



# ARAB WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Stories from Israel

Khalid Arar,  
Tamar Shapira,  
Faisal Azaiza, and  
Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz



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and Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2013

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We dedicate our book to the women who participated in our study,  
whose stories constitute a source of inspiration for us all.

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## PREFACE

When a country educates its girls and women, its gross domestic products grows. When a corporation adds more women to its senior leadership, the company performs better financially than when there are only men at the top (Dychtwald & Larson, 2010).

This book explores the life stories and careers of 22 pioneer Arab women leaders who have forged their path to management and leadership in education and welfare, describing the challenges they have faced to attain leadership positions in a patriarchal society, their coping strategies, and their determination to improve their societies. Arab women leaders constitute the exception to the norm as management has almost exclusively been defined as a masculine role in their society. The book relates specifically to the case of Arab women managers, supervisors, and professionals in the education and social welfare services in Israel. Their stories offer a porthole view into a rich and multifaceted social world revealing their perceptions of various phenomena in private, professional, and public spheres.

The impetus to examine the issue of the increasing appearance of women in leadership in Arab society in Israel\* stems from the discomfort felt by the authors regarding the resistance Arab women meet when they aspire to construct a professional career and to attain management positions. The contribution of the present book is to enrich existing scholarship concerning these issues by focusing on the perspective of women in management in the Arab world, a topic largely overlooked in the

\* The phrases “Arabs in Israel” or “Palestinians in Israel” refer to the Arab minority who are citizens of the state of Israel and do not include the Arab population residing the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip.

current formation of knowledge about gender leadership and management.

The comprehensive title of our book, *Arab Women in Management and Leadership*, reflects the fact that this is not a marginal phenomenon in Arab society in Israel, rather a growing phenomenon among Arab women throughout the Middle East including Israel. The opening of the gates of academia for Arab women has undermined traditional gendering of functions, empowering women to enter to the public sphere, to develop, and to progress. The situation of Arab women leaders in Israel does not differ substantially from that of their colleagues throughout the Arab world and the Middle East. Yet, in Israel, alongside a culture of origin that excludes women from the public space, Arab women are also disadvantaged in the employment market due to their minority status. In our discussion of these issues, we consider to what extent their situation either differs from or resembles the situation of women from ethnic minorities in “Western” societies.

The book begins with an explanation of each of the authors’ personal perspectives, indicating personal and academic motivations for their investigation of Arab women leaders in Israel. Khalid and Tamar have studied this issue now for many years with the collaboration of Faisal and Rachel within the supportive framework of the University of Haifa, where many Arab women have had the opportunity to study and develop professionally.

The first chapter, “Introduction and the Women Leaders’ Stories,” describes the narrative method used to collect the women leaders’ stories and the Listening Guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2004) employed to analyze and interpret these findings. Additionally, this chapter includes a précis of the women’s personal biographies with representative citations from their stories.

Chapter 2, “Arab Women’s Leadership: Definition and Context,” reviews background literature concerning women’s leadership in different world contexts, considering the achievements of three waves of feminist activism for the improvement of women’s status in the Western world; the employment

patterns of Arab women and the blocks they encounter on their path to management; changes in the status of women in the Arab world as expressed recently in the Arab Spring, sociodemographic details of Arab society in Israel, Arab women in Israel, and, more specifically, women managers and leaders in Arab society in Israel.

Subsequent chapters relate to issues emerging from different readings of our research transcripts: Chapter 3, “They Didn’t Consider Me, and No One Even Took Me into Account,” describes eight women school principals, considering three aspects of their lives: the development of their personal abilities in their families of origin; political-social aspects of their appointment to management and their entry into the public sphere; and the women’s achievements and contributions to Arab education and to their society.

Although many Arab women now prevalently manage elementary schools, Chapter 4, “Challenging Cultural Norms,” describes those few exceptional women who, with the assistance of significant men, have broken through the glass ceiling to manage high schools in the Arab education system, a post considered secondary only to the position of mayor in many local governments, since senior managerial positions are few and far between in Israel’s Arab society. The chapter relates to their role in leading their schools from traditional conservatism to modern pedagogy, constituting role models for the empowerment of their students.

Chapter 5, “Women in Male Territory,” describes a unique elite of talented women, whose professional skills and personal abilities have enabled them to run an intense “marathon” of achievements. Empowered by higher education and multi-functioning, they have eventually reached the summit of the educational profession, attaining recognition as pedagogic supervisors in the Ministry of Education, where they introduce change and professional development, making a dynamic contribution to the Arab education system. The achievements of these women support the conceptualization of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) that “women have become leaders largely

because of what they can do with leadership, not what they can be with it” (p. 89).

Chapter 6, “I Was Always a Believer, Only the Clothing Was Missing,” relates to an issue that emerged rather unexpectedly from our encounter with our interviewees: the return to traditional dress by many women managers and leaders as seen by these women themselves. The chapter examines the dynamics and consequences of this change in external appearance, including the reactions of the women’s schools, communities, and Jewish colleagues. These findings offered a unique opportunity to discuss an issue that has awakened much interest in the Western world and to reveal the complex motivations underlying this phenomenon and its effects.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many of our colleagues have helped us over the years both directly and indirectly to organize, synthesize, and better understand our research findings. We would especially like to mention Professor Claire Macglynn from the Belfast University, School of Education, who encouraged the publication of this book; Professor Margaret Grogan, Dean of the Claremont Graduate University, School of Education; close associates such as Professor Izhar Oplatka of Tel Aviv University, who provided many additional insights into the world of women managers in education; Professor David Chen, Dean of Education in the Center for Academic Studies, Israel; Dr. Hanna Bar-Yishay, who indicated the significance of this book and motivated us to publish; and Azhar Diab, for her help in interviewing.

We are also grateful for the support of Prof. Rose Thomas and Emerald Publishers who allowed us their permission to republish parts of our article: Shapira, T., Arar, K., & Azaiza, F. (2010). Arab women principals' empowerment and leadership in Israel. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48 (6), 704–715.

Similarly, we are indebted to Prof. Tony Bush and Sage Publications for their permission to republish excerpts from our article: Shapira, T., Arar, K., & Azaiza, F. (2011). "They didn't consider me and no one even took me into account": Women school principals in the Arab education system in Israel. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39 (1), 25–43. And to Prof. Jeffrey Brooks, *Journal of School Leadership* editor, for the permission to republish excerpts from our paper: Arar, K., & Shapira, T. (in press). Leading a quiet revolution: Female high school principals in traditional Arab society in Israel.

We would like to express our esteem to Ms. Naomi Yalin, who has accompanied our research journey with translation of texts from the original Hebrew and linguistic editing of the English

texts, for her dedication, reliability, and assiduous involvement in the texts and their meaning.

Khalid: My special gratitude goes to my parents, who instilled me with values of respect for my fellow man and commitment to giving. To my wife, Eman, who has taken a strong interest in my writing since we first met, enthusiastically and with curiosity reading the texts in their rough drafts. To my beloved children, Karam, Hosni, Bisan, Hady, and Silin, who have grown together with my writing and from whom I have learned much.

Tamar: I would like to thank my parents, of blessed memory. My mother Erna Lavie, whose love, modesty, and warm heart light my way through life; and my father Zvi Lavie, educator and researcher who taught me the value of knowledge. My deep gratitude goes to my children Saar, Ayelet, and Michal whose sincere interest in my work inspires and motivates me; and to my husband Haim, who has stood beside me for so many years, supporting me with love and patience.

Our book presents seminal lessons concerning Arab women's endeavors to overcome challenges in order to reach leadership and management positions and to use these positions to improve their societies. It is our hope that this modest volume will make a credible contribution to the creation of a more liberal world where diversity and equity constitute fundamental principles for the achievement of true democracy.

Lastly, but definitely not least, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Palgrave Publications for their recognition of the potential for the publication of this book, and to Leila Campoli, the editorial assistant for her advice and direction throughout this challenging project.

## AUTHORS' PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Although each of us became interested in the subject of Arab women leaders from different perspectives, and arrived from different paths, our book represents the common vision and intense cooperation of two Arab male and two Jewish female researchers, offering the reader a unique insight into a little explored field of knowledge.

### KHALID

When I began to teach and entered the school, I was constantly aware of the physical presence of the male principal and the authority he radiated throughout the building. At the same time, I also taught in an elementary school where a woman had begun to work as the principal. I was therefore able to observe, close up, her characteristics that differed so much from those of the male principal I had known as both a student and a teacher.

Moving between the two schools gave me an opportunity to see the differences between the two institutions and to discern the difficulties encountered by the woman principal. I heard her story from a teacher who worked in close cooperation with her, and I witnessed the educational discourse that she tried to promote. Later, during my studies for a second academic degree, I went back to the woman principal and interviewed her and wrote about her in my dissertation. Although this was her personal story, it was also the story of a society, and my research became a journey of discovery concerning the Arab society in which I live.

Seven years later, after a short period of teaching, I was nominated to lead a senior high school. Appointment to this senior post was considered a natural promotion for me as an Arab male. My selection for such an important role, at the age of 33,



revived previous thoughts concerning the blocks that ambitious Arab women encounter.

As I continued to consider the way in which practice and theory intertwined in education, the words of two Italian philosophers remained transfixed in my mind: "Theory is where you know everything and nothing works; practice where everything works and nobody knows why; here we combine theory with practice; nothing works and nobody knows why" (Padulo & Arbib, 1974).

My work in and for the community, my continuous search for the "truth" that would guide me in my teaching, evoked more difficult questions: Why did I have more rights than a woman? What public space was open to me as opposed to that available for the Arab woman? These questions opened up an additional sphere of inquiry, leading me to investigate the "women's path" and discovering that their movements were essentially restricted to an area between the domestic space and the educational space.

During my advanced academic studies, I became familiar with the work of women who had written about narrative research and the investigation of discourse. This new knowledge helped me to begin to listen attentively to women's voices, in order to investigate the world of women teachers and principals and to understand how their careers developed over the years. I interviewed another woman principal and she had a different story. Nevertheless the setting within which both women acted was similar, and they both imparted a strong sense of power. They had broken through barriers and positioned themselves as successful women, as leaders who had contributed to the alteration of social norms.

I learned much from these interviews, and they stimulated reflection concerning my own work, something for which I owe much gratitude to those women. The candid sharing of their stories could not be described in numbers or percentages and "even went beyond the meaning of the words" (Chase, 2005, p. 658).

My meeting with Tamar (the second author) opened up a professional, social, and research encounter and enabled me to

deepen my observation of my life as a man researching the world of women who had become leaders in a traditional society. Professor Faisal Azaiza and Professor Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz, both from the University of Haifa, have continually encouraged us throughout our research with support and empathy but also with a critical eye.

### TAMAR

My first encounter with Arab schools in the 1990s introduced me to an unfamiliar world, where male managers predominated, creating a pervasive authoritarian atmosphere, expressed in rigid codes of etiquette and in the staff's acceptance of the principal's authoritarian status. Male principals took an interest in and became involved in different projects, but the real enthusiasm for innovations came from women teachers.

In the workshops I directed, women teachers were able to talk about their personal and professional lives, but they did not mention their relations with the men in their families. I wondered whether the women were prohibited from expressing their feelings and attitudes concerning their status within their families and whether it would be possible to introduce changes in the school without confronting what appeared to be underlying conservative and authoritarian approaches. Was there something I as a "temporary guest" could not see? Or perhaps these women managed to bypass dangerous issues? I saw the women teachers' enthusiasm for ideas, which promoted a growing democratization in relationships in the school, which until then had been strictly hierarchic. But it was not at all clear to me how and why things occurred in the school dynamics. The many women I met in the Arab schools aroused my interest and curiosity and led me to choose "Women leading change" as the subject for my research, in a research field (Arab schools) outside my natural life circles. I had to literally "cross the road" to reach the other side and to redefine my position as a researcher in relation to these women teachers and their culture.

In an attempt to define the research field and its boundaries, I returned to the concepts of "here" and "there" (Lavie & Swedenberg, 1995, p. 67) that had been the keystone of early

anthropological research. "There" are cultures; "here" is the world of culture containing the piano, canonical books, and museums for sophisticated arts. Yet today there is a blurring of the boundaries between the anthropological research field and the home: accessing "research sites" (there) and writing up "documentation" (here) have become intermingled, one with the other (*ibid.*, p. 81).

Under the impression of these ideas concerning the boundaries between the research field and the researcher, I attempted to define my position and the boundaries between myself and the women whose world I had chosen to explore. I tried to understand how my meetings with them had altered over time from interviews with unfamiliar "others" to encounters on an equal basis between myself as the listener and writer and the narrators in a common location. I began to understand to what extent these women's lives were similar to my own.

I discovered that the most important tools available for me, when researching the lives of Arab women teachers, and later of Arab women principals, were my empathy, curiosity, humanity, and intellect; but these qualities were insufficient. I had to transform the women's experiences so that they would not feel they were researched subjects and would understand that they interested me as human beings and women and not just as representatives of a phenomenon. I hoped they would be able to share my feeling that we had more in common than difference and that they would be able to recognize that they were the ones who possessed the knowledge in this study. Above all, I wanted to believe that, at least to some extent, there was no "here" and "there." Nevertheless, I had to continually remember that I was a representative of the dominant culture. I felt that the research field resembled an apartment block where we all lived. Our identities were based on our ethnic and cultural identities, but age, family status, motherhood, and professional role were no less important components.

The women's stories dealt with their personal struggles for independence and self-realization: struggles against gender suppression and discrimination and fighting for equality between girls and boys, women, and men. All these elements and others

were interwoven within my personal biography as a woman and teacher. It was, therefore, only natural that, more than a decade after completing my initial research, I returned to listen to the stories of women who had attained managerial roles, including some who had participated as teachers in my first research.

### FAISAL

When I first began my university studies in the 1970s, Arab students were few, and the great majority of them were men. Over the years, as I continued my studies and later developed my career in academia and in the public sector, I saw more and more women pursuing an academic education, finding their way into a variety of fields and specialties and making valuable contributions to their communities and to society. Today, Arab women are well educated and the majority of Arab university and college students are female. In my years as head of the University of Haifa's Jewish-Arab Center, I have met many bright women who were studying toward graduate degrees and who had impressive records of academic, professional, and personal success. These women can and should be an inspiration to others.

Yet, despite this welcome trend, Arab women still face difficulties in reaching the highest levels of their professions and obtaining management positions. Too often they are considered esteemed members of an organization but do not have the opportunity to take on a leadership role. There are numerous smart, accomplished, and dedicated Arab women who have not been able to fulfill their potential because they have encountered cultural and structural barriers. Identifying these barriers and finding ways to remove them is, thus, of vital importance, and this is what we set out to do in writing this book.

In addition to my own experiences, I am the husband of a talented and ambitious educator who had to work very hard to become a school principal and later to achieve the senior position she now holds. I have seen firsthand how hard this road can be, and I am hopeful that my own daughters will find more opportunities open to them. Through my research and my

work in academic positions and in public service, I have strived to make this goal a reality for them and for other women.

### RACHEL

I was born in Haifa in 1940, when this country was still known as Palestine. I lived in a neighborhood on the seam between the Arab and Jewish areas of Haifa: at Yechiel Street 13, between Sirkin Street and Hashomer Road, close to the Talpiot market. It was a wonderful neighborhood, owned by the Christian Arab Mr. Srakhabi. My parents paid him rent. The apartment was high ceilinged and spacious with a decorated tile floor. The three houses he owned, joined by gardens, were built in varied architectural styles: one in oriental style, the second in the German Bauhaus style, and the third in an integrated style. The gardens were splendid: fruit trees grew there—lemon and other citrus trees, whose blossom was intoxicating—purple roses, jasmine, and frangipani. From my childhood, I can only remember the beauty of life in that Jewish-Arab neighborhood, Beit Srakhabi.

In 1948, everything changed. War broke out, and the house's owner left for Lebanon. Arab refugee boats left from Haifa port; European refugee boats arrived in Haifa port. My whole world that included both Jews and Arabs was destroyed. Since then and until today, I have aspired to once more return to that world. As children, we tried to save the gardens by watering them. As an adolescent, I held on to my close personal relations with Arab friends. And as an academic, I found that, in the University of Haifa, I once more had the opportunity to recreate those marvelous gardens and the special atmosphere of Beit Srakhabi.

I have taught at the University of Haifa for many years. In each course or seminar I taught, approximately half the students were Arabs: Druze, Muslims, Christians, and Circassians. The Jews too, were from different cultural backgrounds. I devoted most of my time and academic work to researching the University of Haifa as a place that facilitated life together—even if this involved both harmony and conflicts. We, the academic staff, have studied the students together, their social-emotional

world. Over many years we have focused on understanding their evolving identities and their aspirations to develop, to empower themselves, especially the religious women, both Jewish and Arab.

I have written many articles—but the most important thing was that the university enabled me throughout to maintain the *Beit Srakhabi* of my childhood. I still nurture processes of interpersonal, interreligious, and international understanding, and intimacy, respect, and equality in my academic garden.

## CHAPTER 1



### INTRODUCTION AND THE WOMEN LEADERS' STORIES

From 2007 to 2010, we interviewed 22 Arab women managers. Listening to their stories in their natural settings, we were able to learn about their leadership of the educational and social welfare institutions that they headed.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted in the women managers' offices or at home. They were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Eleven interviews were conducted in Hebrew by Tamar and her assistant, and eleven interviews were conducted in Arabic by Khalid, who also translated the transcripts of these interviews into Hebrew. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.

Participants were asked to relate to two key issues during the course of the interview in response to the interviewer's open questions: the first, "Tell me about yourself and about the family in which you grew up," and the second, "Describe your professional development and your nomination to management." Other questions to which they responded were "How was your nomination received in your village or town?" "What reactions did you receive from men and from women?" "How does the staff, react to the fact that you are a woman manager?" and "Describe your leadership style."

Ten women were also asked about their transition to traditional clothing, which has been adopted by many Muslim women in Israel in the last decade. Their stories are presented in Chapter 6.

The interviewer also asked clarifying questions and occasionally included brief informal conversation with the interviewee.

Interviews were analyzed using *The Listener's Guide* method (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2004) whereby the researcher reads the text several times, attempting to identify the different "voices" of the narrator, relating to each of 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 has been used in similar research studies concerning women in the Israeli-Arab education system (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005).

In the research presented here, the interview analysis relied on four readings relating to the following issues: biographical and personal details, social aspects, professional aspects, and the transition to conservative clothing. These readings provided the outlines for the women's life stories, described throughout the different chapters of the book. We introduce the reader to the women through their summarized profiles.

## INTRODUCING OUR INTERVIEWEES

**Manal\*** is a Muslim woman, aged 50, married to a journalist. She has three children and three grandchildren. Manal lives in an Arab city in northern Israel where, for the last three years, she has managed a primary school. She has a bachelor's degree in education from Beer Sheva University and completed a managers' course. She explained, "My qualifications fitted the role, but in the initial stages of the tender, I really felt it became a state political matter; especially since a man from the security services was involved in the selection. He even sat in the interviews. The political viewpoint of our local government was also influential, because the mayor had a voice in it too. He continually opposed me; he had people who were closer to him politically."

\* All names used throughout the book are fictitious; the details given here relate to the women's status when interviewed.



**Rasmiya** is a Druze woman and a widow, aged 55, with four adult children and grandchildren. For the last 14 years she has managed a primary school in her Druze village in northern Israel. She has a master's degree in education.

It was an extremely long path and very full with many things. It was not easy. I was born in a Druze village to a strictly religious family. At one time religious people did not allow girls to study. There was a period when they were not allowed to study at all or just in Grade 1 or Grade 2. But in my childhood they did allow us to study, but limited us to five grades. They said that we shouldn't study further; that a girl should just know the fundamentals of reading and writing and then use them to study religious works.

**Wardi**, a Muslim woman, aged 50, is married to a teacher who has an administrative role. She has four children and four grandchildren. She has a bachelor of arts degree in history. For eight years she has managed a school in the Arab city where she lives.

I was awarded the job after the second tender. I had not supported the mayor who had won the elections, so he insisted that I should not win the tender. In other words, because I had not supported him, he supported someone else. I ran for the tender with all sorts of qualifications, I had won the Education Prize, and had filled many roles. Suddenly they pulled out a male teacher, with no career background. When I spoke with the supervisor, who had been at the tender, I said, "Is there any justice in him being chosen, rather than me," and he answered, "Wardi, you're looking for justice in the Ministry of Education? Well, that's not the right place to look."

**Samar** is a Christian woman, aged 41, married to a doctor and mother to four children. She has a master's degree in social work, specializing in management. She manages a shelter for women and children in the Arab sector. She lives in an Arab town.

When I chose to study social work, my father wanted me to have a more prestigious job. He wanted me to be a lawyer. For my father, social work was not a profession . . . in comparison

to medicine and engineering and prestigious professions, social work was a sort of female profession that was . . . less skilled. I worked as a social worker in welfare offices for several years. For the last 15 years I have managed a shelter for battered Arab women. You have to consider many careerist aspects in this job; also aspects relating to your image and public aspects: how society looks at you; how you assess yourself; and also how your family relates to your work, especially your spouse.

**Ikram**, a Muslim woman, aged 48, is married with three children. She has an undergraduate degree in social work, and manages the local government welfare department in the village where she lives.

At the age of two, I became disabled. I grew up in a family with many children; we were 14 in number, and I was the only one who studied. My mother wanted me to study because of my disability. She always told me, "Ikram, you have to study something." In retrospect I know that my mother was right. Because of my disability, I really needed to study. Now I look at all the disabled women who did not marry. There is only one who is also an academic, and her disability is very difficult. She remained single and soon will complete her doctorate.

**Salima**, a Muslim woman, aged 48, is married to a teacher who works in mediation, and they have four children. She has a bachelor of arts degree in Arabic and Arabic linguistics. At the time of the interview she was studying for a second degree in education. For the last eight years she has managed an elementary school in the Arab village in which she lives.

It was by chance that I came to manage this school. I taught in another Arab town, where a colleague asked me to help him to advance, and I went to the principal and asked him to recommend that teacher. He told me, "Salima, why on earth should I do that? Why shouldn't I recommend you? You have tremendous potential and I see that this school is too small for you, and although it is difficult for me to tell my good teacher to leave the school, nevertheless you deserve it." And that's exactly how it began. I told my husband, and a day later I came home, and

he had already travelled from work to Nazareth and brought me the application forms, and he said, "Fill them in."

**Narin**, a Muslim woman, aged 45, is married and a mother to three children. She has a first degree in sciences and completed a management course. She managed a village elementary school for four years and has now managed the school in the village where she lives for seven years.

I studied in a high school in [a Jewish town]. The daughter of our friend in Tiberias, studied in the regional Academic Teaching College, and he told my father, "Your daughter is so young, let her study to be a teacher, and once she is a teacher then she can study whatever she wants in the evenings". So I went to Ohalo. I was the first Bedouin woman to study there. I had an interview and was immediately accepted. I graduated and immediately began to work in a Jewish city. I worked there for two years as an Arabic teacher, and then I went on to another Jewish junior high school where I taught both science and Arabic for 18 years.

**Suheir** is a nonreligious Muslim woman, aged 39 and single. She has a bachelor of arts degree in Land of Israel studies and completed a management course. She has managed the elementary school in the village where she lives for four years.

We were a rather special family, from a multicultural point of view. I have a grandmother, on my mother's side, who is Jewish, while my grandmother on my father's side is Christian, and we are a Muslim family. This is the education and the approach that we soaked up over the years. My father's status as a school principal and the fact that he works in a unit for coexistence and democracy was a strong influence. So we grew up with a certain lifestyle that it's difficult to see in other places. I grew up in three cultures, which is not simple, choosing what you want to adopt and creating your own personality as you want to and according to your personal needs. So I would say that that's where it all began for me.

**Samira** is a Muslim woman, aged 38, married and mother to three children. She has a master's degree in educational counseling and served as an educational counselor in the school before becoming principal. She has managed the high school in an Arab village for five years. She lives in a mixed Jewish-Arab town.

I have been here almost since the school was established, and I have really developed with the school, so that step after step, I have accompanied the school with its progress, with its development. And all the time I was able to use my personal touch to influence policy, the development of the organization. I made my mark. I was very involved. I initiated my involvement in all the processes. I felt that this was a place to which I belonged, a place from which I can develop my vision or realize my vision. So I attended all the meetings; I established relations with the homeroom teachers, with the parents, with the students, with the management staff. I was involved in everything.

**Rim** is a nonreligious Muslim woman, aged 48 and single. She has a bachelor of science in mathematics and completed a management course. For six years she has managed the elementary school in the village where she lives.

At first it was very difficult—difficulties that I had not expected. We are still a masculine society; there was resistance [to my appointment] in the school and from outside. It was not simple. All my students and almost all the teachers were from another *hamulla* [extended family]. I was both a woman and from another hamulla and differed from the school environment. All of this reinforced my determination—I wanted to prove what I could do, and I did not rest. Their resistance did not make me frustrated—exactly the opposite—it provided me with the faith and determination that I needed to struggle with all my strength but also sometimes to give way. I was very careful; a woman needs to be cautious and she should not exploit the fact that she is a woman. They think that a woman will give in to male requests quickly.

**Iman**, a nonreligious Muslim woman, aged 52, is married, a mother to four children, and a grandmother. She has a bachelor of arts in English teaching and completed a management course. She has managed her village's elementary school for 13 years.

I knew that we were a society in transition, and there were no women in this position. I had to prove to them that I could be a principal. There were some people who were happy but they would have preferred a man. They said, "What, are there no more men in the village?" and "How can she sit down alone with men?" They were used to coming and sitting down to talk with the principal over a cup of coffee. "What shall we do now? If there is a woman, we can't go into the principal's office." Islamic religion forbids a man and woman who are not married to sit down together behind a closed door. You need glass walls so that everyone can see what is going on, and no one will be afraid. So that's what I did, do you remember the glass wall that I constructed?

**Nadra**, a Muslim woman who has become religiously observant, aged 38, is married and a mother to three children. She has a bachelor of science in physics, a master's degree in counseling, and completed a management course. She has managed a high school for three years.

In the management course, they supported me and gave me the belief that I could do it. Even my environment supported me. The school was on the point of collapse. Since I worked in this school I knew ahead of time what I was going to do and that helped me to win the tender. I needed to be much better than everyone else in order to win outright. My faith in my ability helped me to pass the others. There were many others who wanted this job and there were even some who had already tailored their suits for it; they had tried to persuade the mayor in preliminary secret meetings. Some of them did not have any qualifications; I have a second degree in educational counseling and a management course, educational experience. It wasn't something personal but rather my right, as the person worthy to present my candidacy; my winning the tender was something completely and solely professional.

**Nasreen** is a Muslim woman, aged 52, and mother to four children. She has a bachelor of science in mathematics and sciences and a master's degree in education. She has managed a Teacher Training Center for six years.

I always wanted to be a leading school principal. I attempted to win tenders five or six times, I went through difficult processes. Their considerations were influenced by local government, the politicians; but I really impressed them. In one particular tender, I was appointed and what happened was really ugly; I received direct threats against my family, a bomb was thrown at us. I had to give in. The mayor even sent someone to persuade me to give the post up and said that in the next tender they would look after me. I'm known in the community as an excellent teacher; I have good relations with parents, children, and the management. I have a very good reputation in the community, but that did not help me; they fought against me. The parents' committee supported me. They wrote letters, but that didn't really help me.

**Ibtesam**, a Muslim woman, aged 43, is married and a mother to three children. She has a master's degree in social work and has managed a social welfare office for five years. "I never thought about being a manager; I began this position unintentionally. My personal dream was to work in a mental health clinic and to help the Arab sector. I did my practicum in a mental health clinic in Petach Tikva [a Jewish town], and I had not thought about managing a welfare office. In my childhood, I loved to trace social problems; the books I read related to social and mental problems. That's how I developed as an individual and as a professional. I am in a position to help."

**Rula** is a single Muslim woman, aged 36. She has a master of science in chemistry and completed a management course. For three years she has managed a high school in a mixed Jewish-Arab city.

I came to a workplace where five male principals had been replaced in eight years. The entire staff watched and whispered, "What does she think that she can do? Well, she'll last a few months and then leave! Does such a young woman think she can manage such a large high school?" They didn't know that

I have the strength to do things in a very quiet manner, to support, to push, to embrace, and to back others. The students also made remarks like, "What nice jeans! That blouse looks good on you!" I smiled at them and said, "Thank you." My [successful] management added each year to my record and led more and more teachers to believe in my path. They unified around me and moved the school forward to a better position. Today, after three years, I'm in a completely different position, and this is due to the fact that I don't act out a need to magnify my ego or to put myself at the center.

**Fadia**, a Muslim woman, aged 49, is married with two children. She has a master's degree in educational counseling. She has worked for three years as a Ministry of Education supervisor of educational counselors.

I grew up in a home where education was a supreme value, and to my family's surprise, I decided to marry at the early age of 18 and a half; it was a surprise for the whole family, but I wanted it. I immediately began to study in a nursing school. Six months after the engagement, I married and my husband persuaded me to transfer to study biology. I became pregnant, and then afterward I was accepted to Tel Aviv University. I went to the college, which was close to my home. I have built my reputation as a counselor in this town; my work has helped them to understand what counseling is.

**Rania** is a Christian woman, aged 42, and married with four children. She grew up and lives in an Arab town, has a doctorate in Arabic and Arabic linguistics, and works as a Ministry of Education supervisor for Arabic literature in the Arab education system.

I would work in the school in the morning, go to university, study, come home, and then in the afternoon take courses. On Fridays and Saturdays, when there was no university or school, I would tutor students in my home to earn a little extra. I didn't know that there was a Friday or Saturday or Sunday. I had no day of rest for years. I worked seven days a week. Today if I have a free day, I have to ask myself what I should do. The secret of my

success was my belief in myself. My mother-in-law got used to the fact that, each time I came to her, I brought books with me, because I had no time to waste. I go to visit my in-laws every day and sit with them. They talk, drink coffee, whatever they wish. I don't neglect them, but I bring my books with me, with my laptop; I work, summarize lectures, and summarize books.

**Amna** is a Christian woman married to a lawyer and has three adult children, with four grandchildren. She grew up in an Arab town and now lives in a mixed Arab-Jewish town. She has a doctorate in English and works as a Ministry of Education supervisor of English teaching in the Arab education system.

We are a normative, conservative family. I am not a feminist; I don't want to be a feminist. I really love and enjoy my life as a mother and wife. I am not a careerist that runs after a career. On the contrary, my husband supports me emotionally and really helps. For example, I had never visited the villages in the region where I was to work. So I did not know the field. On Saturdays, he came with me, escorted me. He gave me support; so did my father. My father was an engineer in the region, and he knows every village. He told me how to get there. They helped me a lot—practical help not just emotional support. I came home late. My husband looked after the children; he helped with that.

**Ahlam**, a Muslim woman, aged 35, is married without children. She grew up in an Arab village and now lives in an Arab town. She has a doctorate in Arabic language, literature, and philosophy from an Israeli university and completed postdoctoral studies in the United States. She has worked for two years as a Ministry of Education general supervisor of Arabic language studies. She lectures on Arabic literature in a university and in an academic college.

Today an Arab woman can attain a third degree so that she can be a candidate for different jobs. That doesn't mean that it's entirely easy. The challenges are simply different. Thirty years ago I could not go to university, so today I can go to university, but I have challenges of a different type with which I have



to cope. Sometimes the job is in a male territory, and when I enter I have to compete with them. For an Arab woman, the need to relate to the social needs of their home and children also constitutes a huge challenge. And what about her personal needs? What does she want? When she becomes a principal or supervisor does she really feel self-fulfillment or has she simply increased her burden? The question is, is this really what she wanted? Does she achieve self-realization or not?

**Munira**, a nonreligious Muslim woman, is married with four children and now a grandmother. She has a master's degree in educational evaluation and completed a management course. For 14 years she has managed an elementary school.

In school, I was the pedagogic coordinator. It was very difficult for me in a male society that did not believe in women's abilities. All the time they told me, "Women lack intelligence and opinions," and "She can't lead," or "Who are these people who allow a woman to lead them?" In the end, the principal took the job away from me. The principal under whom I worked didn't even like the idea of filling in my form for managerial training. He didn't easily agree; he said, "Why should I? Is there a lack of men in our village, so that women need to fill this job? There are a lot of men who could do this job. Instead of filling in this form for a woman, I could fill it in for a man." Then my husband entered the picture. He went to the principal, to his home and asked, "Why aren't you filling in the form for her? It's her wish. Forget about whether she will get the job or not. Let's help her."

**Maisa** is a single, religious Muslim woman with a master's degree in educational management and completed a management course. She has been the principal of her town's elementary school for four years.

Other women were up in the clouds because I had won the post. I am the first woman manager in this Arab town. They support me; you can't imagine how much. Some of them sold their gold in order to contribute to the school; I improved their status by winning this job. They come and tell me that they will help so that the school will be the best in the settlement, an exemplary

school; I just have to ask. I am the first to get a second degree in this village, the only woman principal among eight other male principals. The women push unceasingly, there are those who have begun to push me to stand for the local government; it encourages them. I tell them that I have not excluded the possibility, perhaps in the next elections.

**Arin** is a 42-year-old religious Muslim woman, married with three children, with an undergraduate degree in physics and mathematics and a master's degree in education. She has managed an elementary school for the past six years:

I was appointed as a teacher during the period of elections for the local government. Twelve years later, when I first proffered my candidacy for the principalship of an elementary school, the mayor said to me, "Your family could not even fill a bus; what will I get out of my support for your appointment?" Today my school is characterized by its different management; it's managed like a family. Relationships are more personal; there is more emotional expression, more involvement in the work, expressions of concern and understanding for the feelings of others, teachers, parents, and students. Even our graduates are different, and they sound different when they reach junior high school.

## CHAPTER 2



### ARAB WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

#### DEFINITION AND CONTEXT

During my interview with Ahlam, she asked me, “Do you think things will change for Arab women?” Ahlam’s words, and the authentic stories of 22 other Arab women pursuing professional careers in Israel, inspired us to write this book. In its chapters, we describe and discuss these women and their careers, relating to their personal development and empowerment, their professional career paths, the challenges they face, and the way they eventually overcame all obstacles to attain senior leadership positions, bringing change into the organizations where they work and into their society of origin. Through this discussion we shall attempt to find the answer to Ahlam’s pertinent question.

But before beginning this exploratory journey, we attempt to clarify the concept of women’s leadership as it is described throughout the world, including developments in Western society, where women have struggled to improve their status over several generations in a male hegemony and where, as noted by Coleman (2011), they have registered several achievements: “The tendency to identify men with the public domain of work and women with the private domain of the domestic is now clearly out of date, as women are almost equally likely to work outside the home as men” (p. 20).

This state of gender equality is not yet available in Arab society in the Middle East. In order to set the context that shaped

the narratives of the exceptional women whom we interviewed, and the struggle that they underwent to attain their careers and leadership positions, we knew we had to understand the culture and ethos of the Arab world in general, and the Middle East in particular—the blocks, challenges, and achievements these women have attained on their long road to gender equality.

### DEFINING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Many books, articles, reports, and university courses have been devoted to the issue of leadership; however, the study of leadership remains fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and paradox (Klenke, 2011). Throughout history, leadership has been associated with masculinity, and women's access to leadership has been constricted by a system of socially transmitted expectations and goals. It seems that men, by nature, seek prestige and status, while women aspire to create successful relationships (Coleman, 2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Klenke, 2011).

According to Powell and Graves (2003), literature concerning women in management dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. A seminal work in this field was "Men and Women of the Corporation" by Kanter (1977). Kanter referred to the relatively few women given prominent positions in management as "token" women. These few "tokens" are often held up as symbols or representatives for all women. Consequently, their thoughts, beliefs, and actions are likely to be considered typical of all women. Kanter's work opened the door to a flood of literature on women in management, also triggered by the increasing role women have taken in public activities.

As more women play a role in the global economy, they have also begun to seek careers in management and leadership (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Omar & Davidson, 2001). Generally, however, management is still seen as a male career, and most top management positions are filled by men (Powell & Graves, 2003). Globally, at almost every level, women managers face blocked social and employment mobility, discrimination, and stereotyping (Klenke, 2011).

Additionally, women managers are commonly reported to be negatively affected by a self-belief that successful managers

must exhibit male attributes, and the notion that a woman is unable to successfully combine her roles as wife, mother, and executive. Women managers often become stuck in lower management positions that give them little access to power and meaningful challenges (Arar, 2012a; Omar & Davidson, 2001).

Klenke (2011) discussed the future of women's leadership in different contexts, examining women's attitudes toward a leadership career as organizations transform themselves from centralized, structures with clearly defined authority lines to decentralized, networking entities. In today's rapidly changing environment characterized by complexity, ambiguity, and unpredictability, she showed how context is critically important in shaping women's leadership: "The context influences what leaders must do and what they can do. A leader's mission and purpose . . . is partly dictated by the demands and constraints of context" (p. 7).

Klenke (*ibid.*) described the themes that have changed women leaders' expectations: persistence of stereotypes, the gendered nature of organizations, the importance of contexts, and women leaders' ability to cross contexts. Perhaps the most consistent, common cross-context thread is the fact that women leaders need to navigate their way through many paradoxical dichotomies such as competition and collaboration, globalization and localization, centralization and decentralization, and hard and soft power (Arar, 2012a).

Reflecting on her own leadership journey, Klenke (*ibid.*) explained that, while teaching, researching, and practicing leadership, she was challenged intellectually by these paradoxes and multiple contradictions. She concludes that women are able to make unique contributions to leadership: "Women leaders are shaping political, corporate, and social agendas in developed and developing countries around the world while they bring to leadership different points of view, values, experiences, [and] interests that provide diverse and unique prisms through which they view and approach the tasks and responsibilities of leadership" (p. 233).

Similarly, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) described qualities that characterize the feminine approach to leadership. They

revealed that women leaders tend to bring an instructional focus to leadership, include spiritual dimensions in their work, and strive to achieve a balance between the personal and professional. In the commercial field, Yaseen (2010) demonstrated that Arab business women have far more inspirational motivation than men do. They talk optimistically about the future, enthusiastically explaining what needs to be done to accomplish the firm's vision, and express confidence concerning achievement (p. 68). They are also better than men in creating intellectual stimulation, in reexamining critical assumptions and seeking different perspectives when solving problems.

Gender Rebellion Feminists, however, suggest that, rather than focusing on the female advantage and how women can contribute to the existing system, they should instead challenge the way men or women are defined. This stream of feminism calls attention to links between knowledge, discourse, language, and power, pointing out the ways in which social theories stereotypically privilege masculine attributes and demonstrating how the gendered assumptions underlying these theories can limit our understanding of leadership (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). This should be kept in mind when we come to discuss the perseverance and present-day influence of patriarchal culture in Arab society.

While various books have discussed educational administration and leadership (Hill & Regland, 1995), few authors have recognized the barriers or obstacles that women face in order to attain educational leadership positions. Exceptional works by Brunner and Grogan (2007), Blackmore (1999), and Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) have explained how women leaders develop strategies to overcome barriers on their way to leadership and are able to offer unique contributions for school improvement. These works provided us with ground concepts when we came to interpret the narratives of our interviewee women leaders.

Despite blocks that still obstruct women on their way to senior management and leadership, women in Western societies have registered achievements as a result of three generations of feminist movements, including legislation that promotes

equality of opportunity in employment and facilitates women's advancement. They have succeeded in contributing significantly to various public systems, and to politics and private enterprise, but their contributions have been especially rich in the education and welfare systems where their particular feminine skills have proven especially fitting to lead change in a chaotic world (Coleman, 2011; Rank & Hutchison, 2000). In their new book, *Influence*, Dychtwald and Larson (2010) describe the emergence of women in the modern economies of most countries as the most significant demographic change of our times. Women now enjoy more economic independence than ever before. Although most women are unemployed and many are very poor, enough women across the world are employed to make their presence felt and remarked upon. Trends show that "when a country educates its girls and women, its gross domestic product grows. When a corporation adds more women to its senior leadership, the company performs better financially than if there are only men at the top" (13). What roles can women play in the Arab world? This we will explore in the next section.

### WOMEN LEADERS IN THE ARAB WORLD: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Western researchers have shown considerable interest in the study of women and their working lives; however, these studies have mostly been limited to European and North American settings, and women in other cultural contexts have been given little attention (Arar, 2012a; Coleman, 2011). While the last thirty years have seen few changes for women in Western countries, there have been major and significant changes for women in Arab societies (Omair, 2008).

In analyzing women's movements, feminist scholarship, and policy issues across time and space, striking similarities are found in their evolution, priorities, and discourse. The "second wave" of women's liberation, the modern "women's liberation movement," emerged from women's entry into the industrial labor force during World War II, as modern industry created new jobs for women—in manufacturing and the service industries—while domestic appliances and processed food reduced reliance

on women's domestic servitude. In the Western world, this movement involved activists, academics, and lawyers who engaged in a combination of public protest, policy dialogues, and new lines of scholarship (Moghadam, 2009).

A similar but different pattern is seen in the developing world. In the Arab region, in the wake of the UN's "First International Conference on Women" in 1975, second wave women's movements were led by professors, university students, teachers, and other professional women and were primarily concerned with issues of equitable development, the rights of women workers, and neocolonialism. Arab women pioneers were involved in integrating concern for women's bodily integrity, agency, and equality with macropolitical and economic issues. Some Arab women formed study groups, while others joined left-wing parties or underground movements (Moghadam, 2009; Moghadam, Franzway, & Fonow, 2011).

Many of the early Arab women's rights advocates have become well-known writers and scholars, discussing and researching women and gender issues, international consultants or civil servants, founders of important women's NGOs, publishers, filmmakers, novelists, law professors, directors of research institutes, and even cabinet ministers. The fate of others has been tragic. Some activists have lost their lives, have faced imprisonment, or have been forced into exile (e.g., in Iran, Sudan, Algeria). After the US-UK invasion and occupation of Iraq, academics were targeted for attacks by the so-called resistance. More than one outspoken woman academic and women's rights advocate had to flee to Jordan or Syria for refuge; however, some theoretical work of these women has been influential, even affecting policy making and legislation. Feminist scholars have assumed leadership roles in some disciplines and professional associations. In sociology, for example, Arab feminist scholarship has had an impact on knowledge about welfare regimes and social policies, poverty, migration, domestic violence, workplace harassment, and employment discrimination. The "tokens" described by Kanter (1977) have, in some places, become a "critical mass," developing theory



through research, and ultimately directing advocacy and policy, in relation to gender-based political quotas.

Synergies formed from feminist activism, theory building, and policy making are evident in at least four phenomena:

1. The field of women's studies that developed from feminist theorizing has grown to encompass the study of gender relations, identities, and dynamics.
2. Feminist theorizing has made inroads in some of the traditional disciplines.
3. Feminist scholars, like activists, have contributed to the global women's rights agenda and to policy making in their own countries (Moghadam, 2009).
4. In a more demonstrative way, the relationship between activists and academics can also be witnessed in the waves of the Arab Spring Revolution beginning in 2010, a movement contrasting with previous rebellions initiated solely by men, where women responded to the call of men (Tsuraf, 2011). In the waves of the Spring Revolution the independent presence of women was felt as never before in the revolutionary collective and they played a leading role in organizing and explaining the issues to the masses. For example, on January 18, 2011, Asma Mahfouz, a 26-year-old blogger in Cairo, posted a video on Facebook calling for a demonstration in Tahrir Square to protest against the Mubarak regime. The next day, in Sana'a, Tawakkol Karman, a 32-year-old activist and journalist, demonstrating in solidarity with the Tunisian people, called on Yemenis to rise up against their corrupt leaders. On February 15, in Benghazi, mothers, sisters, daughters, and widows of men killed in Tripoli's Abu Salim prison in 1996 took to the streets of Benghazi to express their rejection of an oppressive regime. From Tunisia to Bahrain, from Egypt to Syria, women from all backgrounds came out in force to demand the right to democracy, social justice, freedom, dignity, and equality (FDHA, 2012). Does this feminine involvement in the revolutionary movement signify a new gender picture in the Arab public world, where, until

recently, women were not allowed to participate in the public sphere? Does this signify a new trend for greater equality and civilian participation in what until now has been an exclusively masculine arena?

The labor market in Arab regions has witnessed dramatic changes during the last few decades, with women taking more responsibility in public spheres and occupying higher positions in organizations. Women in Arab regions can no longer be generally described as scared, inferior, domestic women who hardly leave their houses. Recently, Arab women have even held ministerial and parliamentary positions, running businesses and presiding as presidents in national universities. Women in the Arab region are increasingly entering the work force and rising to managerial positions (Al-Suwaihal, 2010). A working Arab woman is thus no longer an exception, but rather a growing trend.

Some Arab countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) are among the richest in the world due to oil exports; others (e.g., Somalia or the Sudan) are among the poorest. Yet all of them are economically vulnerable due to their relatively undiversified economies and limited exports (United Nations Development Project [UNDP], 2004). The strategic and political importance of Arab regions, and especially the appearance of recent movements to democratize and liberate political systems in the Arab world and the consequent confusion in Arab societies, has generated close attention from all over the world. Rapid changes and the impact of Westernization and modernization contribute to this state of confusion. Arabs seem to be searching for a new identity that will not contradict their deeply rooted traditions and yet will allow them to join the future and advance (Omair, 2008). The participation of Arab women in all arenas—political, economic, or social—is complicated by the fact that the woman is subject to a number of moral codes and unwritten social mores in a patriarchal, male-dominated society. As Abdel Kader (1987) rightly points out, Arab women have been subject to a triple bias: a male bias, a class bias, and a Western bias (with its support for local male hegemony).

In 2001, the participation of women in the global economy was estimated at 55.2 percent, with corresponding rates in East Asia and the Pacific at 70 percent, South Asia at 43.6 percent, and Latin America and the Caribbean at 42 percent. By stark contrast, a very modest 29 percent of Arab women participated in the national economies of Arab regions (United Nations Development Project [UNDP], 2003). The percentage change in female labor participation overall, for the Middle East and North Africa regions between 1960 and 2000, was 47 percent (Dasgupta & Nabli, 2003). This masks dramatic increases in certain regions between 1960 and 2000: in Bahrain, women's labor participation increased by 668 percent, in Kuwait by 486 percent, and in the UAE by 548 percent, while Yemen's female labor participation increased only by 15 percent (*ibid.*). The overall participation of Arab women in the labor force remains low in Arab regions in comparison to other world regions, in disproportion to their educational attainments and capabilities.

Valentine Moghadam (2011) draws attention to the limitations on women's economic citizenship in Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, indicating that they stem largely from both neoliberal globalization and Muslim-family law. In particular, she shows how the absence of the two key civil rights—mobility and the right to an occupation of one's own choice—constrains women's participation in the employment market and reinforces economic dependence on male kinship roles. Examining the paradoxes of globalization, she shows how globalization can provide new opportunities for women's collective action and documents how women's rights organizations in MENA countries are promoting social rights through their active participation in the Arab Spring Revolution (*ibid.*).

Due, however, to social proscriptions limiting their presence in the public sphere, Arab women have, until this century, seldom participated in public debate and discussions. This is true not only for Arab women in general but also for those in management, the group we focus on in this book (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Omair, 2008). Traditionally, Arab women's work activities have been carried out in exclusively female circumstances, as

most Arab societies maintain a strict code of gender segregation in public, at prayer, and even at home (Guthrie, 2001). Working women usually engage in occupations traditionally accepted as female roles: nursing, teaching, and clerical work (Metcalf, 2006; Omair, 2008). As a result, many women graduates remain unemployed, although the popular teaching occupations are overemployed. In Qatar, the surplus of qualified women in some female-dominated jobs is ten times the need (Abdalla, 1996).

Generally, Arab culture has had an impact on leadership and gender roles and, like every society, has its own definitions of effective leadership and its own distinct attitudes toward leaders. Lederach (1995) defined culture as “the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to social realities around them” (p. 9). He indicated that knowledge and schemes differ according to the particular culture, and they influence expectations concerning leadership. This is especially relevant in Arab cultures. Additionally, conceptions of masculinity and femininity are influenced by cultures; so, in general, masculinity is more highly valued in Arab society. This strong value for masculinity provides the justification for men to become the dominant partners in their relationships with women (Al-Suwaihal, 2010).

Throughout the world, women face barriers when they attempt to climb to higher managerial positions (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). In the Arab world, women have been struggling for decades to prove their worth in the workplace (Ameen, 2001). Innumerable studies have discussed whether Arab women should learn or work outside the home, which types of work are acceptable for women, whether women should enjoy employment opportunities equal to those offered to men, and other associated issues (e.g., Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011; Arar, 2010; Yaseen, 2010). Discussing the Islamic perspective on gender segregation, Metcalfe (2006), noted that, while segregation policies are not “official,” they continue to place restrictions on deployment and ultimately on training and promotion opportunities for women.

### Attitudes Concerning Women's Work in the Arab World

Liberal and conservative arguments coexist in the Arab world, creating different attitudes and justifications concerning women's work outside the home (Ameen, 2001).

Some advocate that women should work (but usually within certain restrictions), basing their arguments on the principles of democracy. Thus hundreds of Arab women have succeeded in crossing patriarchal restrictions and attaining leading positions and senior managerial posts in the government sector, private enterprise, and nonprofit organizations (Khadir, 2004). In the Gulf countries and especially in the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain, women struggle to participate in the democracy movement, aspiring to attain individual freedom as they seek to overcome social restraints on women (Khabash, 2003). In Egypt and Jordan, women occupy leadership positions once dominated by men (Yaseen, 2010).

Although historically Islam has given women some rights and privileges—for example, Khadeja (Prophet Mohammed's wife) was a business women with her own business until her death (Ameen, 2001)—it advises women to do their job at home and only work outside the home under specific circumstances (Ansari, 1990). According to Ansari (1990), Islam grants women the right to an education, sustenance, safety, financial support, motherhood, and even the right to refuse marriage. Muslim women have the right to attend any educational institute, and the woman has the right to work outside the home and to earn money that she controls, though the nature of women's work should be gender appropriate, and the job requirements, workplace culture, and relations between staff members should also comply with Islamic expectations. These religious values are, of course, subject to local interpretation, so in some Arab countries, such as Kuwait and Morocco, religion is used to push reform (Special Report, *The Economist*, June 17, 2004), since Islamic texts are interpreted as supporting progress and promoting the equality of women with men (Moghadam, 2004).

In many Arab countries, however, historic Arab customs and traditions continue to inculcate gender discrimination and restrict freedom (Moghadam, 2011; Wadud, 1999), including

punishment of women by excommunication, expulsion, and even murder, in order to maintain traditional codes of behavior (Chatty & Rabo, 2001; Yaseen, 2010; Al-Lamsky, 2007).

Some Arab women feel their fate is determined by others, especially male family members (Al-Lamsky, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, there is religious restriction of women's appearance in the public sphere, reflected clearly in the fatwa issued by Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz from June 1996, condemning working women and those mixing with men as something that creates temptation that would lead to loose morals and adultery (Haddad, 1998, cited in Al-Lamsky, 2007).

Yet slow integration of women in the work force is visible in the Arab context (Abdulrahman, 2004). In Iraq, Mowafaq (2004) found that Arab women who had attained leadership roles were satisfied with the roles they filled, functioning well and aspiring for promotion and empowerment of their resources, although 83 percent of them believed the blocks to women's progress to leadership positions were created by men in senior positions who tried to prevent their progress on the career ladder.

A study by Moore (2003) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) showed that women exceed men in university registration, but their participation in the workforce in the Gulf States, which now promotes female participation in the workforce, despite an increase since the low rate of 7 percent in 1985, is still far lower than the world average, which is 40 to 50 percent of the workforce. More recently, Gallant and Pounder (2008) pointed to the opportunities and blocks facing women who wish to work in the UAE. They found that the society is still patriarchal, and change in traditions concerning women's status in the family is still slow. After the Arab Spring, there are only eight women in Egypt's new five-hundred-seat parliament—and not one female presidential candidate—and, as Mona Eltahawy (2012) points out, “even after these ‘revolutions,’ all is more or less considered well with the world as long as women are covered up, anchored to the home, denied the simple mobility of getting into their own cars, forced to get permission from men to travel, and unable to marry without a male guardian's blessing—or

divorce either” (p. 1). But Dalia Abed El-Hameed, a researcher on health issues at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, comments, “I am not a victim. We can’t put all Egyptian women in one category, let alone Arab women. My problems are not the same as a rural woman from Upper Egypt” (Chulov & Hussein, 2012).

Katlin Omair (2008) found that women’s professional advancement has been more prevalently studied in the Arab world in the last decade, relating to the blocks that women encounter when building a professional career, the attitudes of Arab society toward Arab women’s leadership, and the identification of factors that have helped Arab women to reach leadership positions. Several studies have also related to the way in which the Arab woman copes with the conflicting demands of home and a career and their assimilation within the workplace, including the cultural and social difficulties these situations involve (*ibid.*).

Jamali, Sidani, and Safieddine (2005) studied constraints facing women managers in Lebanon and found that the strongest barriers to career advancement stemmed from cultural expectations and patriarchal attitudes, which emphasize the role of women as mothers and homemakers. Interestingly, several women in their study did not object to traditional expectations, indicating that Arab women in senior management often remain primarily concerned with their domestic role and the welfare of their family, a role reinforced by social expectations. In addition, women reported having suffered from negative perceptions of their commitment and professional qualifications and were perceived as unfit to assume leadership positions in an environment that promotes a masculine leadership prototype. Lebanese women managers identified numerous structural constraints, including exclusion from formal and informal networks. Some pointed out that not all organizations in Lebanon have cultures that enhance gender interaction; many organizations express a strong masculine culture, building structural arrangements that isolate and alienate women. Mostafa (2005) found a moderate shift from the expected restrictive traditional attitudes toward women managers in the UAE to a more liberal view.

### Factors for Arab Women's Professional Success

Findings from Saudi Arabia described by Alajmi (2001) showed that the resource identified as the most crucial factor for women's leadership development was education. The second most important factor was family support. The highest-ranked personal traits identified by respondents as impacting women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia were energy, self-confidence, and independence.

Al-Lamsky (2007) found that, in contradiction to prevalent social perceptions, women in leadership positions in Oman are very socially mobile and have strong aspirations to become part of the occupational system. He concluded that their aspirations were the result of their development and socialization process, their education and family support. Especially important was the role of their fathers, who motivated them and enabled equality between the genders in the home. Yet these women encountered difficult challenges as leaders in a male-dominated society and in continuing to fulfill their role as wife and mother at home.

Change has begun, for example, in Oman, where government policy has instituted compulsory education legislation so that girls have even exceeded boys in school attendance in the state's high schools. The state also promotes a policy of gender equality in the workforce (International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2005). Although a few women fill key positions in the state—such as government ministers, vice-ministers, consuls, and members of parliament—a deeper examination indicates that these women still suffer from wage discrimination and that they have very long career paths without supportive channels for promotion. Additionally, they still suffer discrimination in the public sphere and are subject to negative cultural perceptions of their social status, so that they are seen as inferior to men (Al-Lamsky, 2007). Omeima Al-Suwaihal (2010) found that women leaders in Kuwait still function fully as wives and are concerned about the needs of their homes, especially if their husbands work outside the home. In the last two decades, Kuwaiti women have improved their status and reached various leadership positions, acting as consuls, school principals,



and business managers. Success factors for women professionals identified in the study by Al-Suwaihal (*ibid.*) include the women's development, family support, spouse support, and coordination of home and professional tasks. Nevertheless, the findings from her interviews indicated that women still encounter cultural difficulties when they attempt to climb the career ladder and attain leadership positions, and males still dominate senior positions in all professions, having stronger influence and more extensive social relations than the women.

The aforementioned studies show that women's progress in the Arab world actually begins with their own development and their empowerment within a supportive family, where the father plays a key role. The socialization processes they experience seriously influence their progress to leadership positions (Al-Rasheed, 2004; Rhode, 2003). This is a point we were able to clarify in our examination of Arab women leaders' narratives in Israel.

Like similar studies in Western countries, the study by Al-Lamsky (2007) reveals that a factor hindering women's advancement to leadership positions is their own lack of an internal urge to aspire to such positions in comparison to men; some feel too weak or dependent, and they lack sufficient competitive drive. The need to balance duties in the family with full-time maternal functions and a career without the support of the close family also deters women in the Arab world from pursuing a senior career (Moghadam, 2004; Shehadeh, 2000). The strong expectation for complete success in both spheres makes it especially difficult for professional women, particularly when there is no division of tasks in the Arab home, and all domestic duties are her sole responsibility (Sidani, 2005).

In most developing countries, at the macro level, above the influence of particular cultures and religions, the state plays a major role in the formation of social policies, development strategies, and legislation that shape opportunities for women. The Omani Government has laid the groundwork for an enlarged role for women, yet this has not been translated into real gender equity or empowerment. Legislative reforms or the placement

of a few women in high-profile positions is insufficient to achieve true gender equality in practice (Al-Lamsky, 2007).

To set the stage for the presentation of the narratives of the women, whom we interviewed, the next section describes the context in which these Arab women leaders have developed, in the State of Israel. Much of the picture depicting the Arab society in which these women grew up resembles the context in comparable societies in transition from traditional values and norms to modernity.

### ARAB SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the Arab minority remaining within Israel's borders numbered a mere 156,000, weakened and depleted by war and the loss of its elite due to expulsion or flight. Sixty years later this indigenous ethnic minority has multiplied 6.5 times, and in 2009 it numbered 1.7 million (excluding the population of the Golan Heights and Eastern Jerusalem), constituting 20.2 percent of Israel's population (Khamaise, 2009).

The Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel (PAI) are a unique national minority. This is a former majority that became a minority in its own land overnight (Morris, 1991). In contrast to many minorities around the world, this is not a minority of immigrants but an indigenous minority of natives. As citizens of a state that is officially defined as a Jewish state (not as a state for all its citizens), Arab citizens of Israel contend with a constant identity conflict (Rouhana, 1997). Most PAI identify themselves as Palestinians and part of the Arab nation, yet they are citizens of a country that is in conflict with members of its own people, the Palestinian people in neighboring states and with the Arab nation (Abu-Lughod, 2010). The government and the Jewish majority in Israel often refer to the Palestinian minority as if it were a hostile minority (Diab & Mi'ari, 2007).

These and other attributes complicate the definition of PAI identity. In actuality, the collective identity of the Palestinian Arab community in Israel comprises several elements: citizenship (Israeli), nationality (Palestinian), ethnicity (Arab), and religion (Islamic or Christian or Druze). Palestinian Arabs in

Israel see their identity as composed primarily of a mix of these four elements, or as a delicate balance between them, or as one identity displacing another (Smooha, 2002). This ongoing identity dilemma alters with changing circumstances (Diab & Mi'ari, 2007), evoking multilayered discourse relating to issues such as "ethnic democracy" (Smooha, 2002, p. 478), "multiculturalism" (Yona & Shenhav, 2005, p. 28), "Palestinian indigenism," and Israel as an "ethnocracy" (Yiftachel & Ghanem, 2004, p. 648). Many Arabs in Israel share the belief that the development of a Palestinian society in Israel is not a natural development, but simply the product of crisis (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Ghanem & Rouhana, 2001).

Despite being the state's largest minority (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010), the Arab population endures discriminatory government policies resulting in deprivation in almost all domains (Suleiman, 2002). Politically, they have not managed to turn their demographic proportion into political power; economically, they constitute 53 percent of the population that remains below the poverty line (National Insurance Institute of Israel, "Poverty Report," 2006). Vocationally, PAI find it more difficult to enter the Israeli job market: only 6 percent of civil service and government employees are Arabs (Dichter, 2004), and most security-related jobs are closed to them (Khamaise, 2009). These data depict a marginal minority, lacking economic resources.

Arab society in Israel is heterogeneous; the latest statistics from 2009 indicated that 82.1 percent were Muslims, 9.4 percent were Christians, and 8.5 percent were Druze (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009, Table 2.1). Although most Arabs live in separate localities, they are in constant contact with the Jewish population through their work, trade, and education.

The socioeconomic structure of Arab society in Israel has undergone accelerated change in recent decades. Different scholastic views see it as either a traditional society or a society in transition from traditional norms and values to modernity. Although Arab identity in Israel is usually described in terms of the tension between traditional and modern values, this description ignores the dimension of structural subjugation that the

Arabs, minority citizens of the state, endure (Abu-Baker, 2003; Arar, 2010).

### ARAB EDUCATION IN ISRAEL

Structural subjugation and consequent marginality have had implications for the inputs provided for Arab schools by the central state authority and the shaping of pedagogic institutions (Arar, 2012b). Nevertheless, since the establishment of Israel, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of young people of both sexes studying in Arab schools, paralleled by a similar increase in the proportion of Arab students in institutions of higher education. Increased education for Arab girls has also led to growing involvement of Arab women in the workforce (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queuder, 2011). Levels of Arab student participation in higher education, however, are relatively low in comparison to the participation rates achieved by Jewish students. This is largely due to deficiencies of the Arab education system, but also a result of structural blocks inbuilt in higher education requirements that disadvantage Arab students (Arar & Mustafa, 2011).

The Arab education system is completely separate and distinct from the majority Jewish education system, located in different geographical areas, speaking a different language, and following different cultures. The two systems are separate but not equal (Golan-Agnon, 2006). The most recent comparison of the Jewish and Arab education systems by Sbirsky and Degan-Bouzaglo (2009) indicates that the Israeli Ministry of Education discriminates against Arab education, since financial resources and management services provided to the Arab education system are inferior to those given to the Jewish system. There is no Arab educational administration for the Arab education system, and, although Arab students constitute 28.2 percent of all the state's students, state investment per student is less. An Arab school receives funding for 1.16 hours of teaching per student in comparison to 1.56 hours per Jewish student; and the PAI local authority's educational investment often totals just \$40 per child in comparison to the \$1,000 investment of some more established Jewish local governments.

Of students in the Jewish system, 50.5 percent were eligible for matriculation in comparison to 32.4 percent among Arab students (in the school year 2008–2009), and achievements of Arab students in international standard examinations were almost half those of their Jewish counterparts (*ibid.*). Many of the difficulties of the Arab education system in Israel resemble those of other underdeveloped educational systems in developing countries (Arar & Mustafa, 2011).

One important development in Arab education since the establishment of the State of Israel has been the improvement of education for Arab girls and women. In the Arab education system, the Compulsory Education Act led to an increase in girls' school attendance and the reduction of school dropouts, especially in junior-high and senior-high schools (Al-Haj, 1995). The proportion of girls even rose above that of the boys in high school (Shapira, Arar & Azaiza, 2011). Girls' matriculation exam achievements exceed those of the boys, and consequently, in 2007, the proportion of Arab women among all Arab students studying for a first academic degree reached 58.7 percent, and 47.9 percent among those studying for a second degree (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This increase in Arab women's education level has had serious implications for their employment potential and their ability to aspire to professional and personal achievements. It also constitutes an important element in the transition of Arab society in Israel from traditional to modern values—as will be seen throughout this book—and, in practice, has led to a feminization of the Arab education system at all levels even, overcoming some institutional forms of discriminations (Schwartz, 2011).

### ARAB WOMEN IN ISRAEL

Although Arabs in Israel follow different social norms from those of the Jewish majority, they also follow a different lifestyle and culture than what is prevalent in the Arab world. They live in a Western democratic state, and the younger generation often adopts far more progressive concepts than are accepted among Palestinians living in the territories of the Palestinian authority or in the Palestinian diaspora in Arab states (Joubran, 1995). In

general, it seems that the Arab society in Israel is undergoing a slow transition process; however, this is not a unified process, and, at present, this Arab society is composed of a complex of groups situated at different points along a continuum between conservatism and modernism, while in political terms, they constitute an indigenous national minority (Kanaaneh & Nusiar, 2010).

This society is characterized by diverse cultures, split into many streams by ideology, geographical region, religion, ethnic group, tribe, hamulla, and status. Each of the major religious groups—Muslim, Christian, and Druze—that compose the Arab minority in Israel are influenced by internal processes of modernization, external processes defined by relations with Jewish society and the Arab-Jewish conflict, and the social context of that group in Arab society (Shapira et al., 2011). For example, a study of the Druze community found that the culture of the Druze in Israel now combines collective values of a traditional society with individualist values of a modern society (Wainryb & Turiel, 1995). Another study found differences in the perception of women in Druze society correlating with the relative size and the extent of dominance of the Druze community in Arab localities (Weiner-Levy, 2011).

As already noted, increased school attendance of Arab girls has led to a gradual change in women's status in Arab society (Al-Haj, 1995). Higher education of Arab women has led to the feminization of the education system and the slow infiltration of women into managerial positions in the Arab education system (Addi-Raccah, 2006) and in other occupational areas, especially welfare services.

Gender structuring in Arab society in Israel can be understood by considering its two main interrelated contexts:

1. *The intercultural context.* The interface between the majority Jewish culture and the minority Arab culture, two cultures that hold substantially different conceptualizations of the position and role of women in society (Arar, 2010). In this context, there is an obvious hegemony of Jewish majority culture over the Arab minority in the determination and imprinting of overt educational

policy (Mazawi, 1999). Gradually over time it has been possible to see signs of the values of this majority culture seeping into Arab society, evidenced, for example, in the encounter of Arab women with the Western culture in Israel's higher education campuses and in their professional work. Although this encounter often creates frustration, it also potentially constitutes a source of empowerment, involving challenges to the existing social order in Arab society and necessitating the evolution of various coping strategies (Arar, 2010). Schwartz (2011) argues that the low rate of labor-force participation of the Palestinian women is an indicator of their low economic and social status, and in turn, helps to reproduce it. Her comparative analysis of the status of Jewish and Palestinian women demonstrates the wide gap between them according to almost every indicator of progress, a gap she attributes to institutional forms of discrimination against Palestinians. For Schwartz, the right to work outside the home and to organize and unionize is vitally important in the struggle for equality between the two ethnic groups as well as between the sexes (*ibid.*).

2. *The intracultural context.* Arab society is characterized by a patriarchal social model, ensuring the superiority of men over women in the nuclear and extended family and in the public sphere. This superiority is often structured and institutionalized by the influence of Islam, dictating, for example, that women's appearance in public should be modest and that their heads should be covered (Bhimji, 2009; Khan, 2009). Girl students in high school are considered young women, on the verge of marriage, and they are therefore expected to obey these precepts (Khatab & Ibrahim, 2006). Many Arab Muslim families in Israel adopt strict social mechanisms to maintain and protect traditional attitudes and values, taking the easier conformist path rather than examining or attempting to undermine religious norms. This general conformism pushes the secular population with its more modern norms to the margins (Arar, 2010).

As we have seen, gender power and status differences in Arab-Muslim society restrict women's potential for active participation in all life domains (Arar & Mustafa, 2011). This is also true in the patriarchal Arab society in Israel where women are expected to remain at home, fulfilling their traditional roles as homemakers and mothers. In this context, the regular attendance of girls in Arab high schools is not self-evident and can be seen as an indicator of change in Arab society (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011). Few Arab women in Israel succeed in breaking through the "glass ceiling" that restricts their aspirations for social mobility: most live under the male hegemony of Islamic-Arab culture that demands their subjugation and obedience. In addition, they are members of a minority group under Israeli-Jewish majority rule. Yet the encounter with Western culture challenges them to struggle to emerge from exclusion to recognition (Halperin-Kaddari, 2003).

Faced with the trend to gradual change, Arab society's conservative decision makers fight to retain male hegemony. Recognition of the power of education to introduce change processes, or, alternatively, to conserve traditions and values, means conflicting forces are in play within the education arena, especially in schools, competing for control of future generations (*ibid.*). The school plays an important role in the socialization of the next generation. In premodern or developing societies, the socialization process is conducted by the family and community and mainly dictates total separation between the two sexes in the public sphere. Today, adolescents reside for longer periods within the school walls and largely experience their physical adolescence there. They are exposed to attitudes other than those of their family, to new information and ideas, and the teachers constitute significant adults for them (Schwartz, 2011). When they graduate from high school, they are able to pursue higher education both in Israeli academic institutions and abroad, which affects their independent identity formation and future coping strategies in different life spheres (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011).



### **Arab Women's Management and Leadership in Israel**

The investigation of women's leadership in education and welfare services began toward the end of the twentieth century (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hopson & Lawson, 2011) and continues to interest researchers today. Several aspects of this issue have been discussed in academic discourse, including political (Blackmore, 1998), professional (Hopson & Lawson, 2011; Oplatka & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006; Rodriguez-Campos, Rincones-Gomez & Shen, 2005), gender (Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, 2011; Embry, Padgett, & Caldwell, 2008; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011), and social issues (Shapira et al., 2011).

Yet, in her reflective essay on experiences of women who became leaders in education, Margaret Grogan (2010) noted, "While we have quite a robust body of knowledge helping us to understand the conditions under which women lead education and welfare systems in the English speaking countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, we know very little, if anything, about women educational leaders in other parts of the world" (p. 782).

Nevertheless, in relation to developing countries, recent studies of women's management have investigated psychological aspects (Morris, 1999), feminist leadership (Biseswar, 2008), indigenous women (Fitzgerald, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2010), and the underrepresentation of women in leadership and management positions in education (Celikten, 2005; Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queeder, 2011).

Outstanding social characteristics of developing societies have been identified that define their educational systems, including an important role for the father of the family, many family duties and constrictions, low levels of education for girls, domination of education management roles by men, and the adoption of an "androgynous" management style by those few women who manage to break the "glass ceiling" (Oplatka, 2006). Cultural norms in many developing countries dictate the allocation of certain tasks and areas of responsibility to a particular sex, assuming that a person must act according to society's gender expectations (Celikten, 2005; Sidani, 2005).

According to the accepted perception in these societies, leadership and management roles “belong” to men, and women should avoid attempts to attain such roles. If they act otherwise, they may face social sanctions, even including injury to their marriage prospects (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

Although the resemblance between these characteristics of developing societies and Arab society in Israel is only partial, the narratives of the Arab women managers working in Israel, whom we interviewed, produced a picture that includes many of the aforementioned characteristics. Still we do not know much about how women have shaped leadership in education in developed countries? What do women principals, supervisors, deans, and directors do with their recently acquired power? What can they do?

Despite the continued existence of traditional norms and cultural values in Israel’s Arab society, the unique dynamics of this country are leading to a transition in Arab leadership patterns that has enabled women to begin to assume leadership roles (Arar, 2010). It is evident that Arab women’s status has improved over the years in conjunction with the expansion of higher education among Arabs in Israel (Arar & Mustafa, 2011). The fact that many Arab women have studied higher education has feminized the Arab education system, especially elementary education, and teaching has become the prevalent professional occupation for educated Arab women, who have gradually infiltrated management positions in education (Addi-Raccah, 2006).

The increased infiltration of female leadership in Arab civil life sets many challenges, generating conflict between different values, norms, and control patterns, and a struggle between different sources of authority. As noted, there has been a gradual increase in the number and proportion of Arab women studying in higher education institutes in Israel, and today they constitute 62 percent of all Arab students in Israeli academic institutes (Al-Haj, 2003; Arar & Mustafa, 2011). These women have improved their status, and many have adopted fundamentally modern principles (Abu-Baker, 2003).

Other studies on women in the Arab education system in Israel reveal the difficulties Arab women face when they aspire for promotions to principalships (Khattab & Ibrahim, 2006; Addi-Raccah & Ayalon, 2002). Arab women's status at work in Israel is restricted by patriarchal norms similar to those applied in the Arab world (Addi-Raccah, 2006). These norms restrict women's work to the vicinity of her home and family, limiting her inclusion in the national economy (Joseph, 2000). Abu-Baker (2008) described the present situation of Arab women in Israel in the following words: "[T]he march toward modernization has been conducted through traditional tools: adult women still need the permission of men to continue their higher education, to go out to paid work and to realize their right for political activity" (ibid., p. 377). In addition to this cultural obstacle, the progress of Arab women to senior positions is limited to the few senior positions in Arab society, where preference is usually given to men.

Despite this seemingly negative picture of women's influence in Arab society, in Israel's Arab elementary education, 75 percent of teachers are women (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The number of women teachers who pursue academic degrees and professional development programs is rising, and many possess the skills and capabilities to compete for and perform the role of principal.

In 2001, the percentage of women among Arab elementary school principals in Israel reached 18.9 percent, and in middle to high school education, it amounted to 7.9 percent (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Seven years later, in 2008, the percentage of women among Arab elementary school principals reached 28 percent, and in middle to high school education, it rose to 14 percent (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2008). Comparatively, in 2003 and 2004, in the United States the percentage of female school principals in elementary schools reached 56 percent and 26 percent in high schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011); while in the United Kingdom, in 2007 and 2008, women constituted 75 percent of all primary school principals and 32 percent of secondary

school principals (Association of School and College Leaders [ACSL], 2011).

The few studies on Arab women leaders in Arab education in Israel describe the difficult struggles they must overcome in their transition to management positions; the first generation of women who chose to pursue management positions paid a high personal price (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011; Shapira, Arar, & Azaiza, 2010). Women who have succeeded in becoming school principals or managers of welfare offices have fought for their jobs with tough struggles, and attain their positions despite the fact that these are normally considered male positions (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011). These women are seen as the exceptions to the rule (Shapira et al., 2011). This is despite the continual improvement of women teachers' capabilities and qualifications. Arab women teachers and social workers increasingly participate in supplementary professional and specialization courses and go on to gain higher academic degrees (*ibid.*); their participation in academic institutions exceeds that of Arab men; however, even when their qualifications are superior to those of competing male candidates for promotion, men are mostly preferred for coordination and management roles in the school. A fierce battle is fought for each principalship that becomes vacant; attempts are often made to besmirch the woman candidate's name, to apply political pressure, and sometimes even to act violently against them (Shapira & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2009).

Chapter 3 will focus on the family backgrounds of these women, which shaped their special abilities and the particular political contexts that enabled their promotions within Arab schools, indicating also how the women perceive their social and professional contexts.

## CHAPTER 3



### “THEY DIDN’T CONSIDER ME, AND NO ONE EVEN TOOK ME INTO ACCOUNT”

Iman, an elementary school principal, considered a path-breaker in her society, told us how her candidacy for a school principalship was received in the early 1990s: “They didn’t consider me, and no one took me into account.” The words of Iman, like the testimony of other Arab women elementary school principals described in this chapter, succinctly illustrate the fact that these women often have the sense that they are invisible in their society. Despite their impressive performance as school teachers, they are still not considered capable of managing an educational institution. Why are some Arab women able to overcome these inhibitory forces, while others remain subject to restrictive social norms? One critical factor for the Arab woman’s ability to break through conventional barriers seems to be her biographical background and the resources and enrichment gained within her family from early childhood.

The chapter begins with a review of extant research concerning women school principals, relating to differences in leadership styles between women and men. The second part of the chapter studies our interview transcripts, focusing on the important role of the Arab woman’s family of origin, her spouse, and their impact on the woman’s determination to study, develop, and advance. It discusses political pressures, the difficulties involved in attaining social acceptance and support, and relates to the sociopolitical implications of Arab women’s advancement.

## SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: THE GENDER ASPECT

Studies relating to the influence of gender in education leadership mostly focus on three areas of comparison: leadership styles, power relations, and careers. Although some researchers have ardently argued that men and women differ in how they manage people and assume leadership roles, these differences were attributed to different socialization patterns and life experiences rather than to innate sources (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). According to this literature, gender differences are evident in the consideration of human relationships (e.g., care, empathy), the extent of focus on teaching and learning, school-community relationships, day-to-day interactions, time management, job satisfaction, evaluation and assessment, leadership style, power relations, and career cycle. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) summed up the major differences:

Women were more likely than men to encourage the empowerment of their teachers, establish instructional priorities, be attentive to the social and emotional development of the students, focus on student relationships, be attentive to the feelings of teachers, include more so-called “facts” in the evaluation, look for the teachers’ personal effects on the lives of children, place emphasis on the technical skills of teaching, make comments on the content and quality of the educational program to provide information gathered from other sources, involve the teacher in decision making, issue directives for improvement, provide immediate feedback on performance, and emphasize curricular programs. Men, on the other hand, were more likely than women to emphasize organizational structure and to avoid conflict. (p. 86)

An important research finding across all studies relating to power relations between principals and teachers is the tendency for female principals to adopt a democratic, participative style, whereas men are more apt to display an autocratic, directive style (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Embry et al., 2008). In addition, women are, by and large, inclined to work in a collegial

manner and actively bring in other participants to take part in decision making (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), as part of what Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) called "relational leadership."

What complicates the picture is that leadership style also appears to depend on the social context in which it appears (Coleman, 2011; Klenke, 2011). In countries with traditional value systems, it seems women adopt an "androgynous" style—a combination of "masculine" and "feminine" styles—combining the adoption of strong male-dominated norms with the expression of women's own tendencies and needs (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011; Oplatka, 2004).

Another predominant distinction detected between male and female principals refers to the place given to instruction and learning in the principal's management—the extent to which the principal adopts "instructional leadership" (Embry et al., 2008). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) found that women principals put more emphasis on teaching and learning, classroom problems, teachers' professional development, and the monitoring and evaluation of student learning than did their male counterparts. Other researchers have found less conclusive support for gender differences. In general management, considerable literature indicates similarities between male and female leaders (Coleman, 2011; Klenke, 2011); while in education management, Brinia (2011) suggested that the either/or, male/female dichotomy is too simplistic and called for a multidimensional approach that examines context, ethnicity, and other factors when conducting research on the issue of leadership style.

Yet women principals' management style is often the result of their need to adapt to a male-dominated culture. When entering principalship, women, especially those from developing countries, encounter resistance that engenders serious pressure, frustration, and a sense of helplessness (Oplatka, 2004). Thus, at first, their managerial style tends to focus on concern for administrative matters in an attempt to justify their appointment (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011). Later, many report a sense of relief as others gradually acknowledge their authority,

and they then tend to delegate authority and to focus more on educational planning (Brunner & Grogan 2007).

According to Coleman (2011), women and men head teachers experience leadership in different ways, with women continually having to overcome the stereotypes that identify men with leadership. However, Coleman (*ibid.*) concluded that “although they may be judged differently, the majority of male and female head teachers aspired to similar styles of leadership that might be described ‘feminine,’ with the majority of both sexes valuing qualities of caring, nurturing and tolerance and working in a collaborative and people-centered way” (p. 53).

As discussed in Chapter 1, many cultural perceptions identify “femininity” with ineffectiveness in management and leadership (Blackmore, 1999), and covert discrimination against women and male control of educational management often delay opportunities for women’s promotion (Hill & Ragland, 1995). It seems that, since a masculine hegemony has for so long dominated educational institutions, a substantial change has to occur in the wider political context of educational reform, so schools can respond more authentically to gender issues (Blackmore, 1998). This is especially so in the context of Arab society where women’s promotions for principalship posts often depend on male approval and support (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Yaseen, 2010).

### WOMEN LEADERS IN ARAB SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

Despite the resistance and obstacles structured to prevent women’s advancement and to exclude women from the public sphere in patriarchal societies, such as the Arab society in Israel, a few women have been permitted to become school principals (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Oplatka, 2006; Yaseen, 2010). One factor for their success noted by Arab women leaders in Israel is the support of their families, especially their parents, that significantly enhanced their self-confidence, motivated them to pursue higher education, and also empowered their social and professional abilities within the context of their leadership responsibilities (Shapira et al., 2011).



Another factor that distinguishes the women leaders whom we interviewed is the acquisition of higher education. Arab women who are privileged to study in higher education meet the majority Jewish society for the first time. On Israel's academic campuses, they encounter a modern "Western" culture, exposing them to more egalitarian norms than they have known in their home villages and towns (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011; Al-Haj, 1995; Masry-Herzalla, 2008). Their academic studies enable them to understand new and different ideologies, broadening their knowledge base and helping them form an educational vision. This chapter describes the stories of some of these women managers, as they emerged from our interviews, attempting to identify the sources of their empowerment and the resources and strategies they employed to attain their senior positions.

The four readings of our interview transcripts presented here relate to the following identified themes: (1) *Empowerment within the Family*: describing early development processes in the woman's family of origin; (2) *They Did Not Consider Me, and No One Even Took Me into Account*: obstacles and blocks encountered on the path to leadership; (3) *The Nomination Was Accompanied by Boundless Affection*: society's perceptions regarding the women principals; and (4) *Professional Relationships*: relations with other stakeholders in the school and the way in which the women principals use their position to develop their educational vision.

### **Empowerment within the Family**

We attempted to identify formative elements in the women's personal backgrounds that may have shaped their leadership potential. The interviewees' stories related to their families of origin and to their present spouses. It is clear from their stories that, despite different personal backgrounds, these women were all encouraged, and even pushed, to acquire higher education and leadership positions from early childhood. The women themselves had a strong sense of self-efficacy and sensed they had the skills and capability to lead; some felt they were marked out for leadership from an early age. These aspirations

and feelings of empowerment contrast sharply with the normally accepted self-image and expectations of girls in Israel's Arab society. This background paved their roads to leadership, so that they were able to progress further than other Arab girls in their vicinity.

Abir indicated that all her siblings completed higher education, although social norms that limit a young's woman's ability to travel outside the village were always upheld: "I grew up in a home with 12 children. My home strongly supported my studies; a person who studies is respected. It's considered prestigious to be educated, exposed to different approaches and ideas and more open to the world. I studied in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; I was the only Arab woman in the mathematics and physics program. Many people told me, 'You'll fail. University mathematics is very difficult.' I was appointed as a teacher in a high school in Jaffa, but my father forbade me to leave the village."

Although some families allow their daughters to attend universities in cities distant from the supervisory eyes of the community, a single woman cannot usually remain outside the village after her studies (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005), since traditional gender ordering demands women's early marriage, childbearing, and homemaking, and imposes social sanctions on every deviation from these roles. Tradition dictates that the Arab woman should only function within the home environs (Shukri, 1999).

Iman was the first woman principal in her village, and she described the family environment that had 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 girl ever continued beyond that. I moved to Nazareth [an Arab town] 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, but they had no Law degree. I then discovered that I would be returning home each night at seven o'clock. It was taboo to return so late, and there were also no buses. Instead, I enrolled in the Arab Teachers' Seminar in Jaffa, where I completed my studies. My husband

always encouraged me, supporting me even before I became a principal.

Suheir described her family as follows:

Our family has a unique multicultural character. My maternal grandmother is Jewish, my paternal grandmother is Christian, but my family is Muslim. That's the only way I can describe it. It was the way we were educated, the perceptions we absorbed. My father's status was also significant. He was also a school principal and promoted coexistence and democracy. So our lifestyle was very unusual. We grew up in three different cultures, and it isn't so simple, selecting the elements that you want, developing your personality as you wish, to suit your individual needs.

Samira grew up in an ethnically mixed town and has managed a high school for the past five years:

My family is a very modest family. My mother is a housewife, my father was a renovation and tarring contractor—a very simple person—but they invested heavily in education . . . It is a very warm family, and we have a very special mother. Our father is very warm and concerned, but Mother is exceptional, and it was really she who disciplined us and worried about our education and pushed us to succeed. Her whole life revolved around her children. She really invested enormously in us. We always aspired to excel, both to please our parents, and because we enjoyed it—to advance, to succeed, to live correctly. Those are the messages we always received.

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 Grade 5 or 6, only learning to read in order to be able to read religious books.

After Grade 8, 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 can't write 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 nonreligious 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 write anything else."

She started high school in Haifa, traveling each day 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 I could read and 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 academic books to my room in secret. My cousin helped me. We studied together."

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

My father is from one of the leading families in the village. His father was the *Mukhtar* [the head or official representative 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 the village Mukhtar. 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 Grade 4. She knows Arabic and Hebrew. Both my parents understand that their children's education means more [than mere] knowledge. My father has many Jewish friends. This probably influenced how he runs his own family.

Rim has been school principal in the village where she lives for the last ten years. She described her family as follows:

I am the third-youngest in a family of six girls and three boys. Although according to accepted practice in Arab families the

boys were supposed to receive their father's undivided attention, my father gave all his attention to the girls. We were poor, and there were many children. My father 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. Our [extended] 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 was my inspiration. He understood life's wisdom. I was the first woman in our tribe to go away to study at university. He pushed me and told me that I deserved it. This opened the door for all my sisters.

### **They Did Not 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. This phenomenon has been described by several scholars in Israel (Shapira, 2006; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005). We attempted to understand how our women principals had attained their posts despite these difficulties. The five following narratives explain how, in specific cases, the patriarchal 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 attempts to vilify women candidates for principalship.

Iman described the tough opposition to her appointment as principal and leader in her community:

When they talked about the 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 yet 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. He said, "How can a woman replace me? It's unthinkable."

On the advice of her attorney, Iman 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. I eventually attained the role, but I began 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 were many wounds. They could have influenced me to react in one of two ways: either to attend to my wounds or to disregard all sorts of important things, to ignore my wounds and start afresh."

Narin applied for the tender in a neighboring village, after studying in a training program for school management:

There were 18 candidates, including one other woman, and I won the tender, despite outright opposition from the local mayor. Following negotiations and sensing that the issue would be taken to the Education Ministry, the council yielded 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 mayor here 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 deceitfully:

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 I had practical experience, because the previous principal had been weak. There was a political and social reaction by everyone in the village, but inside school, I didn’t feel it. I had support, including a large group of teachers from Haifa, who weren’t connected to the village.

The head of the local council wished to promote his own candidate and made several attempts to obstruct Rasmiya’s appointment and her work in 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, “Positive innovation and changes are happening in the school.” That is how I won the tender. Then the local council 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.

### **The Nomination Was Accompanied by Boundless Affection**

Rim was thrown into local politics against her will when she was appointed principal of a school populated by children from a contentious hamulla who were involved in a feud with her own 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 could 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. My own 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, in the previous tender, I had already applied on the strength of my skills 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.

Narin studied in the Jewish education system, experiencing different norms from those accepted in her village, and was not ready for the pressure that was exerted on her by members of her own hamulla:

My second year as a principal was the most difficult. I had to cope with internal pressures 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. 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 my boundaries. My family ostracized me for several months. My husband was abroad, and his family didn't support 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.

### **Professional Relationships**

We examined the principals' stories in order to identify their management style and the nature of their professional relationships. An outstanding feature of the principals' stories is the significant importance they attributed in their school work to their relationships with teachers, students, and parents. Each in her own way described her investment in active cooperation with the teachers in decision making and practice, their attempts to reach out to parents and to bring them into school activities. They also described their personal consideration and concern for their students and their ability to listen to them. These descriptions resemble the findings of Embry et al. (2008) concerning women's management styles. Abir described how the veteran principal she replaced had helped her:

To enter the role with less damage and greater benefit for all, I invited him to my home . . . We established a relationship of respect; he an older man, and I a young girl who respected him. He began to tell me about each and every teacher.

I held individual meetings with each teacher. I prepared a page on which each teacher wrote their expectations. They came [to meet me]; they had fears and anxieties. I sat with each one, and afterward, I did my homework.

What characterizes my school today is the different management; it's managed like a family. The relationships are more personal—there is more emotional expression; more involvement in the work; expressions of concern and understanding for the feelings of others, teachers, parents, and students. Even

our graduates are different, and they sound different when they reach junior high school. The workshops that we deliver to parents provide opportunities for everyone to express emotions better.

The managerial method described by Abir includes legitimation for expression of emotions, communal qualities, and a more interpersonal-oriented and participatory set of leadership behaviors (Embry et al., 2008) than was previously evident under male principals.

Iman described her work as principal and her management style:

I worked until late, in order to build everything from scratch, to develop the staff, to establish the school credo. I worked toward the parents and together with the parents, very slowly, not running. It took me two years until we gained the parents' trust, two years to write my credo; and at the same time, the teachers' group underwent supplementary studies, and the parents' group studied. Together we reached a common perception and were able to describe the school that we wanted. I described our credo in one sentence: "It will be a pleasure to come to this place." The tone of speech has changed, and there is very respectful consideration of parents, attempting to explain things to them. So the villagers have begun to say, "The children enjoy themselves there. The parents are happy with what happens to their children there."

Iman's consideration of the teachers and parents and, primarily, her concern for the students correlates with the finding of Oplatka (2006) that a common feminine managerial style is evident in the work of women in management in different developing countries.

Suheir described the relationships she created with her staff in a story about a public event at the regional council:

Recently, the Minister of Education visited the Gilboa region. The council asked each principal to bring as many of their teachers as possible. It was on a Saturday at a very difficult hour, 8:30

in the evening. Most teachers have children. Only two teachers registered that they wanted to come. I was very annoyed. I asked the secretary if she would tell all the staff that I wanted an urgent meeting with them during the break. I told them, "I just wanted to remind you that we are used to talking when something troubles us. And just as you always come to me with things that disturb you, now it's my turn. The council asked us to bring staff from each school. I'm sure that you won't accept my going there alone. I understand that the day and time are difficult, and you have children and husbands. But I can't do this alone. I simply want to share with you what I am going through at the moment." I didn't allow them to speak, or argue. I told them, "You can now continue on your way and have a pleasant day." After a lesson or two, ten teachers had registered that they wanted to come with me.

Suheir's behavior resembles feminine managerial behavior described by Celikten (2005) in Turkey. She constructed her communication with her staff through her empathy with their difficulties and made her demands clear without exerting authority.

Samira was a high school counselor who won the tender for the principalship:

There were no opponents, and I became the school principal. I enjoy every moment, although there are difficulties. It is not paradise; there are a lot of difficulties. I am very proud of what I do. I am very proud of my students. I believe in the ability of the person who faces me, whether it is a teacher or a parent or a student. I believe very strongly that each person hides many assets. And my job is to find those strengths and bring them out. That is what I try to do.

From her first day, Samira found herself embroiled in conflicts and was slandered by a family whose member had been an opposing candidate for her post. They tried to engender opposition against her: "Let's say that a child is excluded because he attacked a teacher or was verbally violent. They [the family who opposes me] immediately go and talk to the child's family and advise them what would be worthwhile for them to

do. They tell them, 'You can write a letter, file a complaint, and go against the principal's orders.' They act as if the school intended to destroy their children. My solution is, first of all, to reinforce the students, to work toward excellence." Samira's solution was based on purely professional considerations and her belief in her chosen path, and these allowed her to empower the students and to foster excellence in the school. Samira's innovation was to transfer the struggle from the political arena to the educational arena.

## CONCLUSIONS

These personal, social, and professional narratives of women elementary school principals, educational leaders, and pioneers testify to cultural transition processes within Israeli-Arab society similar to those reported in other Arab societies in the Middle East, especially Lebanon and Oman (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Al-Suwaihal, 2010). One explanation for this could be the effect of globalization on Arab society as discussed by Moghadam (2011), represented in Israel by Arab interaction with the majority Jewish society (Schwartz, 2011). Arab women's entry into the public sphere, especially through higher education, is the first step to personal empowerment and innovation (Arar, 2011; Gilat & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2008) and has consequences for their societies.

To some extent, our findings resemble previous research findings concerning women principals in Western societies (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Coleman, 2011) and in Middle Eastern societies (Omair, 2008; Yaseen, 2010). Although these women function in a traditional society that does not yet acknowledge women's leadership as a social norm, they appear to draw strength from their family backgrounds. Each woman's personal story is, first of all, a story of her empowerment within her family, often defying the community's views and restrictions for women. We hear about Iman, whose family sent her away from home to allow her to pursue her high school studies; Souheir's father, who was a school principal and ensured that the family upheld open, democratic values; Rasmiya received assistance and encouragement from her educated uncle's family, who funded

her school fees. Each woman was empowered from an early age, by her particular family circumstances. These findings are in line with previous findings in Kuwait, Lebanon, and Israel that found that Arab women pioneers in education owed their achievements to their families, who encouraged them to study and challenged them to stray from accepted norms, to make changes, even while working within the system (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005).

Although the encouragement of their families for their advancement was exceptional in the context of Arab society, elements of the traditional culture of their environment are also evident in their stories: many family constraints and obligations, girls' low education levels, and the importance of the father's role (Coleman, 2011; Oplatka, 2006). Rather perversely, their ability to innovate, change norms, and present a new model of a woman who can fulfill a central role in public discourse also depended on the patriarchal hierarchy. Those who made this possible were the significant men in their lives: fathers or brothers, and later, also husbands (Shapira, 2006). A woman's need for support from a male figure and for her father's authorization is a well-known phenomenon in patriarchal societies with sociopolitical obstructions for women (Omair, 2008). This kind of support is essential for women's advancement in the public sphere. The support of public figures and organizations also played a role in the women's advancement (Coleman, 2011; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Aburabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008).

In Arab society in Israel, cultural, patriarchal norms still largely limit women's work status, restricting their employment to the local, familial environment and hindering their participation in the broader economy (Addi-Racah, 2006; Joseph, 2000). Additionally, the conditions of the Israeli labor market limit the entry of Arabs, especially Arab women (Schwartz, 2011). In this context, the achievements of the women we interviewed are remarkable, since they compete for the few senior posts available to Arab men.

Another factor that perhaps facilitated the women's advancement is the intercultural exchange that occurs between neighboring Jewish and Arab communities, including regional

activities for teachers and students and regional and national frameworks for principals and teachers that generate change in the perception of women's status. Many young Arab women now study at university, leaving their 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 (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Arar, 2011).

Studies of women's management in the Arab world reveal problems involved in promoting women to management roles in different spheres, and the educational and social welfare systems are significantly tainted by this norm (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Khat-tab & Ibrahim, 2006; Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008). It seems higher education is insufficient to ensure women's natural promotion in the public sphere. Women's entry into public roles is still considered unnatural in Arab society. 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 (Ablah, 2004).

The narratives of this study illustrate the problems involved when a woman is nominated for a principalship tender: Iman 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; Rim continued to function as school principal according to pedagogic principles, despite a rival hamulla's continuous opposition. Relevant also are the narratives describing the heavy social price of family ostracism, when the women chose to follow professional considerations instead of family pressures.

In practice, even at the stage when they tendered their candidacy as principals, the women experienced social opposition and political pressure. This opposition to their appointment

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. Even in Western societies, male resistance to women's advancement is evident. Coleman (2011) and Klenke (2011) found that women who attained senior positions often encountered lack of cooperation from their male colleagues.

When the women were eventually appointed to principalship, they employed their particular feminine skills and approaches to their leadership. The participants described the change processes their schools underwent under their management. They explained how initially they employed a consistent and very professional authoritarian style to introduce changes and innovations. They also described a gradual improvement in the relationships between all school stakeholders and a transition to more empathetic relationships with expression of concern and interest, greater democracy, and openness. These changes engendered a more relaxed atmosphere between teachers and students and in the school. The managerial style they described differs from the hierarchic, authoritarian, masculine style previously known in Arab schools (Al-Haj, 1995).

These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies that testify to differences in administrative styles between men and women (Fennel, 1999). Women principals develop a personal relationship with staff and achieve better cooperation between teachers and between the administration and teachers. They are acutely aware of the need for improved teaching and invest more than do male principals in the care of day-to-day processes (Oplatka, 2006). Their feminine management style is characterized by concern and caring, empowering others, and differing from the masculine style that emphasizes control and hierarchical management (Kochan, Spencer, & Mathews, 2000).

The findings reported in this chapter indicate that these women principals have much to offer, both for the progress of Arab schools and for the advancement of their society and its female population; this theme is more fully explored in the next chapters.

We have seen in this chapter how female elementary school principals had to fight for their positions; this struggle is even fiercer at the level of the high school principal, a position highly respected in Arab society in Israel. Chapter 4 traces the stories of three of the first Arab female high school principals in Israel.



## CHAPTER 4



### CHALLENGING CULTURAL NORMS

What happens when a female Arab teacher tries to break through personal and social barriers and aspires to undertake the role of high school principal, a role that constitutes a symbol of male domination? In this chapter, we discuss the new phenomenon of Arab women in high school principalship. We describe obstacles and difficulties the women faced on their paths to high school principalship in Arab society in Israel, attempting to understand how they overcame these barriers and fulfilled their aspiration to lead. And we discuss the contributions these women made to their schools and communities. To discover this information, we studied the biographical backgrounds and career paths of three Arab women, all high school principals.

#### WOMEN'S CAREER TRANSITION TOWARD HIGH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

A review of the relevant literature shows that, until recently, most high school principals were men (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Jill Blackmore (1998) described three types of barriers all women encounter when they aspire to attain management positions: sociopolitical, organizational, and personal barriers. Personal barriers include a lack of self-confidence that women often develop as a result of male cultural hegemony expressed in the first two barrier types. Therefore, women candidates for

management positions suffer from gender discrimination that imposes challenges beyond the usual difficulties faced by male candidates (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989).

While Arab males do not need to overcome cultural barriers to assume leadership positions in Arab education in Israel and do not have to cope with gender discrimination, Arab women who aspire to reach management roles, and especially high school principalship, encounter several obstacles (Shapira et al., 2010). Research has shown that women's aptitudes for career transitions, including transitions into senior management, are based on a combination of personal traits and behaviors learned while serving in middle-management positions that ultimately shape their leadership capabilities (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009). The fact that most women who reach senior management served previously in midlevel positions (Coleman, 2003), illustrates that they gradually made their way up the management ladder, often having to wait more patiently for a promotion than men.

Oplatka (2005) described the stages women teachers usually traverse before becoming school principals, beginning with their teaching "career entry," through a stage of "establishment" and "midcareer," where some teachers feel either burnout or renewal. In developing societies especially, these middle stages take less time for men. Women seem to follow a longer, more linear sequence due to the barriers they face in entering management, although this is the natural progression from their midcareer stage (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011). Research has shown that, once they attain principalship, women principals' progress from authority based on the legitimacy of their role—sometimes demonstrating power including coercion and withholding rewards—toward authority based on pedagogic leadership expertise, enabling them to influence teachers who identify with their educational vision (Gorton & Snowden, 1993).

## LISTENING TO THREE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' VOICES

In this chapter, we analyze the narratives of three Arab women high school principals, products of our interviews with Nadra, Samira, and Rula.\*

The current chapter analyzes four readings of the interview transcripts: (1) *Empowerment within the Family* focuses on the women principal's personal development and transition into management and broadens the information presented in Chapter 3 concerning the influence of early childhood on the women's abilities; (2) *I Arrived at the Right Time* focuses on professional aspects and changes the women introduced in the educational domain; (3) *Establishing Leadership in an Educational Institution* focuses on the women principals' educational leadership styles; and (4) *Challenging Cultural Norms* focuses on the women's coping strategies in their social and cultural contexts. The theme headers were derived from the women's words.

### **Empowerment within the Family**

Previous studies on women leaders in Arab society in Israel point to the fact that their family backgrounds played a significant role in their empowerment and promoted their ability to attain management positions (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Shapira et al., 2010). This conclusion was echoed by Coleman (2005), who described the role of a strong mother figure who supported her daughter's climb toward the principalship.

Nadra described the family in which she was raised: "I was the eldest child. I thought that I was special; I was always in the spotlight. Wherever I went I had a special presence. It began in my family. At school I was always one of the leaders . . . I was even named after a revolutionary woman leader. I owe that direction to my parents: the choice of my name was empowering. My mother gave me my name."

\* These are pseudonyms; see descriptions of the women in the introduction.

Like the elementary school principals presented in the previous chapter, Nadra emphasized her parents' influence on her development, explaining that her mother had grown up in a multicultural city (Jews and Arabs) and had been exposed to a modern lifestyle and values. Similar influences are described in previous research relating to ethnic minority females who became managers in the Western world (Cooper & Stevens, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2010; Sadeghi, 2008). Nadra explains,

[My Mother] is from the north, and she introduced liberal views; she contributed significantly to my studies. Father is a very open-minded hard working man; he put himself through university, and he received his high school diploma through external studies. He was a self-made man. At home, education focused prominently on moral values, not religious values. Mother has work experience; Father let Mother work and develop herself at a time when that was considered very strange. She reached a senior position in the Labor Party as a representative for Arab women rights; she was close to becoming a member of parliament. This was very important for my own development and exposure, as was my parents' agreement to send me to the University.

Samira, who grew up in a multicultural northern city, described how important education was for her family: "My family is very modest. Mother is a homemaker, Father was a renovation contractor, but both focused strongly on education . . . We are six siblings, two sisters, and four brothers. Mother kept us on a short leash and was concerned with our education and pushed us to succeed. We always strove for excellence, both to appease our parents and because we enjoyed it. 'Advance and succeed'—that was the message we received constantly."

Rula also speaks about the power she was given by her family during her childhood: "I come from a poor family, blessed with many children. Everyone worked in order to support each other, but one thing was clear to us all: we could not disappoint our parents in regard to our learning achievements and needed to succeed. I had to prove to my parents that I was worthy to continue my studies. I studied intensely, and my mother acted as the candle that lit the way for me."

The findings suggest that our interviewees were empowered by their early childhood development at home. Their parents were highly instrumental in promoting their independence and provided them with coping strategies and tools for participation in the public realm (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011; Coleman, 2011). This development motivated them to compete for senior positions in a society with limited resources, despite the hurdles encountered.

### **I Arrived at the Right Time**

Tenders for high school principalship in Arab communities usually involve fierce fighting, and strenuous efforts to block the appointment of women candidates (Shapira & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2009). Yet studies show that becoming a principal is a natural step in the career development of top women teachers and actually reinvigorates them (Oplatka, 2005). The study's participants painted a complex picture of their career development. Samira described her transition from teaching to management as a struggle: "I demanded; I took the initiative and became a part of all the different processes. I purposefully chose the more difficult route of not working a mere five hours and going home. I felt connected to this place, a place where I could develop a vision and realize it, so I always created good relationships with the students' families and the community."

Nadra described the circumstances that paved her way to the role of principal: "At some point the departing principal decided, 'You are going to study management, a school leadership course.' Although for my part, I was mostly interested in providing care and attention. And so it happened that I became principal of the first regional school at the age of 33. He was appointed superintendent, and I was immediately and unanimously appointed by the authority and the Ministry of Education."

Regarding the challenges she faced to attain the principalship, Samira explained, "It was a temporary appointment until the end of the year, followed by an official Ministry of Education tender for six candidates. There were five men and one woman—myself—and I was chosen unanimously. There were

no public opponents, but some of the teachers were not happy, and they joined forces with political partners who did not support me, but my husband stood by me along with my mother and siblings. That's how I started this journey as school principal against all the odds."

Rula explained how previous principals had not succeeded in managing her school, where principals had been replaced each year until she presented her candidacy:

I heard about the tender and presented my candidacy. Luckily, the Amal academic chain had taken over the school, and what interested them was the candidate's skills. But the teachers collected information about me, and then I heard remarks such as, "She was only born yesterday; what does she understand about high school management . . . a mere woman?" [When I was appointed] the teachers responded angrily, the parents were astounded, the leading staff did not accept me enthusiastically . . . I entered a school that had replaced five principals in five years; even the town's media found it difficult to accept my appointment. It was clear to everyone that I was just another principal who would stay for a year, if at all.

I had another difficulty that the others had not had: I was an unmarried woman. It was an advantage because I could work until late, but it was a disadvantage especially because no Arab man would want to marry a woman school principal. As a single woman educator, [I] could not fit their expectations, since I did not fulfill the role of a mother who could bring up her children nor was I a strong man.

Similar resistance to women in managerial positions is reported in developing societies (Celikten, 2005; Mertz & McNeely, 1998) and in the Arab world, especially in corporations (Al-Suwaihal, 2010).

Nadra, Samira, and Rula all mention the contribution of Jewish figures to their principalship. Nadra was supported by a temporary Jewish mayor who was not involved in local political dynamics:

He [the principal] said to me, "That's it. I'm leaving, and I think you are the most suitable of all the teachers to replace me." He

left and an internal tender process was initiated. I offered my candidacy. Then, since some people opposed me, they opened it as an external tender. I was chosen as principal by an official committee, and there was a Jewish mayor. He was not interested in the electoral pressure; he acted purely professionally, although local government members tried to influence him. This was only the first or second time a woman was chosen as principal of an Arab high school; in most cases, male principals are appointed without a tender, because typically the head of the local authority is the one who decides, according to political power considerations and not necessarily as a professional decision.

Despite the resistance to women's principalships in Arab high schools, and despite reluctance on the part of teachers to accept the authority of a woman principal, Nadra described the enthusiastic welcome she received in the teachers' lounge: "The bouquet of flowers they bought me was bigger than I expected. I arrived at the right time as a savior; my society was ready for a new face. The Islamic movement complimented me on my traditional dress; political representatives of all views came and complimented me. The community did not resist; I had a certain aura from my days as a counselor. I was accepted by everyone."

Contrastingly, Rula cannot forget the sentence that rang in her ears as she entered her first meeting with the teachers:

"She definitely won't survive more than a month" . . . as I entered, there were several teachers looking for the principal in her office. They passed by me and didn't think it could be me. There was a teacher who shook my hand because he thought I was a new teacher who had just been accepted to the school. All around me there was a lot of noise. I hadn't slept for nights, and my family was anxious. I heard things about it being a very difficult school with an almost constant presence of the police, firearms, drugs, a lot of problems . . . many men had not survived there. I had to prove that I could survive.

As noted in previous studies (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Coleman, 2011; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005; Shapira et al., 2010), challenges such as family commitments, a

shortage of women role models, monitoring (Coleman, 2011), and patriarchal policies may initially deter women from contending for high school principal roles, but in the end, they do not prevent them from doing so (Al-Lamsky, 2007). Facing these challenges and social expectations, women principals lead high schools from conservatism to modernity and introduce new concepts of management (Al-Suwaihal, 2010).

### **Establishing Leadership in a Learning Organization**

Studies show that women principals rarely introduce innovations in the first few years of their tenure, since they have not yet acquired management expertise (Bruner & Grogan, 2007; Oplatka & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2006). During this time, it is difficult for them to develop leadership that generates innovation and provides solutions to pedagogic challenges (Embry, 2008; Shakeshaft, 1995). This is especially noticeable in traditional societies, where women principals tend to adopt an authoritative leadership style at first, in order to establish their control in the face of social expectations and challenges (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Grace, 1995; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Both Samira and Nadra described their first steps as principals, coping with difficulties when they introduced changes:

When I first started it was very difficult. I believe that each person has a lot of strengths. My job is to recognize those strengths and bring them into expression. I can only change things if I am a principal. (Samira)

My first staff meeting focused on the winter matriculation exams . . . people understood that I was introducing a new educational message. (Nadra)

Their first objective was to establish themselves as staff leaders. Samira was building a professional team: "We hold a management staff meeting once a week. Everyone gathers here and discusses their dilemmas; what has not worked in the past week, what to expect in the next week. We organize plans;



there is a clear schedule, no surprises. This is all a result of my reorganization.”

Nadra described her managerial changes: “I worked collaboratively with everyone so that there was not just one person in charge of all functions as it was before; instead, I built a management team. I expanded my staff; I redefined the entire school structure. I have a vision: I want to turn students into involved adults who are prepared to lead and change the face of society.”

Rula described her perception of school management:

Change contributes much to the system. My predecessors were men, strong and aggressive who were met with antagonism by the community and the parents, but I arrived with my bonding approach to vary things through reciprocal learning and enrichment, providing a positive contribution to the school. Now we learn in the school by pooling our strengths. At first, they looked at me as a weak woman. After I asked both men and women to join the management team, everyone had the feeling that we wouldn't succeed. I began with small steps and applied them; I began with order and organization, a school uniform, respect for time. I insisted on two values, which were quickly absorbed: transparency and perseverance. I walked around the school in order to learn about it and not to control it. I believe in containing students' difficulties. These children often have difficulties in life, and I am there for them, a good sister who knows how to contain them but also knows how to reprimand them, if necessary.

Samira built a new relationship with the staff: “I trusted the teachers, supporting them, giving them a chance to improve themselves. We have become a more open organization, a learning organization.”

Rula speaks about her unique work style:

If a teacher or a parent is angry, a male principal reacts with anger, since it becomes a matter of “ego” for him, who has the loudest voice. As a woman, I take care of it in a completely different manner. I react in an opposite way, and my “ego” is unharmed—I try to understand instead of getting angry. I

empathize with their difficulties and bond with them, trying to give them a perspective on the matter, to think outside the problem and not from within it. Trust is the magic word; I believe in others, and this leads the school to success.

Nadra also replaced the previous masculine management style (Brinia, 2011), employing her own method of relating to students—a feminine leadership style—building new more egalitarian relationships (Fuller, 2011; Klenke, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1995): “Being principal and having been an educational counselor, I am very close to the students. Today, I am more assertive; I am fond of the students, and they like me more than any male principal . . . I treat every person equally, regardless of his or her hamulla.”

Samira described her caring attitude toward students as she offers them partnership without neglecting her authoritative demands: “I shall educate you, I will take care of you, [but] you will follow the rules, and then you can participate fully in the [school’s] discourse.”

Rula explains how she fought to improve the school’s reputation: “I thought it important to rid us of the stigma. There are six private schools in the area; I don’t want to be the default possibility but prefer to be known as a school that accepts difference, advocates values, sees the ‘other’ and respects him. I want to fight the embedded culture of copying in exams and to sow instead values of genuine work, to produce students who have truly earned their certificates and have a certificate for life.” And when the interviewer asked how she planned to do this, she responded, “I provide a genuine presence, bonding with the students and giving them the sense that we are concerned about them. In Arab society, as in all the world, there is an authority crisis; we have to help the students to define their goals and to move toward them. I do this by employing an open-door approach, unlike the classical principal, who worked behind a wall.”

Women principals have been described as mountain climbers continually climbing upwards (Altson, 2000), even though they are committed to their students’ own growth and education (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). They see their professional

lives as an ongoing sequence of activities and actions geared toward change and innovation; change that affects their own internal development and that of others (Coleman, 2005).

Feminine leadership style was a prominent theme in the principals' stories. They emphasized the importance of their relationships with their teachers, students, and parents, and their concern for the community. Each, in her own special way, described the efforts she made to involve teachers in decision making, drawing in parents and involving them in school activities, and attentively listening to students and staff (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Klenke, 2011; Morris, 1999). Nadra explained how she introduced radical changes at school: "I wanted to instill my pedagogic approach regarding the matriculation exams; it was obvious that there was too much cheating, and it simply reflected [deficient] student learning. I had to play a policing role, not just talking, but inspecting everything." She concluded with her personal philosophy: "I fight for students' success; I supervise performance, student attendance, learning achievements, communicating with parents, [and] planning ahead."

And Samira described a new atmosphere in her school: "There is more democracy now, more openness. My door is open; my heart is open to parents, students, and teachers."

Rula indicated that the children feel very close to her and talk candidly with her: "I smile and don't get angry; I demonstrate a youthful spirit. The children feel they are close to me. We speak the same language; for example, talking about the Barcelona-Real Madrid game, I am not distant in thought; I am open to speak with them even about their love."

These principals employ their feminine leadership style to principalship, replacing a controlling, competitive, and task-oriented approach with a cooperative, process-oriented approach, encouraging others to become empowered (Coleman, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2010). Facing up to challenges, they lead their schools from conservatism to modernity, introducing new managerial concepts.

### Challenging Cultural Norms

Previous literature shows that various barriers—for example, commitment to family, lack of female models, lack of managerial experience, and patriarchal policies—may deter women from candidacy for a managerial post (Coffey & Delmont, 2000; Curry, 2000). Nadra appears in traditional Muslim dress, her body entirely clothed, including a veil. She draws support from male sponsorship (her husband and brothers) and her community and is not perceived as a threatening character by the local Islamic movement. Samira, who comes from a multicultural city, wears Western dress and encounters powerful resistance. She is perceived as threatening the traditional ethos of her school. Despite this difference, both women faced the opposition of male teachers who would not accept a woman's authority as principal:

Up until now, the men have found it hard to accept a woman as boss; they have had a rough time. (Samira)

Some of the male teachers were not happy, and they joined forces with political partners who opposed me. That's how I started this journey as school principal against all the odds. (Nadra)

Nevertheless, Nadra's traditional appearance facilitated her acceptance by the community: "The Islamic movement complimented me on my traditional dress, representatives of all political views came and complimented me; the community did not resist."

All three principals challenged the existing social order, advocating justice and morality as part of their leadership style and encouraging discourse as community leaders. These characteristics have been recognized as indexes of moral educational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009).

Nadra explained how she was nominated to become a high school principal: "I arrived at the right time as a savior; the community was ready for a new face . . . As a counselor I had created a good aura for myself." Despite strong parental pressures to bend

the rules, she insisted on promoting moral education: “There was a phenomenon at school whereby parents would ask teachers to change their children’s grades, and teachers would adjust grades. I made it clear that I would not accept this behavior.”

Samira was forced to cope with local opposition to her nomination: “There are a lot of people here with negative energy, and they are not happy that I am here; they see my post as a status symbol. They don’t know how much I have contributed to their children already and how much positive energy I brought with me to the role.”

Samira was perceived as an outsider by the village, and especially by several hamullas who strongly resisted her principalship. But she felt she had a mission: “I view my principalship with a sense of mission [and] as a place where I can realize my vision, change things . . . however, that is not how they see it.”

She described the opposition she faced: “All it takes is three or four people who gang up together to stir up wave after wave, trying to slander me and convince others.” Later, she described how she copes with this resistance: “I don’t confront people—they want to test the boundaries—they try to break my determination, and I need to be strong to survive in a male society . . . we have a patriarchal society that only respects men.” She had to deal with intimidation from the very first day, when her car was scratched and burned: “At midnight on September first, the first night of school, my car was set on fire in front of my home. A year later, on September first, they sprayed my car with brake fluid. These are just some of the things they did to let me know, ‘You will not come to school; you will live in fear, and we will harm you.’”

Nadra and Samira were forced to cope with political, clan-related, and other pressures, sometimes including intimidation, but they have not succumbed, and both claimed that every victory reinforced them. Recent studies concerning women principals in developing countries and in Israel have revealed similar challenges faced by women in management (Coleman, 2011; Oplatka, 2006; Shapira et al., 2010). While Nadra chose a cooperative coping strategy in work with her community, Samira chose direct confrontation strengthened by different

figures outside the school community—for example, a Jewish male counterpart and her official inspectors.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we attempted to find the sources of these women principals' strength in a society that has not yet accepted female leadership as a social norm. It appears that the initial sources can be found in their backgrounds—in the families in which they were raised, where their personalities were formed, and the seeds of their leadership traits were planted, despite living in a society that restricts women. The stories of these families are seen in the context of their environment, characterized by family obligations and restrictions, low education levels for girls, and the importance of the paternal role (Oplatka, 2006).

In a wider social context, it seems educated Arab women in Israel draw their empowerment from additional sources: First, their proximity to Jewish cities, and second, their encounters with Jewish women as students in Israeli universities (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Arar, 2011). These encounters change their perceptions of women's status, allowing them to know a more egalitarian culture, and enabling them to choose to adopt some of its norms. Thus they experience freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and a democratic atmosphere (Abu-Baker, 2008), which later influences their leadership styles and their efforts to grow and empower others and lead a quiet change in existing norms.

Nadra, Samira, and Rula all knew well in advance that the road to high school principalship would not be smooth; however, they decided to fight until they attained the role. They competed in tenders with men and weathered power struggles within their communities. A basic element in their stories is the gender-related nature of their struggles. They wanted the role because they could significantly affect students and society as a whole. They viewed themselves as agents of change and described the dramatic changes that had taken place since they assumed their leadership roles (Arar, 2010). The changes are evident in the school's external appearance; the level of seriousness and commitment to high-quality learning and

teaching; and their containing, empathetic attitude toward teachers, students, and parents. Although these principals insisted on meeting educational and disciplinary goals, they described a warm, encompassing climate in their schools that respects each and every person.

From their stories we see that neither Samira nor Nadra allowed clan-related and political pressures—even violence, such as the intentional damage to Samira’s car—to affect their performance. Nevertheless, many principals work in the shadow of a society that views a strict hierarchy and control as the “correct” form of social organization; and the community’s micropolitics have a strong influence on school decision making (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011). Remarkably, the attempted intimidation did not affect the women principals’ performance, and even strengthened their determination to drive change forward in their schools.

The leadership style of Nadra, Rula, and Samira combines revolutionary and traditional methods of social change: they respected the traditional environment to which they belong and did not challenge existing customs; however, they also insisted on the need for change within their schools, understanding that each change would eventually seep into the environment. They balanced an authoritative leadership style with one of collaboration and empathy, in line with the feminist concept of the “ethics of care and concern” (Noddings, 1992, p. 65) also witnessed in the style adopted by women supervisors discussed in Chapter 5.

In their first years as principals, they had not yet established their managerial expertise (Bruner & Grogan, 2007). Working as women principals in traditional societies, they initially needed to employ authoritative leadership styles to establish their control and to respond immediately to social expectations and difficulties they encountered (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008); however, with more experience, they found time for educational and social initiatives and mobilized their schools toward modernity and student empowerment, acting as role models for adolescent girls.

In conclusion, Nadra, Samira, and Rula have become educational leaders and personal, social, and professional pioneers. Their stories are testimonies to a process of cultural transition within Arab society in Israel and to a process of personal advancement, establishing independence for women.

A very few courageous and ambitious Arab women have ventured to climb even higher toward the educational professional peak. Having excelled in their professional and social achievements in school, they progress to regional and pedagogic supervision of the Arab education system. Chapter 5 introduces the reader to these women and shows how they have brought progress and change to the Arab education system in Israel.



## CHAPTER 5



### WOMEN IN MALE TERRITORY

*It's so difficult for me . . . I have to conquer more than one battlefield, to function as a woman in a full-time job at home and to take care of everybody's needs and to raise children who excel academically, to do everything by myself; to comply with the expectations of my husband's family, to act as the most professional supervisor to ensure my career, and even not to be so well accepted by my community and the men who control the Arab education system in Israel. (Rania)*

These words of the supervisor Rania illustrate the objective difficulties faced by Arab women, who wish to realize senior careers in education, in a territory perceived as “male territory.” Her words inspired us to investigate the difficulties, obstacles, and challenges that beset Arab women when they aspire to attain a career in educational supervision, trying to understand how they cope as women in a “male territory” and what could be learned from this experience.

Literary sources indicate that women only began to work as superintendents in the United States in the last thirty years, and research concerning their functioning began only two decades ago (Bjork, 2000; Brunner, 2000; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Skrla, 2000). In the Arab education system in Israel, it is only in the last five years that women

have been appointed as supervisors. Why did it take so long for women to be able to assume these roles?

The stories of the Arab women supervisors we interviewed allow us to study their personal and professional development before entering these roles, tracing their career paths, which usually involved rising from a teaching career to mentoring and then to professional supervision. This chapter describes the life stories and development processes of four women leaders: Rania, Amna, Ahlam, and Fadia (pseudonyms), who forged their paths from teaching to mentorship and, subsequently, became professional supervisors in the Arab education system in Israel.

The chapter describes the leadership characteristics of these women that were noticeable even in childhood, and the family support they were awarded during their studies and on the climb to their careers, including the support of certain male figures, seen as an essential condition for their success: "Thanks to the male umbrella" (Fadia). It also discusses the fact that all the while, throughout their climb to supervision, they continued to perform all the functions expected from them as women in the home domain. Additionally, the chapter describes the women's entry into male territory, overcoming much resistance and cutting through barriers. Finally, the chapter relates the changes these women superintendents have initiated in the Arab education system.

### WOMEN'S TRANSITION FROM TEACHING TO SUPERVISION

There are two types of supervisors in the Israeli education system: regional supervisors responsible for the comprehensive, administrative supervision of the school and the principals, and professional supervisors responsible for the teaching profession at the regional or national level. An essential condition for the transition to administrative supervision is a minimal number of years of experience in school principalship, while promotion to professional supervision depends on success in teaching and mentorship and proof of high-level skills for professional

training. This study focused on women who were all professional supervisors.

Since teaching involves activities that allow a limited amount of autonomy, men leave the teaching profession as early as possible to attain posts in management and supervision (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women who manage to reach managerial roles and function in these roles according to society's expectations are often labeled as "masculine," while those who defy expectations and stress their feminine skills are considered weak. Educational management is still considered a masculine profession, and women who undertake a managerial career are thought to undertake a masculine role. The processes involved in educational administration are presented in masculine terminology, such as "capturing" or "controlling," and faithfully reflect the dominance of men in the sociopolitical structure of the society in which the education system exists (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Thus it is theorized that, in order to alter the accepted perception concerning the inability of women to function effectively in educational administration, it is not sufficient to simply encourage women to undertake administrative roles; rather, the underlying power structure of educational organizations must be identified and reconstructed (Skrla, 2000).

In the United States, it was found that the increased promotion of women in educational careers was the result of "persistence, courage and collective efforts of women who educated, assisted and supported the advancement of other women" (Kamler, 2006, p. 310). This significant increase was undoubtedly due to the support and mentorship of women working as senior superintendents. The networks constructed by women for women and their determined perseverant support for one another has led to their success in forging their way to the top of their professions (Coleman, 2011).

Despite the progress achieved by two waves of feminist movements in the West, the masculine discourse that prevails in the US education system has not yet made room for a legitimate feminine discourse. This lack of recognition of the feminine contribution to education persists despite the positive experience of more than a few Western states that

have adopted an egalitarian gender policy in workplaces (Blackmore, 1998), and despite the advancement achieved by women in senior positions in educational management and supervision (Skrla, 2000). Masculine discourse continues to dominate educators' workplaces, controlling the opportunities, structures, education practices, and conceptualizations of the contemporary education manager (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Kowalski, 2003). The viewpoint of women supervisors therefore provides an additional lens through which the gendered structuring of their role can be viewed as it is expressed in their daily activities, through their experiences in the domestic and public spheres.

In the last three decades, the practice of educational management and supervision has evolved from the intuitive direction of teaching to high-level professional management and administration, implementing regional policy (Oplatka, 2010). American society sees the role of the superintendent as a male role and has established a basket of masculine characteristics expected of both men and women that fulfill superintendent roles. Skrla (2000, p. 296) describes this basket as including "independence, passivity, domineeringness, high level tolerance, ambition, objectivity, risk-taking and ability to motivate others to contribute beyond tasks and goals." Apparently, feminine qualities such as containment, support, concern, empathy, and care are considered soft characteristics, unsuitable for this role. In other words, the culturally structured characteristics deemed suitable for the superintendent's role in American society are incompatible with social perceptions of femininity. In this complex reality, women in superintendent posts are required to cope with the difficulty of being "intruders" in a male role, forced to disprove society's negative identification of them as unsuitable or unfeminine (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Despite all that has been said so far, the power of the feminist movement and feminist research differs from society to society, so that, in some states, initiatives have led to a policy of equality of opportunity for both sexes, and even active government encouragement for women to enter senior positions in education, for example, in the United States. These moves, however,

are not yet significantly expressed in reality (Blackmore, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007). For example, even in the United States there is little application of the policy for women's equality, and ethnic minority women are still noticeably absent from education superintendent posts (Skrla, 2000).

The reality is even more complex with regard to women in public posts in Arab society in the Middle East and North Africa. According to Hijab (1989), the Arab world has been forced to deal simultaneously with various issues: (a) the role of the woman in society; (b) the struggle for independent economic and political identity as compared to the rest of the world; and (c) the development of Arab society, presently undergoing a transition from traditional values and norms to modernity. These three issues and the disagreements they incite echo even more intensely in periods of conflict and deliberation (Abu-Baker, 2003), such as the Arab world is enduring at present.

In parallel to the increased proportion of Arab women turning to higher education in Israel (Al-Haj, 1995), the education system has been inundated by women teachers, leading to the feminization of Arab education and even including a slow infiltration of women into education management roles (Addi-Raccah, 2006; Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005). This phenomenon can be seen as a symbol of Israeli-Arab society's transition from a male-dominated patriarchy to a more egalitarian modern society, as discussed in Chapters 3 through 5, and also has implications for further social development. How is this expressed at the personal level?

We examined this phenomenon through readings of four women supervisors' narratives, identifying the following themes: (1) *Born to Lead in an Empowering Family* relates to the influence of the women's family of origin on their later development; (2) *On the Runway: Advancing to a Professional Career* considers the women's higher education and struggles for promotion; (3) *Conquering More than One Arena* focuses on the women's needs to multifunction in various arenas; and (4) *Thanks to the Male Umbrella* describes the women's need for male support in a patriarchal society.

### **Born to Lead in an Empowering Family**

Theoretical conceptualization of the development of leadership either relates to a basket of innate personal characteristics that define leaders (Hughes, Ginnet, & Gordon, 1999; Sashkin, 1988) or indicates that leadership is a collection of acquired and developed behaviors (Avolio, 2005).

The findings of many studies have explained how the buds of women education leaders' leadership abilities were evident from their early childhood (Arar, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Parallel research has traced the sources of the leadership abilities of Arab women in senior positions in the Middle East to their upbringing in families that fostered and empowered these abilities (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Omair, 2008; Shapira et al., 2010). This issue has already been discussed in Chapter 3. These studies clarify that long before women managers attained their senior roles, they already exhibited personal ability to lead others and other personality traits appropriate for leadership that were encouraged by their families over the years (Al-Lamsky, 2007; Omair, 2008).

The following narratives from our study reflect this reality. Rania, a Christian woman in her forties, married and mother to three children explained the background that shaped her life: "From my childhood, I did everything that I wanted to. I received several critical remarks from my uncles, but each remark that I received reinforced my courage to continue forward. They told my father, 'She shouldn't go alone to the club. Why do you allow her such freedom? You have boys; let them go.' My father said that he had no preference for a boy or girl, and he allowed me the option of doing what I wanted to."

Rania later told us that her family had given her a wide space for development and much support and assistance in order to succeed; nevertheless, she stressed that her development was not easily accepted in Arab society, so it was difficult for her to choose a life partner and to marry, despite her skills and the space she had been afforded:

Yes, my father, mother, brothers, and sisters [supported me]. And later, of course, when you have a more mature personality . . . I

did not want to make a risky decision when I chose my life partner—who would share things with me—and [found it difficult to decide] what sort of man to choose. Because it is difficult to give up what you are accustomed to, you demand exactly what you have received, what you have grown to know. So [it took time] until I found the right man who could really continue the process begun by my parents. So I am grateful to God, and every morning I thank God for all that I have attained. But I'm not sure whether I represent all Arab women. There are some that . . . you know, how should I put it, had to break through rock in order to achieve the same thing. There are some who underwent very difficult things or a very harsh life, very difficult conditions, in order to achieve self-realization.

Although Rania was born in a large, open Arab city, she too describes a childhood of struggles against the rules and regulations that restricted the movements of an Arab girl within the public sphere. It was not self-evident that she should participate in activities outside school; rather, it was expected that she should take her place working in the home beside her mother. In addition to her strong desire to change and correct injustice, she was gifted with an ability to lead and courage to act, even against accepted conventions. As she explained, these characteristics were already evident in high school:

In high school, I was chosen in rather strenuous elections as the head of the students' council. I remember that when the Intifada began, the school principal refused to go on strike, although all the Arab schools were on strike. But I was studying in a Christian school, and the principal was a priest . . . I stood at the school gate, I got up onto a high stone ledge, and told the students, "My dear friends, today we commemorate the Intifada . . . and if you have any feelings for the children who have been killed there [in the West Bank] and who are throwing stones for their freedom, then we should demonstrate by striking and go home." All the students got on the bus and went home. The school principal stood up above looking at me. None of the students entered [the school]; they all went home.

The story of her rebellion against school rules and her resistance to the principal's decision illustrate the way in which she positioned herself and formed her leadership through her struggle against norms (Arar, 2010). She took a stand against accepted rules of Arab society, challenging these rules and overcoming them, both in her immediate vicinity (in her own family) and in the school where she studied. She described how she refused to give in when she was summoned to the principal's room for a clarification of the aforementioned incident: "I was summoned to a sort of field trial in school. Some students from the students' council and the managerial staff were also present. They all wanted to prohibit my activities in the school, but they were unable to do so. I told them, 'I just told the students, my friends, to go home, and I didn't threaten anyone. They went away.' That was my first protest as a young person, against the rules and regulations in our society."

Ahlam, a woman in her thirties, recently married and a new mother, is one of the few women who has gone abroad to study higher degrees with the almost unreserved support of her parents. She explained:

I wish that I could represent a model for every Arab woman who has achieved something and succeeded. I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth. I was born to a loving family . . . education was something sanctified for them. They supported me right up to the end and 'til my last degree. I was given my independence from an early age. From the age of 18, I left the village, living in other places while I studied for my BA, MA, and doctorate. I travelled abroad several times; I lived in an Arab state for six months, and I lived for a year in the USA. I could not have achieved all this alone.

The possibilities open to her although she was a woman in a patriarchal society differ from those available to her colleague Rania, whose uncles criticized her freedom. Ahlam's family granted her a wider space and support and helped her in order to achieve her aspirations. Nevertheless, she indicates that changes are visible in Arab society, so that girls are now allowed to advance: "In our village, although it is a small village and so



distant from the central region, there is much respect for education; they want their daughters to go and study and work.”

Amna, too, is a professional supervisor in her late forties and a mother to three children. She relates that if she had not had the support of her family, it would have been almost impossible for her to advance:

Without the backing of their families, young women will have a hard time, and they will have to miss out on something. Our problem is that we, as Arab women, want to progress, but our environment does not sufficiently support or liberate us to allow us to advance. It's impossible to live in both worlds. And today, many career women who want to progress have to work in both worlds [home and work], and that is difficult. They need the support and backing of their family, of their husband, and especially of their children.

Fadia was also given freedom by her family and allowed to advance by acquiring an education: “You know that my sister is a famous professor, who completed her doctorate in the USA, and she is one of the first Arab women to become a recognized lecturer in such a prestigious university . . . so the door was open for me, since she had gone first, registering success at the end of the seventies, and she was a model for us all at school.”

Although in the recent past the stories of these women were exceptional, Ahlam claims that, in contrast to her youth, when it was difficult for girls to win positions of power, today, Arab society has altered, and this is expressed in an improved status for women and a desire to allow girls to acquire an education.

It can therefore be concluded that the sparks of these supervisors' leadership could already be identified in their childhood, and the support of their families enabled them to realize this potential and to climb the ladder to senior positions. A similar development path is reported for women in Qatar and Kuwait who were enabled to reach leadership positions with the strong unwavering support of their families (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Yaseen, 2010). Nevertheless, as Alston (2000) explained, the path

of senior women managers to the summit is often difficult; this was echoed in the words of our interviewees.

### **On the Runway: Advancing to a Professional Career**

The Arab women supervisors' narratives illustrated how they needed to integrate their studies and professional progress with the establishment of their families. They had to overcome many difficulties to fulfill all these functions simultaneously and to succeed in more than one arena. Their career paths began with their turn to higher education that helped to empower the personal resources they applied in their work as teachers. Their intense desire to continue to develop their higher education, although they often come from families with little economic means, is described by Rania: "I remember that often I and my brother would travel by bus to school and come home on foot in order to save money. We knew that we had to save money for our higher education in university."

Rania began to think about studying abroad with the assistance of a scholarship, since her parents could not fund her studies: "Someone came from the Women's Democratic Movement and said, 'Rania, listen. We have a scholarship if you want to study abroad.'"

This was an excellent opportunity for her; she responded positively and was asked to obtain the consent of her family so she could travel abroad. One factor that helped her to get permission to travel was that she was already engaged to be married, but this was also what eventually led to her return home: "My fiancé phoned and said, 'Rania, come home. I'll let you study whatever you want, just be here by my side.' I came back, but on the condition that, from the day of my return, I would continue my university studies."

Similarly, the supervisor Fadia began to study immediately after her marriage, with the agreement of her partner, an engineer: "I was accepted for nursing school, and after a six month engagement, I was married. After I was married, my husband persuaded me to transfer to biology studies. I took a break and became pregnant. Then I was accepted for university studies, and I graduated in biology. I was very ambitious; it was very

rare to marry and then begin studies. People said, ‘Your husband is wealthy. Why do you need to study?’”

Rania, Amna, and Fadia explained how they combined higher education with work, childbirth, and childcare, ensuring that the domestic needs of their family were fulfilled while continuing to work as teachers in school (Loder, 2005). As Arab women, they remained the homemakers, although they simultaneously struggled to successfully break through into a new professional arena where they had to continually prove their worth. Their efforts to juggle these multiple roles are described by Rania: “I excelled in my first year [at school], although I was already pregnant. My first son was born on June 4, twenty years ago, and on June 10, I sat for my university exams. It wasn’t at all easy because I had just begun a new life, marriage; there was a baby at home, and also exams, and there were people who didn’t understand that I was a student and had to study.”

Following her first degree, she developed her teaching career in an elite Arab secondary school in a multicultural city. It was difficult to maintain standards in each function and comply with everyone’s expectations in the different domains—her home, the school, and the university: “I would work in the school in the morning, go to university, study, come home, and then in the afternoon take courses. On Fridays and Saturdays, when there was no university or school, I would tutor students in my home to earn a little extra. Today, I’m amazed that I sometimes have a free day; back then I worked all week.”

Contrastingly, Amna did not succeed in conquering several arenas at once; she found it difficult to combine her concern for her home with work at school and higher education: “I have a master’s degree in English. I wanted to study . . . if you ask me what I regret—it’s that I didn’t begin to study for my PhD. I always delayed it because of my work burden and my child-raising duties.”

In contrast to Fadia, Amna chose a strategy of temporary waiver instead of continuing to climb upward in her career: “During the years when I studied, I knew I had to give something up, to reduce my hours of work, and I worked half-time

on my doctorate—I had to continually yield everywhere—I worked all day, apart from six hours sleep.”

The supervisors’ stories illustrate that their career development was accompanied by many obstacles and difficulties, to the extent that it became what Alston (2000) describes as “mountain climbing.” Their situations differ from those of men who are able to focus on their achievements in their field of employment, since women’s focus is divided between career development and their interpersonal relations within the family. Although they develop within the same life circles as men, these circles appear in various versions, colored differently by gender, ethnicity, culture, and specific circumstances (Barkol & Kupferberg, 2001).

### Conquering More than One Arena

In a report on Arab women’s occupations in Israel, Sa’ar (2011) explains that there are several reasons why Arab women do not integrate in senior careers within the employment market in Israel. The main reason is that it is not profitable for them to work, as it involves taking on a second job alongside their job as mother and wife, which they are not allowed to relinquish. This differs from women in Western cultures.

Studies in the West have described various obstacles preventing women’s career advancement including gendering, role perceptions, and variables relating to the family (Powell, Butterfield, & Parents, 2002; Metcalfe, 2008). These studies did not relate to the woman who wants to advance her career in the Arab world, torn between two demanding roles—a homemaker who needs to comply with the expectations of her husband and family and yet aims to succeed in a professional career (Tlais & Kauser, 2011).

Again, it is Rania who indicates how stressful it can be to maintain proper functioning in all domains: home, work, and studies: “If I am pressed, you’ll see that everything is organized; the food, washing, the house is clean, my children are washed, and everything is completely in order—100 percent. But if I feel today, on a Friday, that I have two hours to breathe, then I begin to become lazy; I’m willing not to cook.

I've built a home; I've built a life . . . so I had to work hard. Often, I didn't know whether it was Friday or Saturday or Sunday. I didn't have any day of rest for years."

Rania indicates how difficult it was to run along several parallel tracks, as a wife, mother, homemaker, and career woman while she still aspired to continue to advanced studies in the university:

I worked, I took courses, I studied at university, and I raised my children with all it took. And it was the same when I studied for my doctoral degree. During that degree, my nose was constantly into books. But I also divided up my time; I said to myself, "Rania, you have to finish this book by Thursday." So I set myself a limit so that by Thursday the book would be finished, meaning that I would have read and summarized it. I would get up early in the morning at 4:00, read and summarize. Sometimes I would say, "Everyone is probably resting and sleeping right now. Why should I be stupid and get up so early to read this book.", But I said, "Well, OK; it's only two years, and everything will pass. Afterward, I will remember these days."

Amna, however, did not manage to multifunction in this way, something that she greatly regretted: "My husband is a lawyer, and he also works for a foreign embassy as their counselor. I have three children; all this prevented me from continuing to a third degree, although I had a supervisor who agreed to guide me."

Nevertheless, Amna talks about her success with her children as a sort of compensation and her self-realization: "My oldest daughter is a lawyer; she works in the civil state attorney's office in Haifa. She has two gorgeous girl twins. And I have two sons. Anis is the middle child; he is in his last year of medical studies at the Technion. He is extremely intelligent; he always excels. And the youngest son studies in Amman, in his third year of medical studies. So I will have two doctors and a lawyer."

As noted, Fadia temporarily postponed her ambitions to climb the career ladder due to her need to fulfill her duties at home: "During the years when I studied, I knew I had to give

something up . . . I got up early in the morning and cleaned the yard. I love to wash everything down and do things by myself; I have a mania that everyone has to help, but I am a good mother, and I love my children—perhaps too much—and wait eagerly for the moment when they return from university.”

Amna’s efforts to maintain her domestic duties resemble those of women with a professional career in Lebanon. A study by Jamali, Sidani, and Safieddine (2005) indicated that Lebanese women who wish to study needed prior consent from their husbands, and they must always ensure that the family is satisfied with their functioning at home before setting out to work. Also, Omair (2008) found that the Arab women’s duty to raise children held preference to their occupational aspirations. Arab women seem to be torn between their focus on studies and work and on their family and looking after the home (Al-Suwaihal, 2010; Al-Lamsky, 2007). Despite this difficulty, all the women supervisors we interviewed found a way to persevere, to advance, and to reach the summit of their profession.

### **Thanks to the Male Umbrella**

As noted in Chapter 3, the progress of Arab women in a professional career depends, *inter alia*, on the support of the men in their lives, both in their early career stages and when they study in higher education. At all these stages they need the consent of their father, brother, fiancé, or husband (Arar & Mustafa, 2011; Mostafa, 2005; Yaseen, 2010). Their sociocultural and gender contexts dictate their ability to advance and build a career, and they need male figures to help them in this process (Barkol & Kupferberg, 2001). This phenomenon was also reflected in similar studies in the Arab societies of the Gulf States (Al-Lamsky, 2006; Omair, 2008).

In line with findings of previous studies in Israel (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011), the interviewees explained how their husband’s help was the factor that enabled them to overcome the difficulties involved in what Fadia described as “living in two worlds”: “It’s impossible to live in both worlds. And today, many career women

who want to progress have to live in both worlds [home and work], and that is difficult.”

Rania talks about the support she received from her husband: “Hani, my husband, is actually the one who pushed me. He said, ‘Go for it.’ I don’t know why. You have to ask him whether he regrets this today. Because there is a price, I mean, from the aspect of . . . the home; I have done my best . . . [Although] Arab cooking is on the priorities list, the first item on the priorities list is my children’s studies and mental support for my children; there I have succeeded. My husband gave up the requirement for Arab dishes.”

But Ahlam senses that she cannot flow with her work when she has to multifunction, meaning she gives up much of the self-realization she enjoyed when she was single: “For example, I held this job when I was still single, and now when I am married, it’s completely different. When I was single, nothing else mattered. I would come back to this office at quarter to eight or quarter to seven and work until the parking lot closed, right up until the last minute.”

Most of the women described their difficulty in multifunctioning, especially since there was no equal distribution of tasks in the home, difficulties that must prevent many Arab women from entering the same path to promotion and a successful career. Other reasons that have been noted as deterring women from managerial and supervisory roles include family commitments; lack of female models; lack of managerial experience and/or mentoring skills; and patriarchal policies (Kowalski, 2003).

Additionally, women who attempt to transition from a teaching career to management and/or supervision often encounter resistance and fierce struggles as they rise on the career ladder. These struggles were seen in greater detail in Chapter 4, which dealt with women competing for high school principalship (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Coleman, 2003). Even in Western countries, women who compete for supervision posts are often hindered by various obstacles, and they are essentially considered “outsiders” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). In developing patriarchal societies, this is even more evident (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011; Oplatka, 2006).

Women are seen by men as unable to function in a masculine arena, and the role of regional school supervision is still seen as a male role in both Western and developing countries (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Yet men supported the supervisors we interviewed throughout their careers, as our interviewees emphasized: "Look, we can say that, in general, the Arab education system is dominated by the masculine element. It is a system of men: the school principals, supervisors, and mentors. But you will be surprised to hear that this system supports women. I can't remember any male supervisor trying to hamper me because I am a woman, or because I am a risk or threat to him. We have several women principals, and many women mentors; we have many women teachers" (Rania). In Rania's opinion, Arab women are deterred from competing for senior positions in education since they are perceived as male roles.

Ahlam does not think women's internal inhibitions prevent the women from trying to advance, but rather, that men have imprinted their mark on this role and defined it according to masculine expectations and characteristics: "It does not necessarily indicate the woman's weakness or men's control. No, no, definitely not. Many women just would not choose this role."

On the other hand, Amna believes professional supervision is the natural progression from pedagogic work in school, and nomination for this role depends purely on professional and pedagogic skills and is determined by the professional authorities in the Ministry of Education, so that neither the Arab male supervisors nor the locally elected Arab officials have any say in this process: "If we are talking about administrative school supervision, it is a very desirable post for men, even among the Jews, but women compete more for professional supervision. It's as if administrative supervision is defined as a man's role, something masculine. In professional supervision, I don't see any special blocks. It's a job that depends on professional skills including higher education, a background in mentorship; so I think that's why we have succeeded in attaining these positions."



Ahlam notes two additional points: that Arab society has changed and that women usually exhibit stronger quality and greater success than competing men, especially in professional pedagogic work: “I agree that some women have internal blocks that prevent them from advancing. But women who have succeeded as teachers, registered professional success, and even starred in mentorship have managed to hold all sorts of pedagogic jobs in the school, and they have receipts for their success. [Such women] can aspire for promotion and advance their career even beyond the school.”

Thus the women indicated that there is a difficulty in attaining senior management roles in their patriarchal Arab society, yet they also indicated that some of the reticence to attain these positions comes from a woman’s own internal inhibitions; when these are overcome, it is possible to advance.

### **Promoting Social Justice through Educational Praxis**

Attempting to explain how women lead, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) assert that women managers discern and distinguish their many sources of authority and share their power with staff members, both focusing on formative leadership and trying to establish interpersonal, interdisciplinary coordination (*ibid.*). The common denominator they found among women principals in the United States was the women’s attempt to promote social justice through their educational practices, focusing on finding social solutions for educational problems. Fadia provided examples of this in a project she directed: “To form the foundations, I fought to bring in expert advice; I wanted to construct a professional training plan. I built the work strategy and prepared the more experienced staff members for serious follow-up supervision, training them in life skills, instruction. Now there is an organized professional program for the school counselors’ professional development, from their entry into the role.”

She then detailed the courses and programs that she had constructed and now operates:

Today we can say that we have an esteemed strong foundation for professional development. There is no such development base for principals or deputies, but for counselors there is. The counselors have a professional address that they can turn to on almost every issue. We have compulsory training courses with professional planning, some for development and empowerment. We are building the foundation for a treatment program. I know how to ask the Ministry of Education for the resources we deserve. Today I am leading an empowerment program throughout the Arab education system for adolescent girls, a hothouse program to reform the tutoring and support for pupils in distress.

Rania also described her organization of conferences and courses as a means to transmit not only knowledge but also a social vision: “I’m looking for people to train as strong instructors with vision and foresight. I want to realize my vision together with them; this is a vision that we have dreamed of achieving for thirty years . . . If you want to transmit material or a vision to others, you need their trust in your ability and you need to share things with everyone.”

Rania wants to initiate challenging, thought-provoking pedagogy:

I began to provide courses for the teachers. I gave them a new approach—how to go into the classroom with positive energy—explaining what I give the pupils when I come into the classroom . . . If a ball is lying on the floor, nobody wants to play with it, but when one pupil picks it up, then everyone wants the ball. As a teacher you always want to give them the ball. If it’s you pushing the ball, it’s just your hand pushing it, everyone will look at you, and they won’t understand anything. But if you throw the ball, then Ahmed also wants the ball, then Nadine wants the ball from Ahmed, and then Ahmed will throw her the ball. The ball will be thrown around the classroom and return to you. That’s how you can activate the pupils. Don’t see yourself as someone superior, who knows the most; allow them to know and to participate in knowledge creation.

Fadia explains that she believes in building and encouraging the teachers' growth so that they can become mentors and leaders: "Male supervisors would ask us, 'Perhaps you can find a strong male teacher [to be a mentor]?' I said, 'I won't appoint people in this fashion, and I won't just pull someone out of the drawer; I'll foster the development of people who will be strong mentors' . . . I look for people I can instruct so that they will be strong mentors with a vision for the school, so that they can implement my approach, and together we can achieve the change that we desire."

In her own way, Amna tries to lead the Arab schools to success in the matriculation exams, without stressing her personal role in the educational activity, but trying instead to empower others and to outline a path for the teachers working in the field:

I worked quietly and allowed the results to speak instead of me. I organized the first conference and was very concerned to ensure that it would succeed, because I knew that after such a success, the results would soon arrive. Many teachers contacted me; they said, "You gave us tools"; "We can already see the change from the second and third month of your work; we can see the change in the matriculation form." I don't have to boast that I'm the supervisor, or that I'm in charge, or [that] I'm the coordinator. The results will speak for themselves, and successful results will bring more success. So I work quietly.

In the last chapter of their book, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) note that some women in education management have indicated that there is a postgender stage that follows the stage where the woman leader establishes her authority. In this stage, gender no longer defines their image, and special meaning is given to their professional role and an attempt to promote an agenda of first-degree educational reform: empowerment of others and the promotion of substantive equality and social justice. Women distinguish the different sources of their power, responsibility, and authority and share these resources with others. This enables them to lead the education systems and to realize their agenda for social change and collaboration

(Petersen & Barnett, 2003). The women supervisors presented here seem to have reached this stage. Employing their feminine style, personal strength, and pedagogic experience, they are able to promote social goals reaching far beyond the formal definition of their role.

## CONCLUSIONS

All the supervisors interviewed for our study stressed the fact that their families empowered them from an early age (Arar, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shapira et al., 2011). Their ability to study and their rise to senior positions depended on male figures in their nuclear family (Arar & Mustafa, 2011), so their sociocultural context determined their ability to advance (Barkol & Kupferberg, 2011). As shown in previous studies (Abu-Rabia-Queder & Oplatka, 2008; Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011), it seems the women supervisors had to cope simultaneously with “living in two worlds” (Fadia). Despite the changes that have occurred in recent decades, Arab society mainly maintains its traditional patriarchal values and norms. There is still no permit for women to break into the upper echelons of Arab society, and few have succeeded. These few exhibit leadership qualities, perseverance, and the ability to learn at the highest levels. They succeed, *inter alia*, due to family support that enables them to empower themselves and reach senior positions in the Israeli-Arab education system, for example, supervision.

These women supervisors explained how they were challenged to develop their ability to function simultaneously in several domains, aspiring to prove their abilities as women and to succeed in each of these areas. Finding it difficult to balance these different functions, all the women reported that they were forced to give up something. While some attempted to function as “superwoman” in all areas—leaving themselves without a spare moment in a busy week schedule for a long period—others delayed their career promotion while they brought up their children (see also: Coleman, 2011).

The narratives of these women indicate that, despite their ability to undergo personal transition in order to climb the career

ladder, their advance was more like “mountain-climbing,” as they had many obstacles to overcome on the way (Oplatka, 2002). In contrast to the men who are able to focus almost entirely on their occupational achievements, women are torn between a focus on their work and a focus on their interpersonal relations and domestic duties. Although they develop within the same life circles as the men, these circles are defined differently according to gender, ethnicity, culture, and specific circumstances (Barkol & Kupferberg, 2001).

All the women supervisors indicated that it was possible to reach the summit with determination and perseverance. Within the role, their influence and introduction of unique meaning is evident. In this context they appear to have reached the post-gender phase described by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), attempting to promote an agenda of social justice and substantive equality (Petersen & Barnett, 2003) and employing their feminine qualities and power to further social goals beyond the formal requirements of their roles.

The findings indicated that these women supervisors do much to lead the Arab education system toward a more challenging pedagogy in an attempt to influence social order. They improve and empower student abilities and foster future teachers. They promote a more professional discourse within the Arab education system by attempting to actualize an educational vision through methodical planning and a goal-directed operational strategy. With slight differences, these findings echo the picture of women leader’s leadership style and *modus operandi* described by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) in other countries. They lead in five different ways: relational leadership—“being in relation and sharing power with others” (p. 8); leadership for social justice—“they enter the field because they want to change the lives of children . . . to make the world a fair place” (p. 11); spiritual leadership—“[they] always talk about spirit when discussing school leadership as a source of personal strength as well as a way to understand connectedness” (p. 14); leadership for learning—“[they] support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches” (p. 18); and finally, balanced leadership—“women

leaders strive for balance between responsibilities at work and at home” (p. 21). These various leadership strategies have served many women leaders well in settings ranging from kindergarten to college. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) conclude, “[W]omen have become leaders largely because of what they can do with leadership, not what they can be with it” (p. 97). As a consequence, they are more likely to pay attention to who is being served.

In the next chapter we will present our findings concerning an issue we encountered incidentally in our interviews with these professional Arab women—namely their adoption of the *hijab* (traditional dress) as part of their identity, the consequences of this decision for their image, and their interaction with their professional and social environments.

## CHAPTER 6



### “I WAS ALWAYS A BELIEVER, ONLY THE CLOTHING WAS MISSING”

Until now we have focused on the respondents’ family backgrounds, exposing their social relationships as leaders and their professional relationships as principals and leaders in different social spheres.

This chapter deals with Muslim women principals’ adoption of traditional dress and head coverings, the meaning of this phenomenon, and its contribution for women principals in their different life spheres.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The migration of women to cities or other countries to acquire higher education often opens up new opportunities and enables empowerment, facilitating social mobility and economic advancement through enhanced participation in the employment market and sharpening women’s sense of autonomy in their families and cultural communities (Arar, 2011; Khan, 2009; Masry-Herzalla, 2008; Sadeghi, 2008).

This process involves positioning oneself according to parameters of race, class, and gender; more profoundly questioning interactions with others; and reconsidering one’s present self-identity. This process was relevant for our interviewees, who were all graduates of Israeli universities in Jewish cities.

Feminist research focusing on women in the Middle East, who aspire to self-advancement, describes their attempts to cope with the modern world while maintaining certain traditional practices (Helie-Lucas, 1993; Moghadam, 2011; Sadeghi, 2008). The cultural, political, and social contexts of Middle Eastern societies—with their distinct lifestyles, family relations, and professional career development—differ from what is known and accepted in Western societies (Moghadam, 2011). Traditional patriarchal societies of the Middle East present unique challenges for women and shape their coping strategies with their own particular perceptions of power and justice (Saar, 2006).

According to Abu-Lughod (2002), Middle Eastern women do not aspire to attain abstract concepts such as power and liberty, preferring other aspirations that are more meaningful for them, such as life within the family environment or life “according to God’s will.” Sadeghi (2008), however, noted that when these women migrate to the Western world—for example, to Canada—they are able to enter higher education and to attain long-term objectives as part of a discourse of empowerment. Khan (2009) discussed Muslim women’s struggle for individual freedom in North America, indicating that they need to maneuver between the state’s security considerations and their call for civil liberties, a context of tension between their desire for integration and for personal identity.

Zuhur (2003) theorized that, since women in the Middle East lack the experience of those in Western countries, it would be incorrect to attribute concepts such as “empowerment” to their development. This is true for two reasons: First, most situations including empowerment are identified in the West with overt actions involving government organizations and agents. This perception does not reflect the actions of women in the Middle East, which usually take place in the private sphere, often covertly (Abu-Saad, Horowitz & Abu-Saad, 2007). Second, there is an affinity between the concept of empowerment and the concepts of “autonomy,” “free choice,” and “self-realization,” terms rooted in Western culture where individuation and independent, personal development



are perceived as decisive components of human development (Erikson, 1968). These concepts are considered inapplicable to Middle Eastern cultures in which women who aspire to individuation, empowerment, and self-realization also strive to maintain mutual relationships, commitment, and interdependence (Popper-Givon & Al-Krenawi, 2010). This means that the influence of concepts such as higher education and empowerment on women's lives should be considered differently in the Middle East (Moghadam, 2009).

Middle Eastern feminists have found ways to use tradition as a tool for women's emancipation, an obvious example being the veil, which is seen by many women as an item of clothing that allows them to move freely in the public sphere, since it indicates loyalty to tradition (Abu-Odeh, 1993; Moghadam, 2009).

The discussion regarding Palestinian women in Israel should relate to their broader context since they are influenced by the fact that, predominantly, they live in separate Arab geographic and cultural spaces. Living in such contexts, they maintain their unique culture but, nevertheless, can potentially change the existing social order (Abu-Lughod, 2010). As educated women move outside their local domains, they become acquainted with the Israeli-Jewish majority culture and are exposed to new lifestyles and philosophies that influence their own self-definition, their relationships with their culture of origin, and their aspirations to continue to higher education; in contrast to their parents' generation, they adopt many aspects of these modern lifestyles. Their deliberation and decisions reflect their ambitions and attempts to reposition themselves in Israeli-Arab society (Erdreich, 2006).

### MUSLIM WOMEN'S IDENTITY IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

Manna, Or, and Manna (2010) described four main categories of collective identity that affect members of the Arab minority in Israel: religious identity (Muslim, Druze, or Christian), Arab identity, Palestinian identity, and Israeli identity. According to Samouha (1998), the structure of an Arab individual's identity in Israel is composed of different measures of these multiple

identities within one of two apparently contradicting processes: “Israelization” and “Palestinization,” with some researchers claiming the process of Palestinization is dominant. This process involves the reinforcement of a sense of belonging to the Palestinian people, sharpening Palestinian cultural identity, and supporting the demand for full rights for the Arab minority (Abu-Lughod, 2010; Manna et al., 2010). We tried to discover whether these identity-forming processes are reflected in a Muslim woman’s choice of dress in Israeli Arab society.

Droogsma (2007) found that American Muslim women’s attitudes concerning head coverings actually redefine the concept of the hijab. Since the events of September 2001 in the United States, reactions to Muslim women wearing the hijab include suspicion and close inspection due to an increased general fear of Muslims. For Americans, the veil often constitutes a concrete symbol of ethnic and religious otherness; yet few of them bother to stop these women to ask them how the scarf influences their daily life. Droogsma (*ibid.*) noted that researchers tend to attribute meaning instead of describing the meaning of the scarf according to those who wear it. Other studies that examined the practice of head covering only investigated veiling in Muslim societies or assumed that the meaning of head covering was identical for Muslim women in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies (Khan, 2009).

A study by Bhimji (2009) investigated whether British Muslim women were committed to Islam. She found that, when women participated in strictly religious spheres, they were able to assume several identities, as they collectively attempted to understand Islam. When they entered these religious spheres dominated until now by men, they transformed these spheres by expressing their feminine, political, and cosmopolitan identities. The hijab was just one of the aspects of their religious identity. The mosque was one of the spheres that empowered these women, since they met their women friends there and acquired social connections. According to Bhimji (*ibid.*), holy sites should be considered as an interface between religiosity and identities, dynamic spaces that may contain many different identities. A similar approach was voiced by Jamal (2005) in her

study of American Muslim women. She considered religious institutions to be communities, groups of people who regularly meet and share their beliefs and values, creating a common experience.

Several researchers have focused on the ways in which Muslim women express their religiosity in various national contexts, many of them discussing the overt symbols—such as head coverings—of this religiosity (Bhimji, 2009; Bilge, 2010; Croucher, 2008; Gole, 2003; Khan, 2009; Saar, 2006). These researchers have investigated the meanings, motivations, and implications of this most visible, symbolic act of Muslim women in the present era. For example, Tarlo (2007) described the cosmopolitan characteristics of Muslim women's dress, while Bhimji (2008, 2009) indicated that this cosmopolitan style was adopted by Muslim women to express their sense of affiliation in different countries—such as England and Southern Asia—a sense of belonging indicating citizenship, national affinity, gender, ethnicity, and emotional dimensions of status and connections. As Bhimji (2009) noted, in many cases, the unique dress style of these women often combines Western-style clothing such as jeans or a skirt with the hijab or shawl.

Other scholars have discussed how Muslim women demonstrate authority and cope with conflicting cultural identities within formal education spaces. Examining the motivations of British women of South African origin, Ahmad (2001) discovered that the women she interviewed had to negotiate between traditional and Western norms. Discussing the obstacles British-Muslim women must overcome in relation to their studies and education, Shain (2003) pointed out the ways in which these young women demonstrate their resistance to inequality, racism, sexism, and social stratification within the educational world.

Droogsma (2007) indicates that, while the dominant perception of the hijab assumes that it symbolizes the suppression of women, women who wear it hold a completely different view regarding its role in their lives. The women she interviewed were far from feeling subjugated, and identified their head coverings as fulfilling several functions in their lives, some of them empowering. Women see the hijab's role as defining Muslim

identity, acting to check behavior, enabling resistance to sexual objectification, and providing freedom (Khan, 2009). These Muslim women wear the hijab not only for personal reasons but also in order to demonstrate their attitudes to others and thus to confront other ideological perceptions of this practice.

Following the description of the professional, social, community, and family aspects of the life stories of Arab women managers in public organizations in the preceding chapters, this chapter focuses on the meaning of the transition to traditional dress by Muslim women managers in the education and welfare services. This phenomenon awakened our attention from the beginning of the study, since we noticed that more and more women who had been appointed to management positions began to dress in a traditional manner, especially wearing head coverings of different sorts, which were very salient.

In this section, we tell the stories of ten Muslim women managers. With eight of them—Samira, Narin, Ibtesam, Ikram, Wardi, Nasreen, Salima, and Suheir—just one interview was held, and their findings appeared in previous chapters. The last part of these interviews related to identity and religiosity, and this was the source of material for this chapter. With two of the women, Nadra and Manal, two interviews were held. The second interview was devoted entirely to the issue of identity and religiosity.

The reading of the transcripts that provided the material for this chapter relates to traditional dress and its meaning for Arab-Muslim women managers in public systems. The findings are presented according to the different parts that their dress played in their lives.

### **I Was Always a Believer, Only the Clothing Was Missing**

The transition to traditional clothing was connected in different ways to the interviewees' appointment to principalship, and each of them found a slightly different solution to the issue of religious precepts concerning dress. Some of the women began to wear traditional dress before their appointments to principalship, while others made this decision after their appointments.

All those who made this decision indicated a direct connection between their appearance and their community's consideration toward them. Two of the interviewees continued to wear secular dress and did not feel they had to change their lifestyle, yet for all of them, whether or not they decided to alter their clothing, this matter was very important and very meaningful.

Nadra explains the deliberations that led to her decision: "I returned to my religion several years ago; it was a personal choice, after I reached the conclusion that not everything is obvious . . . At the age of 37, I became religious—it happened five years ago. I grew up in a very open home; I had a modern hairstyle, fashion, makeup, and I was a real model. My external appearance, with its aesthetic beauty, was very important to me. I became religious after deliberating inner questions: 'Why didn't I pray? Why did only part of me believe while another part did not?'"

In contrast, Samira explained her resistance to a head covering: "I believe, and yet I am not religious . . . I don't feel at all that it [a head covering] is something that I have to do . . . It may be something that comes from true belief . . . I don't know how to do that and why people do that . . . If I did wear such apparel, then the consideration [toward me] would change, but I will not wear anything like it."

Narin explained that her faith had been part of her life from childhood. She spoke about the internal process she underwent that led to the change in her dress, describing her clothing style as an external expression of her inner world:

I am no longer secular. When I became a principal, I was completely secular. The crises that I underwent were not easy. When a person copes with his problems alone, he will either commit suicide or collapse or manage to escape from the situation. There are two possibilities . . . either you can go to a psychologist who can help, or your treatment may be spiritual. That is how I began to read the Koran, to listen to stories. And it made me feel good, really good. It calmed me. I said, "My direction is spiritual." I have prayed since I was 13, even when I was studying in a Jewish school. It seems that praying is a matter of belonging to something. I really felt a lack of affiliation and roots. My

head covering began in December last year [2008]. My uncle died, and I really loved him. During the mourning period, I put a scarf on my head. I said to myself, *Well, if I put a scarf on my head, and I pray, I'm maintaining tradition . . . so what would be bad if I completed this process and became a religious person?* I just needed a head covering. Even head covering still needs stages. I won't wear it completely closed. I can still put a hat on my head or a scarf and my neck will be exposed and my appearance won't be completely religious.

Manal describes the addition of a scarf to her apparel as the continuation of the education she had received:

I was educated in a traditional home; my mother had prayed from the age of 13. I really loved our tradition. I always fasted on Ramadan. My town is, of course, a Muslim town—everyone here fasts—it's something that I grew up with. Everyone prayed, so I prayed. I know that when you pray you cover your head and that you should cover things up to here [signifies her forehead], wearing something long, and then you pray.

On the last Ramadan, I woke up in the morning and wanted to go to the school. I was fasting. For the past few years on Ramadan, I had put on a shawl like this [over her hair], as though I was covering my head, and then I would go out, just placing it on my head, symbolizing some sort of modesty. Suddenly, I began to play with the shawl. I wasn't ready for it at all. Not mentally and not . . . I really hadn't thought about it, hadn't planned it. I put the shawl on in this way [covering her forehead]; it pleased me. I said, "OK, I'm going to school."

Ibtesam thinks it is important to integrate her official appearance as a functionary in the village with her personal decision to wear a hijab; she had serious deliberations concerning her external appearance and explains the difficulty she faced:

I am an attractive woman; I love to look beautiful, but I also love to pray. Reading the Koran calms me a lot. For me to alter my dress and wear a gown and a scarf was really not easy. I used to go into the local council—everyone there is religious, it's a very traditional village. I was the only woman there in jeans, and I felt different. I had pressure at home, but that did not

influence me; I wanted it to come from me. It came from an inner conviction, inner persuasion, a sort of maturity.

I began to wear more modest clothing, but at home I would wear the latest fashion. I always considered the village, especially with regard to my appearance outside, but whoever came to my home would see another woman. After several years, you encounter difficulties—crises—the family is in distress; you decide, you begin to believe in the Almighty. I thought about it a lot, but I had difficulty in wearing a scarf . . . it angered me that others assessed me according to whether or not I wore a scarf. I put it on after I was content with it.

Ikram describes a process of negotiation with her family accompanied by continuous pressure from her brothers that left her no alternative:

My oldest brother, who is seventy, is very supportive. I really love him. He is a sheikh with a beard, and he is very religious. But he is not radical—religious but flexible. He was always asking me, “Well, Ikram, when?” I pray, I fast. When I was wealthy before, I bought my land and bought a house; I would let my hair out until here. I had such very long hair. He told me, “You’re laughing at the Almighty. When will you wear a head covering?” I began to cut my hair; I would curl it. I told him, “Listen, I pray, and I believe.” I was an adult; I was 41. My brother said to my mother, “Listen, I love Ikram and really respect her. She is married with children, and she has a role to fulfill. It’s enough. She is always shortening her hair, and she has begun to wear short sleeves.” My mother began to tell me, “You know, you are the entire universe for him, really.” One day, when Ramadan began—Ramadan was in the winter—I put on a shawl, and since, then I have been like this [with the hijab].

Like Ikram, Wardi also links her decision to wear traditional clothing with her age and the accepted norm:

In Islam, being religious means fasting at Ramadan and praying five times a day. When we pray, we put the hijab on our heads. When I finished, I would take it off, as it was always suffocating, and I was always . . . OK . . . I was religious, but I didn’t really go out like that . . . I was religious, but in my own style; but

sometimes you feel that that is missing. To be religious doesn't have any influence at all, but something's missing because I should also wear a hijab on my head. I am in a school where most of the women teachers, even the youngest, wear a hijab on their head. Nearly all the women of my age do that. If I am religious, and if I go to pray every day, it just remains to put a hijab on my head. Anyway, it doesn't influence anything.

Salima describes herself as someone who always kept the religious precepts but didn't intend to wear a head covering because she loved fashionable dress:

A head covering is part of our tradition and religious faith. I come from a religious home, yet I don't wear religious clothing. Our parents sent me to study [although I am a woman]. They keep the traditions, but their rules did not restrict us at all. We chose suitable dress for ourselves but within limitations. I won't wear a swimming costume, but they didn't restrict our dress. Even when I married, even then I kept to the rules; but even then they never . . . they didn't even say anything about having to wear modest dress. I prayed and kept the precepts, but I said, "I will never wear a scarf on my head or dress like that, because I love fashion."

I thought that at a certain stage I would dress like that. It is actually part of the routine traditions that a woman should wear a hijab. Everyone has her own story as to how she decided about this one day. And this happens at all stages of life.

Nasreen describes the difficulty she experienced in the transition to traditional dress:

I have always been a religious believer. I am very conservative; I come from a conservative, traditional home. I also think it's important what people say about me . . . I waited for the right moment. The transition was difficult for me, the change. Without traditional clothing, it was easier. There are not many difficulties, but if I go into the Ministry of Education in Tel Aviv [in modern dress], it's easier. The decision had to come from me. I was always a believer, only the clothing was missing. If you go into the Ministry of Education in traditional dress, what happens? They think that something



bad has happened. You need to begin to explain yourself, as if your dress had been natural before and now it's not really natural. You explain, and then they ask you again, "But why? What brought you to this decision?" A woman in traditional dress is considered religious, and this sometimes leads to interpretations that we don't hear, but they are there in the background.

### **My Husband Never Asked Me or His Family, but It Was There in the Background**

The stories that were told to the researchers indicate that the women's spouses related to the issue of their appearance in a different manner than did their families of origin. There were some spouses who did not mention the issue at all but supported their wives' decisions; there were those who did not support them and even expressed resistance when the women decided to adopt more traditional clothing. In contrast, the family of origin usually represented the community that expected the woman to cover herself in modest clothing when she was appointed to a public function. Thus the family's opinions represented environmental pressures. Those women who did not wear traditional dress resisted these environmental pressures.

The narratives of Nadra, Wardi, Ibtesam, and Nasreen describe how their deliberations affected their spouses.

I went through six difficult months in making the decision. My husband is not religious, so, of course, he did not support me. He told me, "Nadra, you're influenced by society and the environment; its social pressure." He didn't want to hear any more about it. My children were afraid that it might affect us and our ability to go out. (Nadra)

It took me a long time. There are some girls of 18 who wear hijab. It took me until the age of 49, and I feel that this was the appropriate age, after I had exposed my cleavage and worn a bikini, after I had done everything. I felt that now the right time had come. I asked my daughters, and they were very happy. My husband, until now, hadn't wanted it; I mean, he often jeered at me when I went out, "What do you need it for? What do you lack?" "Don't interfere," I told him. It's my life, not his. (Wardi)

My husband never asked me or his family, but it was there in the background. It came solely from me. I wanted his support, but he was passive. (Ibtessam)

My husband was in favor of his wife wearing traditional dress, but he knew how to respect my decision [not to wear a hijab] and supported me. He told me, "I never thought that it would be attractive on you. I never wanted it, but I accept you as you are, and it's really beautiful on you." (Nasreen)

Salima chose to alter her dress while her husband was travelling abroad, but the blessings she received from "the entire village" clearly reflected their expectations from her:

All the time I wanted to . . . but I didn't dare to. One day, my husband went away to Mecca, and I decided that it was time, because I didn't want it to look as though it was due to my husband's influence. I wanted to make the decision while I was alone. One day, I came to school; people went past me and didn't recognize me. They didn't say good morning, because they didn't believe it was me. It was simply from one day to the next; I hadn't prepared for it or talked about it at all. People in the school were surprised; they were astonished. I dressed like that on Monday; on Tuesday, the entire village came to the school to look at me. They didn't say they had come specially, but I felt it. They went past and looked and said congratulations. But they were all surprised, because I hadn't spoken about it at all.

Although Nasreen emphasized that the decision had been her own, it was clear her family had expected it and tested her and her actions: "My brother is the head of the Sharia courts in Israel; my brothers are lawyers. What people say is always important to me, and I don't want it to disturb my brothers. My brother encouraged me a lot; he supported me when I applied for the tender for my post. He never commented on my dress, but I can read him. When it [adoption of religious dress] came from me, it was warmly welcomed and greatly esteemed."

Ikram told us that, despite the resistance of her husband, pressure was exerted by her family of origin that led to the alteration of her dress, and she was still under pressure regarding the style of head covering:

My husband didn't want me to cover my head, but my family—my parents—are very religious. I go out with the largest possible shawl so that it will be possible [to cover up]; I don't close it. I told the girls [at work], "Why are you surprised? I am religious, so I wear a head covering." And I actually began to wear it like this. Until this moment, I have a sister who is extremely religious, who is not happy with this; there are a lot of people who are dissatisfied. I said, "I've already worn this for five years." She said, "You've waited too long; close it up." And at weddings and in the winter, I wear hats. I always used to wear hats; in our community, hats are considered more modern.

Wardi associated her decision to alter her dress with social norms and changed her appearance, despite her husband's objections: "When we think about going abroad, then we consider going to Saudi Arabia, to Mecca, the pilgrimage, Al-Haj. God willing, I shall go there. If I go there, then after I come back [I'll cover up], that's how it's meant to be, and it won't change. If I plan to do that sometime, then why shouldn't it be now?"

Suheir is in continual conflict with those around her regarding her appearance. She is determined not only to reject traditional dress for herself but also to confront the fact that she is assessed as a principal by her choice of dress:

During the academic year, I dress modestly, but I really am free. Sometimes I come with a really sportive appearance. When there are special events—especially religious events and on Ramadan—I try to be suitably attired. So I don't dress too extravagantly; more traditional, but also ordinary . . . because I define myself as very secular. And there are pressures. They have no right to pressurize me, but it is as though they transmit messages . . . But I'm not willing to manage the school; I mean, [to allow them to assess] the success of this school by whether I wear or don't wear [traditional dress]. I want them to understand that it's irrelevant. Don't look to see whether I'm wearing a head covering or not. Really look deeper to see what I am going to give and what I want to contribute to you . . . that [wearing a headdress] won't happen. I'm not willing to consider it.

### **It Gives Me Strength, Protects Me, Makes Me More Respected**

Arab women, who attain managerial positions, conduct a professional career that deviates from the norms of their close environment, so that appearing in traditional dress in the public sphere has significant meaning—reaching beyond their nuclear families to the realms of the hamulla and the village. These women are also involved in professional forums at different levels, and, for some of the time, they act in a multicultural sphere dominated by Jewish entities or in a sphere that is equally shared by Jews and Arabs. They have a strong awareness of the effect of their appearance in these arenas, and they each describe how the issue of dress is perceived in the different public spheres.

Salima provided a detailed explanation of the reasons that bring more and more Muslim women in Israel to undergo the transition to traditional dress:

In 1948, we were a closed society continually occupied with survival, how to exist. All the time our families were busy providing food for their children. The male was dominant, and he was responsible for providing everything for the home. Very slowly, this society changed; women began to study and to go out to work. Men and also women began to see that the Arab woman had lost her uniqueness. She began to look like the Jewish woman. And then she would no longer be a good housewife, might neglect her home and her children, and cut herself off from her heritage. At first, this was how the woman was perceived, as if she was breaking through the boundaries of this closed society. Although she was educated, she was considered no good at home; she was not good for her children. She had abandoned some of her femininity and part of her designated role. Despite being educated, she was not good at many things: she didn't know how to cook, she didn't know how to look after her home, and her house was not clean. That was how they began to harass the leading women, who had led a breakthrough. And then the woman, especially the Muslim woman, wanted to prove herself: "I'm good at everything, and my husband, my father, and the community members are all still important to me." We are concerned at how people look at us; I care when people talk about me in the community, and it concerns me. I also want to tell everyone that Salima is

not only a good principal but also a good mother and a good wife; she can look after her home, her house is clean and organized, [and] she cares about it. We care about succeeding in our careers.

So, if you'll excuse my expression, I am not a "Jewish" woman, because in our collective perception the Jewish woman is one who neglects her home; she only cares about her career. And although I want to be like her, I have to return and convince my society, "No, I am an educated woman, but I am not a Jewish woman. I can also look after my home, after my children, and also conduct a successful beneficial career." It's part of the equilibrium; it's an external balance that we can also see.

Wardi, whose transition to traditional dress seemed the natural thing to do, saw her new appearance as something normal for her:

Wherever I go in Israel or in the world, I see people who are the same. Look, I don't know how it happened. It also brings more respect for the adult woman. I mean my daughters dress more exposed; they don't care, and I also didn't care when I was their age. I dressed as they do. But at my age, that uncovered look is no longer accepted. It's not accepted and not considered honorable. I want to respect my status and to respect my religion, so I do it [wear traditional dress]. But it doesn't influence me at all. This week I wanted to go to the beach with my husband; we went there and swam in the sea as usual.

In contrast, Suheir thinks traditional clothing is very restrictive:

I'm not willing to believe that it's not restrictive . . . I'm not even willing to invest energy and thought in this issue, but it does irritate me . . . We live in a very belligerent and dangerous world, so it's as though we want to tie ourselves to something more spiritual. But don't think that whoever wears it also prays. Most of them don't pray. It's just as though the society wants it.

I don't like it, simply don't like it. It really makes me mad to see it. It's a blow, a fad in our society. I feel that it's a fad that's becoming bad, and it's oh, so strong. A lot of girls and women, whom you see suddenly overnight with head coverings. And I

don't believe that it's not restrictive, that I can do everything, even with a scarf on. I'm not willing to believe it.

Salima indicates that, although she needs to integrate within the Israeli sphere, she also wants to maintain her own identity:

I also try to understand why for myself. But at the time that you decide, you believe it's because of the religion, because of our heritage. That explanation doesn't satisfy me. I think that there are several other explanations that commit us when we dress like that, deciding to look like that.

It depends, among other things on identity. You want to look like everyone else, to speak like everyone else. If you go to the university, you want to be part of the Israeli experience. But nevertheless, you also want to maintain your uniqueness, your identity; and that's a part of the evolution of your identity that is still not completely formed.

Ibtisam stresses the spiritual and social contributions of her appearance: "Today I read, listen to sermons; I know what I want from myself. I am, of course, enriching myself. I invest in it; sometimes we travel to Jordan and also to Egypt in order to buy beautiful things . . . Today I feel that I am part of the community, not separate from it. It gives me strength, protects me, makes me more respected, more meaningful, more authoritative; and it only adds without subtracting anything."

Suheir voiced her protest against the "celebration" that accompanies the change in women's dress: "When a principal has secular teachers and suddenly, without preparation, she arrives dressed in hijab—I don't know whether it is correct or not—but, primarily, it really bothers me. I wouldn't say that I don't respect it, but personally it bothers me. I feel as if it is restrictive. I'm not sure that the women I see like that have religious conviction. What bothers me is that they immediately say, 'Congratulations!' as though you should consider it a celebration; it's a sort of festival."

### Salima, Is That Really You?

As was mentioned earlier, Arab women employed in managerial functions are exposed at different levels to the Jewish environment. Most of them have a first or second academic degree from one of Israel's universities or from the Arab education college. Some are school principals, who have studied managerial courses provided by the Ministry of Education and have regular contact with different ministry officials, participating in trans-sector regional forums for school principals and in continuous discourse with their Jewish colleagues. Others may be directors of social welfare offices, who are in constant professional contact with the regional offices of the Ministry of Welfare; they participate in ministry courses and receive ministry mentoring and supervision regarding various projects. Those who have altered their dress are very aware of the effect this has in these settings, and note the reactions from their Jewish colleagues—usually from the women—to this change.

Wardi associates the reactions to her altered appearance with the war on the Hamas and Hezbollah:

With those Jewish women who knew me and now meet me [in traditional dress], it now seems different. Many of the women that I knew come to see me and say, "What happened to you, Wardi?," or "Why?," as if I had gone mad, or something had happened to me. "Why did you do that to yourself?," "What do you lack?," and "Oh, how attractive you used to be." I think that this is influenced by a political opinion more than a social opinion. If we weren't at war with the Hamas and all sorts of entities in the West Bank, it wouldn't have such an effect on the Jewish society. But each of us that dresses like this, it's as though we were connected with the radical Hamas or the Hezbollah who say, "Death to the Jews."

Salima describes reactions of surprise concerning the change in her appearance: "The real surprise was at the teacher education college. When I arrived there, they said, 'Salima, is that really you? How strange that you did this. We can't believe it. Where is your hair; where is your hairdo?,' and 'Why?' The coordinator of the new principals' program said, 'You have to

explain this to me. Particularly you? I can't believe it.' I said, 'The right time has come.'"

Ibtesam, however, notes that there was no change in the consideration toward her.

I gave a short explanation at the beginning, and they forgot about it. I wasn't concerned that their consideration would change. The truth is that Jewish society is not like Europe; they have become used to our appearance and presence, and I don't think their consideration of me changed. Actually, it sometimes challenges people with a paradox: "She speaks Hebrew better than the Jews. How can she be religious?" And then you have to explain. Today, I have an inner conviction; I am a respected welfare office director, and I have a presence of my own. My opinion is important for others; people consult with me, and my dress is simply a part of this . . . It associates me with my natural group . . . When I go out with this appearance, I am strengthened and protected.

Wardi thinks it is important to describe her Israeli identity: "We are Israelis. We live in this state. Believe me, if they would allow me to leave and go to any Arab country, apart from a week's tour—no more than a week—we wouldn't leave this place. For us, this place here is where our roots are. We want to be here, and I don't take you into my home as a Jew but as a friend."

One of the most sensitive dilemmas some of the women principals described was the need to distinguish their identity as Muslim women yet the fear that they would be perceived as associated with an image of the enemy—"the Palestinian terrorist"—an image empowered over the years by Israeli communications media. It is, therefore, not simply incidental that they emphasized and tried to persuade us that they had not changed as a result of the alteration in their outward appearance.

The story of Wardi illustrates, more than anything else, her understanding that she could be seen as a radical by the Jews:

It was 12 or 13 years ago. I was on a course, and I slept in the same room with Hanna, a Jewish colleague, in a hotel in Tel Aviv. Hanna told me that she had to go out to a friend of hers; they were meeting in a restaurant. At 11 at night, Hanna knocked on the door. I opened it, and she came in with another



woman. We were on the eighth floor; she had her girlfriend with her. Her friend came in and sat down. She looked at me like that, and I was in my nightgown. [I couldn't understand:] *What's bothering you? Why was she looking at me like that? What had I done?* She comes at 11 o'clock at night to scrutinize me in my room. After she left, Hanna said to me, "Wardi, I have to tell you something. I have to share something with you. I was in the restaurant with several friends, and I said, Wardi will go mad if I come back late. She'll have to get up and open the door; she might even be sleeping already. So they asked me, 'Who's Wardi?' I said, 'The woman who is sleeping in my room with me.' They said, 'Are you crazy? Sleeping with an Arab woman in your room? How can you close your door if there's an Arab woman sleeping in your room?' They went mad; they didn't know what to do. That woman said, 'I have to come with you to your room to see how you sleep in the same room with her.'" I wasn't dressed, and I wasn't religious; I was in a laced nightdress.

### **Suddenly You Begin to Wonder What Is Unique about You**

One other aspect of traditional dress is the emphasis on Muslim identity. But it is no less important to show that "I am an educated Muslim woman." This declaration attempts to interrupt any automatic interpretation of traditional dress as a radical message, and instead assigns a new type of ethnic, educated identity to the woman.

Salima expresses this most succinctly:

It's part of our identity to look as if we are Muslim women and to declare this. However, we have a problem with our identity, especially for educated women, because we are in Israel. I'm talking about Israel, but it occurs generally in any such place. Even in Arab countries I see many women with scarves. In Israel, we are a minority that is beginning to develop. We begin to look like everyone, and suddenly you begin to wonder what is unique about you. How will they recognize that you are a Muslim woman? And I am proud of myself, and I want people to see that I am an educated Muslim woman.

Nevertheless, she criticizes exaggerated traditional dress: “A lot of young women with scarves study with my daughter in the Technion [university]. They don’t dress like me; what they wear is called a *Jilbab* [long gown with scarf]. It’s traditional religious clothing, and I am amazed that such a young woman relinquishes her jeans and modern appearance and chooses to dress like that. She is an educated woman, studying medicine or studying engineering, and she chooses this; they don’t force her. She chooses to dress like this.”

Suheir is really annoyed by traditional dress:

It really angers me. I try to convince myself that this is not my job to get angry, and I have no right to do so. So I keep it to myself, but I try to respect and understand it as much as I can. I don’t invest any time or energy to think about it. But internally and personally, it irritates me. I have a Christian teacher, to whom I always say, “Thank God that you are a Christian.” She says to me, “I’m afraid that one day, you’ll appear like that.” I reply, “Don’t even think about it.” I really don’t want to think about it.

### **I Need to Maintain My Links with My Community**

Suheir describes her life as a secular single woman in a traditional society and the price she pays for her modern lifestyle and appearance:

I’m advancing, but I continually look to both sides, and although I know where I am going, I know on every side what price I pay. I’ve never had a problem with the price. And I don’t know if it’s even correct to say that it’s a price that I pay. It’s a lifestyle that I choose. Having developed my single status, it’s very difficult [to change], and even if I want to go back and to think, it’s difficult for me. I won’t allow anyone to intervene in my life. I even resist them with regard to simple things. I can’t imagine being with someone, and I had a lot of options, but I simply couldn’t, can’t. I want to go home when I want, to get into my car and drive where I want when I want, not to look at my watch to see whether it’s late or not. I believe that nighttime is not for sleeping, but for enjoying oneself, for seeing the stars,

for being outside, for travelling, for going to the beach—not for sleeping. I don't want someone to tell me, "That's enough. Come on, let's go to sleep." I fill my hours as I want.

Contrastingly, Salima feels she profits from being a principal in traditional dress:

It allows me to behave more freely. For example, when you sit together with a man, our community is traditional, and it has many restrictions. When you sit with a man, you feel as if you are protected; your confidence increases, and you feel that, when people speak to you, they relate to you as a human being and listen to your voice and your thoughts and don't look at you [solely] as a woman and look at your cleavage. Then I feel as if I am talking as one person to another. I love being a woman. I won't surrender my femininity, and I am proud of it; but when I speak as the principal, I want people to relate to me as a professional and not as they once used to: "You look young, pretty . . . your hair!" It offends me; it really insults me. What am I, a model? I'm a professional. When you come to the school, you have to talk professionally without all these preambles. So they speak to me professionally, respectfully. They are afraid to talk about irrelevant matters. I want them to relate to me in my workplace as a professional, not as a woman.

She also emphasized her affiliation to her society by dressing traditionally: "It's as if I declare that I have remained traditional although I have advanced, and it is also connected to my chosen path. I don't want to detach myself from my society, because I am a minority, and my affiliation is important to me. I want to belong to a particular group. I need to maintain my links with my community."

Salima also gave another "feminist" explanation for her traditional dress:

Feminism is part of my identity. How you look is also part of your identity. I think that everything has its reasons—either declared or covert—that people don't always dare to talk about, but they exist, and it's good to think and talk about them and research them. There are things for which we don't have the

answers, or for which we don't dare to give the true and correct answer. But there are many more reasons that I myself think may exist, but we have not discovered them or thought about them enough. Sometimes we think that things are obvious, and that's not right. Everything has its reason. There's absolutely no simple coincidence. Although a religious woman won't say that things are not coincidental, I believe that there is a reason for everything. I believe that this is feminist. I want a man to listen to me, to listen to my voice and my thoughts and not to look at me as a woman; and I really believe in this, and I see it in practice.

Suheir criticizes the instructors in her school, who, in her opinion, cannot fulfill their role in traditional dress: "The Karev program is conducted in the school. I have a story hour. I believe that I need a secular instructor, good looking and pleasant, who knows how to run and sit on the floor with the children. Suddenly, they brought me a new instructor. When I saw her, I wanted to bury myself, not only religious—not even with trousers—but with a religious gown. And I asked myself, *how can she transmit the story hour like that?*"

To summarize, the processes the women managers had undergone in the transition to traditional dress were clarified from their narratives, including the considerations of their spouses to this change; the pressure exerted by their families and their environment for conformity; and the reactions of their Jewish colleagues to their traditional dress, especially their head covering. The interviewees' redefinition of their Muslim identity was also discussed. Two of the women continually voiced their dissent and clarified that they had chosen to remain in secular dress, and in their texts, it is also possible to discern, between the lines, that they are subject to social pressure on this issue.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focused on the meaning of the transition to traditional dress by Muslim women managers in the education and welfare systems in Israel. The findings do indeed demonstrate that, for those Muslim women who were appointed to

management positions, the decision to alter their dress seemed to be a very personal decision. Nevertheless, the change was not simply incidental, and sociocultural messages played a decisive part in these decisions.

Many Israelis tend to consider the Israeli-Muslim woman's transition to traditional dress to be a type of religious radicalization that evokes immediate connotations to radical Islam. This type of clothing cannot be ignored, and it stands out in the public sphere. Our findings do not support this prevalent stereotyping (Jamal, 2005), and instead indicate a range of considerations, mainly cultural, which these women managers weigh when deciding on this step.

The narratives show that the women associated their traditional dress with their management roles in various ways. Their traditional dress might begin either before or after their appointment; however, most of them associated it directly with their status in the community.

Each of these women found a slightly different solution to head-covering, a solution that was expressed in greater or lesser severity of religious appearance. Two of the women wore secular dress and did not feel that they had to alter their style of dress and lifestyle, as Samira explained: *"I believe, and yet I am not religious . . . If I did wear such apparel, then the consideration [toward me] would change, but I will not wear anything like it."* She tried to distance herself from any form of head covering with the expression "like that."

The women's narratives described the change in attire as stemming from very personal reasons that differed from one woman to the other: a serious crisis that led to reading the Koran and choosing religion as a spiritual response; placing a shawl over the head during Ramadan; the decision to believe in God following difficulties and distress; pressures from the family of origin in contrast to the secularity of her spouse; a desire to dress like most other adult women; accepting that this should be the way to dress in contrast to a previous fashionable trend, as Nasreen indicated: *"I was always a believer, only the clothing was missing."* But, in fact, most of the women managers declared from the start that they had always been religious.

It seems that Jewish reactions to the women's change of dress stem largely from misunderstanding, erroneous perceptions, and categorization based on external appearance. In Jewish society, there is almost complete dichotomy between religious and secular Jews, while the cultural milieu of the interviewed women is dominated by a traditional culture, and the hijab is just one of its external expressions. Why, then, is such strong social pressure exerted on women principals in this society to wear a headdress?

These educated women's growing consciousness of Israeli culture exposes them to new lifestyles and philosophies that influence their personal self-definition, evoking deliberations and decisions that affect their relations with their culture of origin and help them to reposition themselves in Palestinian Arab society in Israel (Erdreich, 2006). It seems that Muslim women undergo a similar process in Canada (Khan, 2009).

Their altered appearance is considered, in the Jewish society, as a radical step, as if the transition to traditional dress is an expression of religious and even political extremism, meaning resistance to the Jewish state. As Ibtesam put it: *"Each of us that dresses like this, it's as though we were connected with the radical Hamas or the Hezbollah who say, 'Death to the Jews.'"*

Wardi's Jewish colleague's account of her friend's remarks reflected these stereotypes: *"What, are you crazy? Sleeping with an Arab woman in your room? How can you close your door if there's an Arab woman sleeping in your room?"* One Jewish colleague tried to distinguish Israeli from Muslim identity as though they contradicted one another: *"[She] speaks Hebrew better than the Jews. How can she be religious?"* (Ibtesam).

It is clear that underlying these remarks is the Jewish fear of "Palestinization" of Israeli's Arab population (Manna et al., 2010), a fear engendering anxiety and a sense of existential threat. There is an unresolved tension between the traditional dress of the interviewees and their Israeli identity, since Jewish society considers this appearance to define them as "other." Wardi's words, however, clearly express her affiliation: *"We are Israelis . . . We live in this state . . . We want to be here."*

According to Droogsma (2007), since the events of September 2001, the appearance of Muslim women in the United States with covered heads generates suspicion and thorough examination, a form of Islamophobia. An ongoing debate relates to the outward signs of Islam, such as the head covering (Bhimji, 2009; Gole, 2003; Saar, 2006) indicating that the scarf has become a symbol of the "other," of resistance to integration and an example of the failure of multiculturalism (Williamson & Khiabany, 2010). On the other hand, there are clear expressions of collective affiliation to the broader Muslim community due to the discrimination experienced by religious Muslim respondents in Western societies (Jamal, 2005).

Perversely, it is at this point that the similarity between the aforementioned studies and the present research disappears. Our interviewees indicated that Jewish colleagues only reacted with surprise on the initial contact after the change in the Muslim women's dress and that subsequently they tended to ignore the issue and to flow with the intercultural relationship: *"I gave a short explanation at the beginning, and they forgot about it . . . The truth is that Jewish society is not like Europe. They have become used to our appearance and presence. I don't think their consideration of me changed"* (Ibtisam). This quotation reflects the Israeli component of the interviewees' identity, which was also voiced by other interviewees.

Despite several similar characteristics found in the different studies investigating Muslim women in the Western world (Bhimji, 2009; Droogsma, 2007; Gole, 2003; Sadeghi, 2008; Tarlo, 2007), the population studied in the present research is exceptional in substance, since this is a native, not immigrant, population. Palestinian presence is natural in the Jewish sphere, since they are indigenous minority citizens who have lived in the region for generations. Thus interaction of Palestinian citizens of Israel with the majority Jewish population is also to some extent different from the interaction of Muslim immigrants with local populations described in Western countries. We have, therefore, tried to indicate the unique considerations of the women interviewees' concerning their adoption of traditional dress.

Alongside the personal reasons that led the women leaders to alter an external component of their identity by the transition to traditional dress, there was an obvious sociocultural element that appeared throughout the interviews. These women were awarded their appointments mostly as a result of struggles, and their right to these appointments was often challenged, since the appearance of Muslim women in the public sphere contradicts the traditional female role, restricted to the boundaries of the home (Abu-Baker, 2003; Abu-Aska-Daoud, 2002; Shukri, 1999).

The cultural, social, and political context of Middle Eastern societies includes a special lifestyle, with unique family relations and professional career development stemming from particular challenges to women that shape their coping strategies (Saar, 2006). Listening to the narratives of the women managers revealed that most of them had undergone a continuous process of deliberations, aware that their community expected and anticipated an alteration in their dress. There were also expressions of resistance to these expectations: *"I'm not willing to manage the school; I mean, [assessing] the success of this school by whether I wear or don't wear it [traditional dress]"* (Suheir).

Complying with the expectations, however, can also be rewarding: *"One day, I came to school . . . It was simply from one day to the next . . . People in the school were surprised; they were astonished . . . On Tuesday, the entire village came to the school to look at me . . . They went past and looked and said, 'Congratulations'"* (Salima).

*"Today I feel that I am part of the community and not separate from it. It gives me strength, protects me, makes me more respected, more meaningful, more authoritative, and it only adds without subtracting anything"* (Ibtesam).

The choice of head covering style is also a significant point for those women who adopt traditional clothing. This issue has been widely discussed in Western studies (Bhimji, 2009; Gole, 2003; Khan, 2009; Mahmood, 2005; Tarlo, 2007; Williamson & Khiabany, 2010). But in contrast to the collective meaning found by Western researchers, who associated the wearing of the hijab with fashion and cosmopolitanism, these Muslim



women in Israel saw the hijab as something partially fashionable but stressed that wearing the hijab was also a personal and social statement. Those whose head covering is less severe describe the style of draping in detail, while all the women who wore traditional dress indicated that, in the past, they had taken care to be fashionable and now tried to blend traditional and fashionable elements in their appearance. When their dress did not strictly conform to traditional precepts, they felt it necessary to reinforce their appearance with words of explanation, providing greater meaning to their actions: *"I go out with the largest possible shawl, so that it will be possible [to cover up]; I don't close it. I told the girls at work, 'Why are you surprised? I am religious. I wear a head covering'"* (Ikram).

It is concluded that the religious identities of the Muslim women managers and their transition to traditional dress and head coverings are meaningful in all their life circles: personal, sociocultural, and professional.

Their ability to fulfill their role as managers and to implement far-reaching changes needs the support of staff, community, and family. The respect and complete acceptance they acquire in the community is reinforced by their traditional dress, which is seen as their acceptance of cultural norms, and this facilitates community support.

The women's connections to their communities through their traditional appearance enable them to advance the organizations they lead. In this way, they are able to introduce progressive educational and social innovations and to constitute models for imitation by young women, especially educated young women, in their communities. Beyond their concern for the advancement of the younger generation, they also constitute models for more egalitarian consideration of women and girls, since they enjoy broad consensus and admiration in the community.

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