedouin man dies during his military service, a majority of the community leaders and members react with either indifference or hostility. His life is not grievable, and his widow and close relatives symbolically do not exist in the local hierarchies of grief (Butler 2004). In sharp contrast to the practice of embracing bereaved families who lost their beloved ones in civilian circumstances, military bereaved families are ignored and marginalized. In Doka's (2002) terminology, their grief is disenfranchised, and therefore, culturally sensitive social work with the bereaved is needed to help the widow and the family to cope with both the loss and the societal neglect and isolation. 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 marrying off a daughter to a serving or a discharged IDF soldier.

Ambivalent Attitude Toward the Support Provided by the Authorities

We observed bitterness and frustration at the partial support and failures of the Ministry of Defense 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 who may jeopardize the support provision for various reasons and interests. When a Jewish soldier dies, it is the duty of the Ministry of Defense to assist with the logistics related to the *shiv'a* (the 7 days of mourning according to Jewish law). In the Bedouin tradition, there are 3 days of mourning during which the close relatives of the deceased stay at home and accept visitors. On the 40th day, it is customary to organize a wide-scale memorial ceremony which includes serving a traditional dinner to the guests. Manal tells about her monetary and physical difficulties in organizing 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 this things and we live about 5 km far 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.

Yet, Manal does express satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Bedouin social workers from the Ministry of Defense. She mentions receiving help in building a solar energy heating system and referring her daughter to higher education studies which eventually gave her a profession and a job. We felt that much ambivalence is conveyed in her words: on the one hand, satisfaction with monetary support, but on the other hand, expecting something more than money: "The Ministry of Defense gives me only money, they do not help with other things."

Similar to Manal's satisfaction with the help for her daughter's studies, Amira was happy with the help that was given to her son, who was advised to enlist into the army. She proudly reported that her son has been serving already 5 years in the regular army, a job which is perceived as providing economic and occupational stability. We find much ambivalence in these narratives, as the perceived victimizer is the very same entity which helps and supports, leading to a necessity to cope with complicated and paradoxical circumstances.

A large part of the privileges and rights aimed at supporting bereaved families is irrelevant and not applicable in the Bedouin sector. Every IDF widow, no matter what her religion, is entitled to a monthly pension as long as she lives. Besides that, IDF widows and orphans receive monetary benefits of four kinds: (1) reduced taxes when building or buying a house, (2) car purchase and attendant expenses, (3) subsidized educational expenses and occupational training, and (4) health and psychotherapy services. Sadly, the Bedouins cannot realize these benefits, owing to the traditional cultural code. For example, support in purchasing a house cannot be provided if the family resides in an unrecognized village; alternatively, purchasing a house in a recognized village may force the widow to leave the tribe and be separated from her community; either alternative is not allowed by the leadership of the community. Furthermore, even if hypothetically it was 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 license, owing to the norm of forbidding them to leave their domestic space. This very same social norm is also the cause that widows are unable to utilize the psychotherapy which is provided to IDF widows and orphans by Bedouin female social workers: visiting a widow who resides in an unrecognized village requires that a Bedouin tracker soldier drives the social worker, an embarrassing situation in itself. The female social worker is perceived by the community as violating traditional prohibitions against women venturing outside their familial space and being accompanied by a male chauffeur who is not related to her by marital or familial relations. Hence, she is not appreciated by the family and community, and her presence is unwelcome as she demonstrates an unwanted "role modeling" for all women in the village. In extreme cases, a wrong interpretation is given to the visit of the female social worker which can endanger the social worker's life.

Bedouin war widows cannot enjoy other benefits, such as vouchers for a nationwide book store which does not sell books in the Arabic language; they are forbidden to take part in group family trips in Israel subsidized by the Ministry of Defense without a male partner (though some manage to invite a female relative), due to the traditional code, and often, the trips are scheduled during their *Ramadan* (the 1-month holiday in which Muslims fast during the daytime). Another source of trouble in receiving support or utilizing privileges stems from the custom of polygamy. When a Bedouin soldier has been married to two women, if he dies, both of them must share the support and divide it into two. Naserin, who was a second wife, describes the difficulty, which came to a happy end only after a legal battle:

> The Ministry of Defense recognized me as an IDF widow although I am the second wife. At first they gave me only half of the monetary support and other payments in kind. I said 'It's ok for myself but why should my

> children receive only a half [of other IDF orphans]? 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…'

Most of the disappointment was related to the lack of support or the partial support provided by the Ministry of Defense; with regard to the army, there was hardly any direct criticism, as the army is perceived as the source of the husband's good earning capacity since he is the sole breadwinner in this society. Yet, a few negative statements were made regarding the army. These ambivalent and contrasting attitudes reflect simultaneous rejection and appreciation of the army. While the widows felt alienated and detached from their community owing to the military circumstances of the husband's death, they still could not deny the repeated efforts of the social workers to help and support them.

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 for 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 into the army. It seems here again that the widows hold ambivalent attitudes toward the army, as they do with toward the Ministry of Defense.

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 marginalized status, to say the least, of Bedouin IDF 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'." This statement explicitly asserts that the life of the dead father is considered ungrievable, making the widow and her children almost transparent in the eyes of the village inhabitants; consequently, their grief is disenfranchised. 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 to support the widow with the economic burden of taking care of the family without a male breadwinner.

Sahar relates to this issue: "My neighbors 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 got divorced and 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 told about her oldest son, who apparently felt he must replace the paternal figure. He started beating his sisters after he heard some gossip about their alleged inappropriate behavior. The family feels they live under a magnifying glass and try to conform to traditional ways of behavior as much as possible.

After describing in detail the multiple and diverse ways, in which the Israeli state fails to ensure the realization of the widows' human rights, and their inability to use the support formally available, we turn now to discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our project.

Discussion

Our research project explores the Israeli selective myopia regarding the unique cultural features of Bedouins which intensifies the silent suffering of Bedouin war widows and their experience of being marginalized and excluded both by the authorities and their communities. These widows are far from fully realizing their basic human rights of freedom, dignity, social inclusion, and mental health. Like other marginalized groups, stereotypes and stigmata intensify their marginalization and the discrimination against them (Cox and Pardasani 2017). While the attitude of the Bedouin members of their local network is likely to change only if some kind of intervention would be approved by the leadership, it is the duty and the moral obligation of the state via its social workers to adjust the support system to the Bedouins' unique needs. As we have shown in this paper, the widows' inability to fully benefit from the social services on offer to them casts doubt on the Israeli state's ability to care for its minority citizens and assure their well-being. As long as no action is taken, basic human rights are severely violated, and these widows' lives are filled with unrelieved sorrow and pain. We introduced the concepts of the hierarchy of bereavement and the hierarchy of grief in the "Introduction" section as theoretical constructs. Our findings illustrate how theoretical concepts of this type are experienced by individuals in real life. We believe that interventions at both the community and the national levels aimed at educating the population (both dominant and minority groups) that any loss of life is grievable, and that every widow is entitled to an equal opportunity to realize her benefits and rights and the support for which she is eligible, may contribute to alleviating these widows' suffering and plight.

That being said, various activities at the level of the community aimed at encouraging the acceptance of these widows should be conducted with great caution and sensitivity. Unfortunately, against the backdrop of the current political hostility felt by the Bedouins toward what they perceive as

the colonialist regime, the circumstances of the death of the husband in the service of the Zionist state are an insurmountable barrier against receiving any kind of legitimacy for supporting widows of "ungrievable" men.

Bedouin IDF widows' societal status and their position in the inner hierarchy within their community seem to be much worse than those of "ordinary" Bedouin widows. These widows face a much more humiliating attitude and alienation, owing to the circumstances of their husband's death. 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 explicit. 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 labor force and earn a salary, the envious relatives are more motivated to expropriate her monthly pension. They may also criticize her active lifestyle, in contrast to the expected behavior of agony and grief (Al-Krenawi 1996; Giveon-Sinai 2000).

The social services support policy of the Ministry of Defense has been recently updated (Drori-Gohar 2011), 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 sociocultural context and is a member of a wider network which includes, among others, 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 the widow 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 domains in which work can be done to minimize the exclusion and discrimination of these widows and facilitate the realization of their humanity and human rights:

1. *Enlisting the traditional leadership of the tribe 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 Defense to enable the widow legitimacy and an optimal platform for gaining relative liberty while minimizing the influence of potential opponents.
2. *Establishing a sub-unit in the Ministry of Defense that would specialize in providing psychosocial support for the widows which is adjusted to their cultural and religious legacy*: this department would also provide the financial and instrumental basis for conducting support groups for bereaved Bedouin IDF widows.
3. *Reassessing the extant support practices in order 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 is not applicable or acceptable in their community, they would receive other grants which 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 (and sometimes the third) wife to equal rights and status is expected to significantly contribute to their well-being.

The above recommendations should be designed and applied with great sensitivity, while looking for the proper and optimal balance between the following dimensions: (a) developing and implementing global versus local solutions; (b) adjusting, if possible, Westernized social work practice to non-Western clients versus adapting indigenous beliefs and customs; (c) providing multicultural intervention programs while adapting traditional and collectivist values versus incorporating some universal and Western principles; and (d) interpretation and analysis of people's needs using international social work framework versus local understandings and meanings of such needs (Gray and Fook 2004).

Conclusion

Linking the personal and the political aspects of human rights violation is the core of the social work profession (Ife 2001). By the same token, the increasing globalization trend is raising new challenges to international social work (Gray and Fook 2004). Therefore, social workers have sought to assist not only individuals and communities in need but rather sought also to contribute their input to policymaking at the national level (Ife 2001). We should always bear in mind that the voices of the disadvantaged and the marginalized people who receive professional assistance from social workers are hardly ever heard; therefore, if Israel aims to provide social justice to all citizens equal to other human rights programs over the world (Ife 2001), there is much work to do in order to establish a just and egalitarian society. The current situation is far from just, and the existent practices as well as some possible solutions

are likely to reinforce the existing discriminatory social structure.

Our study contributes to the extant literature on discrimination and exclusion of ethnic and social groups as well as 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 conquered their homeland. We expose an alleged democratic regime in which minority citizens are weakened, abused, deceived, excluded, and victimized by various sorts of threats as well as through emotional, verbal, and economic violence by both their community and the state authorities who are in charge of their well-being. Despite the declared equality, it is disappointing to find out that the actual attitude toward Bedouin women who sacrificed their beloved partners and the actual intervention provided to them by the Israeli Ministry of Defense lacks humility as well as cultural sensitivity. Understandably, there are individual differences between the widows as to their personality traits, resilience, and coping styles; also, the small number of the interviewees should be taken into consideration when drawing comprehensive generalizations. The challenge of a democratic society is to learn the complexities of each of the ethno-cultural and religious features that eventually hinder minority citizens from realizing their humanity. It is our hope that the present project will bring this injustice to international light and, consequently, will trigger an initiative to devote state efforts to revisit the current instructions and plan new and better policies, aimed at upholding human rights, as well as increasing equality, justice, and well-being for people whoever they are.

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