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'They Didn't Consider Me and No-one Even Took Me into Account': Female School Principals in the Arab Education System in Israel

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Abstract

The study of women's management and leadership in education has become a central research topic and the copious work published in many countries encompasses various issues relating to gender and educational leadership. The study of female school principals from the Arab minority in Israel has only recently begun. This is a minority that lives mostly in separate settlements, distinguished from the majority Jewish population by their lifestyle and culture, in a society that can be described as developing. In-depth interviews were conducted with the seven female school principals, from different socio-cultural backgrounds, who had successfully climbed the professional ladder to senior positions in the Arab education system in Israel. Data-analysis addressed three areas: biographical background; the social and political aspects of the women's nomination to principalship; and the social and professional acceptance of the women as principals. Findings indicated that women principals contribute significantly to the development of Arab schools. As women in senior roles, the majority faces resistance; a change of societal norms and willingness to accept women's leadership would enable many more women to fill public roles and to contribute to their society's progress.

Introduction

The issue of women's management and leadership in education has become a central focus for research since the end of the 20th century (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1987) and continues to occupy scholars. Researchers in many countries discuss various aspects of women's management and

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leadership including political ((Riehl and Lee, 1996; Blackmore, 1998), professional (Oplatka, 2001), gender (Embry et al., 2008), and social (Mertz and McNeely, 1998) issues.

Recent studies of women's management in developing countries have investigated psychological aspects (Akuamoah-Boateng et al., 2003), feminist leadership (Biseswar, 2008), indigenous women (Fitzgerald, 2006) and the under-representative number of female principals (Celikten, 2005).

Little is know about the lives and careers of female managers in developing countries (Oplatka, 2006) and this is also true with regard to female principals in Arab society in Israel, a society that can also be considered to be a developing society. There have been a few studies of female leaders in Arab education in Israel (Addi-Raccah and Ayalon, 2002; Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005; Khattab and Ibrahim, 2006; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008). However, there has not yet been an in-depth study of a large group of female principals that would describe their personal and professional lives and their managerial style and that considers political and social aspects relating to Arab women's leadership in Israel.

The Arab minority in Israel lives in separate settlements, excepting 6 percent who live in mixed-ethnic cities (Manna, 2008) and is distinguished from the majority Jewish population by religion, lifestyle and cultural norms. Arab female principals in Israel constitute an ethnic minority that suffers from discrimination. They belong to a society with a conservative culture, which suppresses women, and are also subject to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that exists in the state. These circumstances engender barriers stemming from both their gender and ethnicity, and the continuing political conflict and they also pose a challenge for those researching Arab female leaders in Israel.

The goal of the present study is to examine and understand professional, social, community and family aspects of the lives of Arab women in management roles in schools and in public life.

This study presents the stories of seven Arab female principals. Analysis of their stories enables the reader to clearly comprehend the environment in which these principals work, to understand the significance of their supportive families in a patriarchal society and the cultural, social and ethnic obstacles that they are forced to overcome as Arab women.

The article begins with a review of studies of female school principals and leadership styles of women as distinct from men, discussing the characteristics of Arab society in Israel and the barriers set before women in developing countries, the broadening of higher education and the appointments of Arab women to managerial posts. It continues with a description of the research methodology employed in this study and the research procedure. The second part of the article focuses on the importance of the family of origin and the woman's life partner and their impact on the woman's determination to study develop and advance. It discusses political pressures, difficulties in attaining social acceptance and support, and relates to political implications for the Israeli-Palestinian context.

School Leadership: The Gender Aspect

Women's leadership has been discussed in the literature concerning educational management in many Western states since the late 20th century (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1987; Riehl and Lee, 1996; Blackmore, 1998; Kochan et al., 2000). Various issues concerning female principals have been debated in this literature.

Schools, like other work environments were shaped by gender relations in which men have a higher status than women and gender is one of the most powerful determinants, far more powerful than other school characteristics (Dantow, 1998). It has been suggested that leadership formed from a feminist viewpoint would put more emphasis on interpersonal and inter-community relationships and a conceptualization of 'power' as a multi-dimensional and multi-directional concept,

that could be used to empower others instead of controlling them (Fennel, 1999). It has also been argued that change in the gender base of education entails planning a substantial change in the wider political context of educational reform so that schools can respond more authentically to gender issues (Blackmore, 1998).

In a series of studies on women's leadership, it was found that men and women were distinguished by the way in which they lead organizations. Female managerial style tends to be more flexible and comprehensive than the corresponding male style; women are better suited than men to the adoption of participatory leadership (Chase, 1995) and women are often more efficient managers than men (Kochan et al., 2000). Women focus on relationships with others, their main core interest is teaching; they have a democratic style, share more and they feel it is important to create a sense of community (Shakeshaft, 1987; Kochan et al., 2000). The legitimization of the 'feminine' managerial style has influenced the formation of new models for school leadership (Riehl and Lee, 1996). With increasing integration of women in managerial posts the character of school leadership has altered (Addi-Raccah, 2006).

In many countries women's path to principalship has not been easy, and the external obstacles encountered by the minority of women in these posts include cultural perceptions that identify 'feminism' with ineffectiveness in management and leadership (Blackmore, 1999), covert discrimination against women and male control of educational management that delays opportunities for women's promotion (Hill and Ragland, 1995).

A comparative study conducted in Israel found that Arab men tended to strongly support the authoritarian-supervisory style, a finding that is in line with the managerial style that characterizes male culture (Addi-Raccah, 2006). In a study of women in the Arab education system in Israel it was found that gender played a decisive role when women served as principals (Shapira, 2006).

Arab Society in Israel and the Status of Women in a Developing Society

The Arab ethnic minority in Israel lives in communities separate from Jewish communities, except for 6 percent who live in mixed cities. Arabs have daily contact with Jewish society, through work, trade and education (Abu-Asbah, 2007). In 2007, the Arab minority in Israel numbered 1.45 million (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008a).

The Arab minority is distinguished from the majority Jewish population by its religion, lifestyle and cultural norms. Nevertheless Arabs in Israel have a different lifestyle and culture from that prevalent in other Arab states (Shapira, 2006). Israel's Arab society includes a rich cultural variety with much heterogeneity and is split internally according to many dimensions, such as region, religion, family, tribe, community and class (Abu-Asbah and Avishai, 2007). Each of the main ethnic groups composing the Arab national minority, Muslim, Christian and Druze, are influenced by internal processes of modernization, external processes associated with the contact with Jewish society, and Arab–Jewish relations, and by their geographical location and type of settlement (Shapira, 2006). Different communities can be found at different points along a continuum between traditionalism and modernism.

The status of women in Arab society in Israel is based on cultural norms and a lifestyle resembling those of developing countries, including multiple constraints and duties within the family, male dominance in teaching and management posts, the importance of the father's role and adoption of an androgynous management style by the very few female managers in post (Oplatka, 2006). Cultural norms specify gender-defined tasks and fields of responsibility, assuming that a person needs to act according to society's gender expectations (Celikten, 2005; Sidani, 2005). In this sense, leadership roles 'belong' to the men in society and women are not supposed to aspire

to this type of position; non-conformation incurs social sanctions (Cubillo and Brown, 2003). In Arab society, behavioral codes, such as the demand for honor and a good reputation, are still widely supported and perceived as basic values, thus the growing recognition of women's rights must still be seen in the context of a patriarchal hegemony (Ghanem et al., 2005).

The Arab Education System in Israel

Separate systems exist for Arab and Jewish education in Israel. The Arab education system uses Arabic as the language of instruction and Hebrew is studied as a second language from the middle of elementary school. The principal source of funding is from the central state government. Education laws were legislated when the State of Israel was established in 1948, including provisions for compulsory education, which all citizens of the state receive without distinction between nationalities or religions (Al-Haj, 1995)

Nevertheless, data presented comparing the Arab and Jewish education systems, testify to a lack of equality, budgetary discrimination and lack of development of learning programs and content that acknowledges Arab culture and identity. Additionally there is disproportional under-representation of Arabs in governmental educational planning, supervision and management (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Zelniker, 2006).

The Arab education system also lacks a suitable physical infrastructure (Golan-Agnon, 2006). Despite the achievements in improved outputs of the Arab education system over the years, these outputs remain relatively low in comparison with the Jewish education system (Abu-Asbah and Avishai, 2007).

With regard to education of girls, in the initially their proportion of total pupils in schools was low and they had a high drop-out rate from high school upwards (Al-Haj, 1995). Over the years there has been an increase in the proportion of Arab girls studying both elementary and middle school, and the proportion of girls in high school is greater than that of the boys, amounting to 92 percent (Shapira, 2006). In 2007, 58.3 percent of Arab students who received a first degree in Israel were women and women constituted 47.9 percent of those receiving a second degree (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Women's Leadership in Arab Society in Israel

The acquisition of higher education among Arab women has led to the feminization of teaching and a consequent slow infiltration of women into managerial positions in education (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005; Addi-Raccah, 2006).

According to the basic assumptions of modernism there is a positive correlation between education and occupational mobility, and different groups have the ability to redeem the educational resources that they have acquired in the employment market. However, Arab women's higher education has not been realized as a resource for the promotion of equality between men and women in Arab society (Mazawi, 2002) and has not led to greater flexibility in the gender distribution of power, prestige and influence. Apparently, education has not been instrumental in dispelling prevailing traditional gender roles (Arar and Abu-Asbah, 2007).

According to Sa'ar (2006) strong, capable Palestinian women, are encouraged to abstain from using their personal strength for authoritarian public status, which would undermine the existing gender hierarchy.

In 2008, women constituted 28 percent of the Arab principals in elementary schools, and 14 percent in high schools (Ministry of Education, 2008), compared to 74.6 percent of Jewish principals in elementary schools and 43.6 percent of Jewish principals in high schools (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008b).

Research relating to women in the Arab education system in Israel testifies to the difficulties women face securing promotion to managerial posts (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2006; Kahattab and Ibrahim, 2006). Women's employment status is restricted by patriarchal cultural norms (Addi-Raccah, 2006). These norms restrict women's employment to their local and family environments and impede their participation in broader economic revenues (Joseph, 2000).

Women, who have succeeded in being appointed as school principals, are perceived as exceptions and the accepted norm remains that this role is appropriate and intended for men (Shapira, 2006). Although there is an increasing number of female teachers applying for second degree studies in higher education institutes (Haidar, 2005) and even if a woman's qualifications exceed those of the man in all the required areas, men are still prefered for coordination and management in school and in management tenders a fierce battle is waged against women and heavy political pressure is applied to prevent their nomination (Shapira, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

Feminist research from the past decade relating to female principals in Western societies constitutes the starting point for the consideration of this issue in societies in which women's management is a new phenomenon (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1987; Riehl and Lee, 1996; Mertz and MacNeely, 1998; Blackmore, 1999). These are conservative societies in which the woman is only assigned a role within the private sphere:

> Even going out to work is something novel, and this is even truer when the woman attempts to enter the public sphere as in the management of a school. The sparse studies on women's leadership and management in schools in developing countries throw some light on the phenomenon and show how women are sometimes allowed to become principals in societies that exclude women from the public sphere, and how these women cope with the obstacles they face. (Oplatka, 2006: 604)

Arab women in Israel encounter many cultural obstacles on their way to becoming a principal that resemble the barriers encountered by female managers in other developing societies (Celikten, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2006; Biseswar, 2008). Arab women who are sufficiently privileged to study in higher education meet the majority Jewish society for the first time, a society that resembles Western societies in culture and basic characteristics, exposing them to more egalitarian norms (Al-Haj, 1995; Masry-Herzalla, 2008). They forge their path with the help of higher education, professional excellence and support from their family (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005).

The conceptual framework underlying this article therefore considered feminist theories regarding management, conceptualization of the changing role of women in transitional societies between traditionalism and modernism, and theories concerning women's management style.

Research Method

This article combines two studies that were conducted among school principals living in different geographical regions of Israel. The authors chose to present the part of these two studies that relates

to female principals in Arab education in Israel as one study since the goals and the research questions were similar. The findings revealed many common points and the integration between these two studies enriched the picture of the culture and society that was obtained.

Interviews were conducted to produce detailed descriptions of the principals' lives, their relationships with male and female teaching staff and local community leaders, with the community itself and within their immediate and extended families. Analysis was based on life narratives as the major source of data (Lieblich et al., 1998). This approach exposes transitions and developmental processes and elicits meanings attributed by narrators to phenomena related to their lives and professional development (Josselson, 1995). Analysis of these personal, professional and social narratives (Mishler, 1986; Gilligan et al., 2004; Chase, 2005) produces a rich, broad understanding of the studied phenomenon (Stake, 2005).

Narratives portray subjects profoundly and meaningfully, presenting the narrator's actions, attitudes to, and interpretations of, life (Lieblich et al., 1998; Murray, 2004). They represent people's interpretation of life events from their own perspective, depicting an authentic picture of their world (Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Participants

Seven female principals participated in the research. They ranged in age from 39 to 55. Four participants were married, two were single and one was a widow. Four (Souheir, Rasmiya, Wardi, Narin) lived in Arab communities in the Northern region of Israel and three (Sarab, Mariam and Indira[1]) in the central region. The participants were selected using the snowball method, through their local reputation or through prior acquaintance. All participants were fluent in Hebrew. For more details see Table 1.

The Interview Procedure

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted: six of them in the principals' offices at school and one was conducted at home. They were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Four interviews were conducted in Hebrew by the first author and three interviews were conducted in Arabic by the second author, who also translated them into Hebrew. Each interview lasted between 90 to 120 minutes. Participants were asked to relate to two key issues in the course of the interview: Tell me about yourself and about the family in which you grew up? and Describe your professional development and your nomination to principalship?. Other questions to which they responded were: How was your nomination received in your settlement? What reactions did you receive from men and from women? How does the staff, men and women, react to the fact that you are a woman principal? Describe your administrative and leadership style. The interviewer asked clarifying questions several times and occasionally conducted a brief conversation with the interviewees. The atmosphere was informal.

Interview Analysis

Interviews were analysed using *The Listener's Guide* method (Gilligan et al., 2004) whereby the researcher reads the text, and attempts to identify the different 'voices' of the narrator, relating to them separately. This method enables researchers to expose the whole range of an individual's relationships, with the self, with others in the environment and with the individual's society. It was used in other such research concerning women in the Israeli Arab education system

Table 1. Participants' family backgrounds, education and management experience

Name	Personal details	Education and management experience	Key statement
Rasmiya	Druze woman, from very religious family, completed Jewish high school without her father's knowledge.	Second academic degree in education. Principal of Druze elementary village school for 14 years.	My mother's dream was for her daughter to be a seamstress. I had another dream.
Wardi	Muslim woman, from multicultural city with Jewish neighbors. Her mother encouraged her studies and development. Aged 50, married + 4 children + grandchildren	BA degree in education and Management course. Principal of urban elementary school in Arab town for 8 years.	I felt that the people on the inside had betrayed me, the ones who had taught me in the principals' course, and the ones who knew who I was and what my capabilities were.
Indira	Traditional-modern Muslim woman. Very open family of origin, her mother was a political activist and candidate for the Knesset (Israeli parliament). Aged 41 + 4 children.	Second academic degree in educational counseling. Management course. High school principal for 3 years.	I don't remember anyone else in the village even thinking of studying away from home
Narin	Muslim woman, daughter of village leaders. From Grade 9 studied in Jewish school. Aged 45, married + 3 children.	BSc in sciences and management course. Principal of elementary schools for 7 years, 3 of them in her home village.	I had to maneuver between different forces within the family. It concerned the running of the school, and bringing in new teachers.
Souheir	Secular Muslim woman, daughter of a mixed marriage. Father was school principal. Aged 39, single.	BA in land of Israel studies and management course. Principal of elementary school for the 4 years.	Our family is unique, from the multi-cultural aspect. My maternal grandmother is Jewish, my paternal grandmother is Christian, but my family is Moslem.
Sarab	Secular Muslim woman, from a family that designated her from an early age for education and an elevated social status. Aged 54, married + 4 children.	BA in education and management course. Principal of elementary village school for 11 years.	They didn't exactly want me, they didn't open the door for me, didn't lay down a red carpet, it was all done belligerently.
Mariam	Secular Muslim woman from an impoverished family with 9 children. Father encouraged the daughters to study. Aged 48, single.	BA in Hebrew literature. Management course. Principal of elementary village school for 10 years.	I was the first woman in our tribe to go away to study at university

(Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005) to analyse the findings in the following way: the first reading faithfully maintained the spirit of the narratives without any interpretation. The second reading involved listening to the voice of the 'self' in the context of the individual's status in the interviewees' families. The third reading related to the interviewees' perception of their professional and personal relationships. The fourth reading exposed the manner in which the interviewees experienced themselves as part of their socio-cultural and professional settings.

The present research was analyzed relying on three readings: the first focused on the women's family backgrounds and is entitled 'My name is a sort of revolution'; the second revealed the political aspects of the women's appointment to the principalship and is entitled 'They did not consider me and no-one counted me'; the third reading describes the way in which these female principals are perceived in their social and professional contexts and is presented under the title 'The nomination was accompanied by boundless affection'.

Only a small selection of participants' stories appears in the findings section, to portray a general picture while avoiding profuse details.

Findings

'My Name Is a Kind of Revolution'

This section describes the personal backgrounds that shaped the leadership of six of the participants: Sarab, Souheir, Indira, Narin, Mariam and Rasmiya. Biographical profiles were constructed, based on the participants' stories, relating generally to their families of origin, but sometimes to their lives with their present-day partners and how these relationships influenced the women's determined struggle to achieve their role. A prominent common element of their narratives is that despite immense differences in family background, these women had all been pushed and encouraged towards leadership since childhood, following leadership role models in the family, or messages channeling them towards study and advancement. This contradicted the accepted norm for girls in their societies.

Pioneers in the Village. Sarab has been the first female school principal in her local village, for the past 11 years. She described the background that shaped her life:

> From the age of five, my parents told me that I would be a lawyer. My father died when I was 11, before I reached 8th grade, and no other girl had ever continued beyond that. I moved to Nazareth to study. We chose that option so that people wouldn't say that I was leaving the house and coming back late. I enrolled in Bar-Ilan University, and then discovered that I would be returning home each night at seven o'clock. It was unacceptable to return so late, and there were also no buses. I enrolled in the Arab Teachers' Seminar in Jaffa, where I completed my English teaching studies. My husband always encouraged me, supporting me even before I became a principal.

Rasmiya has been a school principal in a Druze village for the past 14 years. She originated from a very religious family in an era when girls' schooling was limited to 5th or 6th grade, only learning to read in order to be able to read religious books. After the 8th grade, schooling continued in Haifa.

> But girls did not travel because there was no awareness concerning education. The Ministry of Education helped those who wanted to continue and in Grade 8 they asked what we would like to be in the future. All the girls wrote housewife or seamstress, which was the most popular occupation

in those days. Except for me, I thought: 'I'm not even able to write down on the paper that I'm going to be a housewife or a seamstress'. I had another dream, but nevertheless, I said that at the very least, I would be a teacher. The principal said: 'Only one girl has written that she wants to be a teacher.' The other girls teased me. They said: 'We come from non-religious families and even we didn't dare to write that we want to be teachers, so how can you be a teacher?' I said to them: 'That's the minimum, and I'm not willing to even write anything else.'

She started high school in Haifa, with her male cousin, without her father's knowledge:

I persevered with my studies, and was always hiding so that no-one would see me. I walked in my cousin's shadow. My mother knew and my uncles paid for everything. My father knew that I could read and that I enjoyed reading. He always said: 'Why are you reading all the time? You should read more religious books. It's good for you. Why do you read secular books?' But I took books to my room in secret. My cousin helped me. We studied together.

Indira has been principal of a high school for the last three years and describes herself as follows:

I was the eldest child in the family I saw myself as some-one special. I was always in the spotlight. I also have a very unusual name. I was named after Indira Gandhi. Wherever I was, I had [this] special presence, the firstborn in the family, the first granddaughter. In school, I was always one of the leaders. My personal feeling is that I am outstanding; everyone looks up to me, my sisters and my brother.

My name is a kind of revolution, and I have my parents to thank for that, it's the power of words. Do you know who Indira Gandhi was? A quiet woman, who led a revolution. My mother named me. She was from Haifa and brought liberating views into the house. My father was very tolerant and hardworking. He studied independently at Tel Aviv University, completed external matriculation, advancing under his own steam. He learned Hebrew on kibbutzim during the 1960's and was exposed to Jewish society. Education to values, rather than to religion, was dominant at home. My mother came from a very open society. My father allowed her to work and to develop. That was very unusual. She achieved a very senior position in Israeli politics, as a representative of Arab women's status. That was very important for my development and exposure, as was my parents' agreement to send me to Ben Gurion University. Anyone else in the village even thinking of studying away from home.

A Rather Special Family. Souheir has been principal of a local school for the past four years. She described her family as follows:

Our family is unique, from the multi-cultural aspect. My maternal grandmother is Jewish, my paternal grandmother is Christian, but my family is Moslem. It was the way we were educated, the perceptions we absorbed, as well as my father's status. He was also a school principal, and promoted co-existence and democracy. I grew up in three different cultures, and it isn't so simple, to live with them and take the things that you want, to develop your personality as you wish, to suit your individual needs. So I'd say that for me, this is where it all started.

Narin has been a school principal for the past seven years. She describes her family as follows:

My father is from one of the leading families in the village. His father was the Mukhtar [accepted leader] of the village. He is very intelligent, well-educated and knowledgeable. He is also well-known in the village as an agent of change. My mother is also from a large family. Her grandfather was also once Mukhtar of the village. She was uneducated, didn't study much. My grandmother insisted that all her daughters should at least learn to read and write. So my mother studied up to 4th grade. She knows Arabic and

Hebrew. Both my parents understand, that primarily, children's education means [more] knowledge. My father has many Jewish friends. This probably influenced how he runs his own family.

Mariam has been school principal in the village where she lives for the last 10 years. She describes her family as follows:

> I am the third-youngest in a family of six girls and three boys. Although the boys were supposed to receive their father's undivided attention, according to accepted practice in Arab families, my father gave all his attention to the girls. We were poor, and there were many children. I was closer to my father than to my mother. He always wanted me to be a pioneer. He grew up without parents. He worked hard for our sake. It wasn't easy to leave home to study in those days. The family was against my studying at university and sleeping away from home. My eldest brother was living in Tel Aviv and he supported me, telling the family that he would keep an eye on me and that they didn't need to worry. My father had died earlier. He was my symbol. He understood life's wisdom. I was the first woman in our tribe to go away to study at university. He would have pushed me and told me that I deserved it. This opened the door for all my sisters.

'They Didn't Consider Me and No-one Even Took Me into Account'

The tender for school principals in Arab communities nearly always involves difficult struggles, tensions and obstructions for women. The literature in this field describes this phenomenon (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005; Shapira, 2006). This section, presents five narratives explaining how the establishment and community accepted women for management roles. Despite immense diversity of the communities, similar traits reappear in all the narratives, such as opposition by the head of the local municipality, political and social pressures, gossiping, and slandering the woman's name.

'It Was All Done Belligerently'. Sarab describes the tough opposition to her appointment as principal and leader in her community:

> When they talked about candidates in the community, they said that there were seven men, and one woman, but they didn't remember who she was. They used to talk about me, saying: 'She can't do anything and she thinks that she can take on a management position.'
> The principalship is the highest position that an Arab can achieve. On the day of the tender, they didn't consider me and no-one even took me into account. They didn't know me because I am a woman. Men can go out socially in the community. They can sit in cafés and market themselves, but I can't do that. They have a place where they can talk about themselves, their achievements, what they have accomplished. Nevertheless, I won the tender, but I didn't get the job. The previous principal retracted his resignation. He changed his mind because I won: 'How can a woman replace me? It's unthinkable!'

On the advice of her attorney Sarab appealed and won, but the fight was not yet over:

> You feel bad when they don't want you, but you achieve the goal because you want to be there. Instead I attained the role and had to start the job already exhausted. They didn't exactly want me, they didn't open the door for me, didn't lay down a red carpet, it was all done belligerently, and after a battle, there are many wounds. They could influence you to react in one of two ways; either to attend to your wounds, or disregard all sorts of important things, to ignore your wounds and start afresh.

Narin applied for the tender in a neighboring village, following undertaking a training program for school management:

> There were 18 candidates, including one other woman, and I won the tender, despite outright opposition from the head of the local council. Following negotiations and sensing that the issue would be taken to the Education Ministry, the council compromised and accepted me as principal in that village. In 2005, the school principal in my own village retired, and I decided to apply for the job. The tender was offered at election time. This time, the fight was even worse. The head of the local council also opposed me. The Teachers Union supported him. I wouldn't capitulate, and said that I would apply to the Supreme Court. As a successful principal, it is my right to transfer to the school of my choice. The Ministry of Education supported me. I went to the appeals committee in Jerusalem, where I was accepted as the next principal of the elementary school in my village.

Rasmiya had a constant struggle with the establishment in the Druze village where she is school principal, and with entities within the establishment that often attempted to besmirch her with lies:

> When I first became principal, it was something special, the entire village was surprised. How could a woman run the school? It wasn't acceptable, it wasn't approved, and no-one would believe that a woman could run such a big school with 750 students and 50 teachers, mostly men. But nevertheless, I had practical experience because the previous principal was weak. There was a political, social reaction by everyone, but inside school, I didn't feel it. I had support, including a large group from Haifa, who weren't connected to the village.

The head of the local council wished to promote his candidate, and made several attempts to obstruct Rasmiya and the school, attempting to turn the school parents' committee against her.

> Ministry of Education officials read the letter written by the Director of the Programs and Methods Department, about my innovations and changes and the teaching methods she had seen and they said: 'Good things involving innovation and changes are happening in the school.' That is how I won the tender. Then they went to the Supreme Court. The mayor was there with a big entourage, a crowd of 23 people, ready to claim a victory in the Supreme Court. In opposition, stood the Ministry of Education's legal adviser, who defended the nomination. And since then, I have been running the school.

A Fight between Hamullas and a Political Conflict. Mariam was thrown into internal politics against her will when she was appointed principal of a school whose population came from a hamulla (extended family) who were involved in a feud with her hamulla. She describes the situation as follows:

> We are still a male-dominated society, there was opposition both inside and outside of school, it wasn't easy. I had to have the courage of my own convictions, as there would be no concessions. I tried to understand them, at first, not because I am a woman, but because there were tensions between my hamulla and that of the school's neighborhood. This reinforced my desire to show everyone what I could do. People think that women will easily comply with men's requests. They think that women are emotional, and that their emotions will overcome their aspirations. I heard this also from older experienced teachers, and my hamulla behaved nastily, and were rude and aggressive toward me.

Wardi was the first woman principal in her home town, opening the door for others. She received the role through her second tender. The first tender followed the mayoral elections:

I didn't support the elected Mayor, so he was adamant that I shouldn't get the job. The Ministry of Education insisted that they wanted me, but they compromised and accepted a different candidate. That was why I didn't win the first tender. The second tender was a real turning point for me. I didn't want to apply for any more tenders, because I had applied on the strength of skill, and educational awards, with a list of my previous jobs. A few months later, the Mayor came to my house and made a promise to support my nomination. I said that I didn't believe in promises, I hadn't applied for any tenders, I'd had enough. I had tried, I was unsuccessful; apparently it was the wrong place for me. But then he started to persuade me: 'You'll win the next tender.' I didn't believe him.

Indira attributes her appointment to the fact that the head of the local authority was Jewish and was appointed by the Ministry of the Interior:

In general, the high schools appoint the principal without a tender, as it's usually in the hands of the head of the local authority and is determined by political power relations, and not necessarily professional powers. If the head of the local authority hadn't been Jewish, and I hadn't known he would support me on the basis of my skills, I may not have applied.

The Internal Politics of the Hamulla. Narin studied in the Jewish education system under different norms from those of the village and was not ready for the pressure that was exerted on her from within her hamulla by members of her family of origin:

My second year as a principal was the most difficult. I had to cope with something internal within my family; I had to maneuver between different forces within the family. It concerned the running of the school, and bringing in new teachers. And as someone who had studied in the Jewish sector, I saw education as sacred. I had to remunerate people according to worth and ability, not according to whether they were part of my family, or not. It was terribly stressful; as if they were coming at me with a steamroller, making demands, and threatening, 'if you don't do this, then we'll do that to you.' I wasn't prepared for that.

   In the end, I determined the boundaries, although I paid a heavy price. But they learned to accept that from me. My family ostracized me for several months. My husband was abroad, and his family wasn't with me, and I was completely and utterly alone. I didn't have time to cry about it then, but later I cried a lot, when it was over. It was mainly my male friends, and their families, who supported me, three families. They didn't leave me to cope alone with my family's rejection.

'The Nomination Was Accompanied by Boundless Affection'

Social Acceptance. Achieving social acceptance is often very problematic. Although there is growing support for female leadership in education, social disputes and conflicts still set the tone in many communities. The resistance of the local authority to women's principalships is the first stage in the struggle that these women face and it appears that what particularly hurts them are the social barriers that make the female principals' lives extremely difficult.

Sarab described the reactions she received when she was appointed to her job:

There were people who said: What? Are there no more men? Why should a woman have to run the school? If she gets pregnant, who will run the school? How will she sit alone, with men? We're

accustomed to drinking coffee in the principal's office. What will we do now? We can't enter the office if a woman is sitting there alone, because it's against Islamic Law for a man and woman who are not related to sit together behind a closed door. We'll need glass walls so that everyone can see what is going on and so no-one will be afraid

You lose lots of friends on the way to this kind of job. It's because of internal community politics, the culture, the society, gender-based issues, women's status. Some men forbade their wives to contact me, they were afraid that I would influence them, or as they put it, 'ruin them', an undermining woman because she is an unusual woman, who is, threatening women's traditionalism.

Wardi described the warm acceptance that she received when she was eventually appointed:

The second tender was a year later. Everyone supported me and they said that it was suitable for me and that I deserved it and my husband wanted it very much. I didn't want it, I feared a second disappointment, I felt that the people on the inside had betrayed me, the ones who had taught me in the principals' course, who knew who I was and what my capabilities were. After the tender, the Mayor telephoned me: 'Congratulations, you won the tender.' I can't even describe the happiness. I was the first woman principal in the community to win a tender Everyone came to my house to congratulate me, both men and women. There was a real celebration.

Narin describes the friendly way in which her appointment was accepted:

My election was accompanied by boundless affection. People had been waiting for Narin to be their principal. Their willingness to help was phenomenal, men more than women. Everything was wonderful until the politics recommenced. There are always political issues, as soon as politics gets in the way, much is destroyed. In my village I stumbled a bit, because of complex hamulla issues. I did not have much experience, as I grew up mainly outside the village, and I suddenly had to understand certain essential issues connected to my life, meaning, to my tribe.

Being Accepted Professionally and Succeeding. These women's choice to manage a school constitutes part of the change processes that the Arab education system in Israel is presently undergoing. This is a transition from a conservative traditional approach to innovation in teaching and learning programs and democratization of the relations between the educational staff and students (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005; Shapira, 2006).

Rasmiyah described how she achieved professional success despite continuing conflict:

Six years later, the school was the first Druze school to be nominated for the prize, without the support of anyone except for the supervisor and school mentors, who recommended us. We received the national education award, without politics, without the help of the person in charge of Druze education or of anyone else, but by virtue of our own innovation and up-to-the-minute learning, according to professional criteria.

Indira describes her professional success as a factor that influenced her acceptance by others:

They brought me a much bigger bouquet of flowers than I expected. I came as a savior at the right time. The society was ready to accept a new face. The Islamic movement spoke very highly of me, as I wore traditional dress. I had a good name as an educational adviser in the community. Everyone accepted me. For 18 years, I had always made efforts to help the students

The teachers couldn't restrain their admiration for this rejuvenating institution, where the whole community was involved in setting the school back on its feet in a respectable manner. Women mean strength, and perhaps men supported me because I am a woman and they had faith in my intentions.

Conclusion

These personal, social and professional narratives of female school principals, educational leaders and pioneers, testify to cultural transition processes within Israeli Arab society. One explanation for this could be the interaction with the majority Jewish society. Arab women's entry into the public sphere, especially through higher education is the first step to personal empowerment and innovation (Gilat and Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2008).

This study depicted female school principals from various communities in Arab society in Israel, focusing on female leaders in the Arab education system, who despite their dual marginalization, have achieved an empowering space, serving as a model for their community and for other women, from which they, themselves, draw strength.

Biographical Family Circle

The source of strength of these women, who are required to function in a traditional society that does not yet acknowledge women's leadership as a social norm, appears to lie in each woman's family background. Each woman's personal story is, first of all, a story of a family, and a story of empowerment, despite the community's views and restrictions for women. We hear about Sarab, whose family sent her away from home, to allow her to pursue her high school studies; Souheir's father was a school principal and the family upheld open, democratic values; Indira, the eldest daughter in the family, was marked for greatness by her name, and served as a role model for her siblings. Narin's family included village leaders and her father's running of the family was influenced by his contact with Jewish families. Thanks to her eldest brother's support, Mariam was able to study and live in Tel Aviv; Rasmiya received assistance and encouragement from her educated uncle's family, who funded the fees. Each woman was empowered from an early age, in her own, unique way.

These women's family stories are often in tune with the nature of their environment, many family constraints and obligations, girls' low education levels, the importance of the father's role (Oplatka, 2006), and the individual family's ability to challenge society. Rather perversely, their ability to innovate, change norms and present a new model of a woman who can fulfil a central role in public discourse, also depended on the patriarchal hierarchy. Those who made this possible, were the men — fathers or brothers, and later, also husbands (Shapira, 2006). The need for support of a male figure and the father's authorization is a well-known phenomenon in patriarchal societies with socio-political obstructions. This kind of support is essential for women's advancement in the public sphere (Cubillo and Brown, 2003; Aburabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008).

Nonetheless, these women's achievements were revolutionary, since cultural, patriarchal norms (Addi-Raccah, 2006) limit women's work status, restricting their employment to the local, familial environment and hindering their participation in the broader economy (Joseph, 2000).

A previous study found that most of these female pioneers in education owed their achievements to their families, who encouraged them to study and to dare to stray from accepted norms, to make changes, even within the system (Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira, 2005). The present findings regarding female school principals are therefore supported by previous findings. Recent

expansion of the group of female principals enables examination of the phenomenon in a wider social context.

Taking a broader environmental viewpoint, it appears also that the influence of cooperation between Jewish and Arab neighboring communities, regional activities for teachers and students, and regional and national frameworks for principals and teachers generate change in the perception of women's status. Many young Arab women now study at university leaving the family for the first time. They live away from home, encountering a more liberal lifestyle, without the social supervision of the Arab community. Experiencing freedom of expression and thought, they operate in a democratic environment (Alhaj, 1995; Masry-Herzalla, 2008).

Acceptance of Women in the Public Sphere

Study of women in the Arab education system in Israel reveals problems involved in promoting women to management roles in school (Khattab and Ibrahim, 2006; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Oplatka, 2008), and it seems that higher education is insufficient to ensure women's emergence into the public sphere. Although higher education is a decisive factor in women's participation in the workforce, this opportunity may not be realized, if the patriarchal structure continues to hinder change in women's social status (Arar and Abu-Asbah, 2007). Women's entry into public roles is still unnatural in Arab society. Despite the steady augmentation of female school principals over recent years (Ministry of Education, 2008), these women are perceived as exceptional, and the accepted norm is that men are appropriate for this role. Even when a woman has superior achievements to a man in all the relevant areas, men are preferred for management (Shapira, 2006).

The narratives of this study illustrate the problems involved when a woman is nominated for a principalship tender: Sarab explained how she was treated during the period leading up to the tender and described the tender as a battle engendering wounds that needed healing; Wardi felt betrayed by her acquaintances on the tender committee after the first tender; The head of the local council opposed Narin on both occasions when she won the tender; Rasmiyah was opposed by the head of the local council, who attempted to besmirch her; Indira would not have applied for the tender, had it not been for the Jewish head of the local council; Mariam, dealt with hamulla struggles, and functioned as school principal under the rival hamulla's continuous pressure. Relevant also are the narratives describing the heavy social price of family ostracism.

In practice, even before women are appointed as principals, they experience social opposition and political pressure. This opposition is not professional and does not truly consider their skills and experience, but stems from what is perceived as the threat posed by women's entry into the public sphere and positions of central authority in the community.

These narratives paint a difficult picture of the environment in which the principals operate, and they obviously need to excel and instigate far-reaching changes in school in order to succeed. These women have an especially high sense of self-efficacy, although research concerning Arab schools found that female teachers have a lower sense of self-efficacy than male teachers (Shapira, 2006). Nevertheless, Wardi's story exemplifies how, despite her great confidence in her own abilities and skills, her sense of self-efficacy was damaged when the mayor thwarted her in the tender.

However, the picture would be incomplete without reference to its broader context. We cannot ignore the ongoing discrimination against the Arab minority by the government of the Jewish state. Despite many recommendations based on research, by decision-makers on the governmental and Arab leadership level, the Arab academics' employment problem remains unsolved. No program

has yet been designed or completed, to improve employment prospects for Arab university graduates (Al-Haj, 2003). Especially for women (Arar and Abu-Asbah, 2007).

Unequal employment opportunities between Jews and Arabs are reflected in the Arab education system in Israel (Khattab and Ibrahim, 2006). As the local Arab work market creates a very limited demand for the educated workforce and in the absence of opportunities in the public sector, educated Arabs are restricted to work in teaching. Lack of opportunity for inclusion of educated Arabs in management roles in general also detrimentally influences women's inclusion in such roles in the education system (Addi-Raccah, 2006). Since the prestigious positions are saturated and employment opportunities for their male educational counterparts are scarce, women are forced to be satisfied with lower-level and lower-income positions than men (Semyonov et al., 1999).

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Note

1. Indira is the only participant whose real name was used in this article. She consented to the use of her name.

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