

Cultural Distance From the Internal Other: Education and Relations With the Other as Discussed in Life Stories

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Abstract: Life stories make it possible to trace the manner in which identity construction takes place, especially amongst members of multicultural and multiethnic societies. The life stories of six women belonging to three different groups, all residents of the Be'er Sheva area in Israel, were analyzed by applying and extending BAR-ON's (2005) theory of identity construction which focuses upon the relations with the "internal other" and the "external other." Specifically, we investigated the intersection between education and relations with others as factors shaping identity during the women's various life courses. Results suggest that education serves as a mapping tool which places the "self" and the "other" as either close or distant in terms of identity construction. Moreover, findings point to the existence of a "cultural distance from the internal others" (CDIO) as shaped by educational aspirations and achievements. Building upon BAR-ON's theory and the concept of CDIO, psychosocial applications and future directions for research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

According to KAINAN, ROZENBERG and MUNK (2006), the study of life stories provides an opportunity to discover how the narrator reports aspects of his/her life which s/he considers important, and how a life story is constructed as a result of the intersection between personal and societal factors. As such, life stories provide a window for understanding the culture in which they take place (KAINAN, 2002). Of major interest among life stories are narratives of identity construction (McADAMS, 2001; SCHIFF & NOY, 2006), especially those of members of multicultural societies. Narratives of identity construction can be defined as "a version of life given at a particular moment as expressing the given story as consistent, and sequencing experience as lived" (ROBERTS, 2004, p.270). DePEUTER (1998) suggests that through relations with others, the narrating self is capable of defining itself and its relations with others. In this article we suggest that it is possible to see narrative identity as an interaction between the stable and the changing, and to understand identity as a *process* that is constantly under re-construction: constantly changing but at the same time resulting in a sense of sameness (BAMBERG & GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2008). [1]

Another strand of research into life stories which has gained prominence deals with the ways education, and especially higher education, shape an individual's life course and his/her narratives (ABU-RABIA-QUEDER & WEINER-LEVY, 2008). In this article, we examine the narratives of three pairs of women who belong to three distinct social groups within multicultural Israeli society. While their life courses have placed them in geographical proximity, their divergent educational experiences separate them considerably, specifically at the intersection of identity construction through interaction with others. An investigation of their narratives can further our understanding of the ways life stories are constructed within the context of multicultural societies. Within such societies, members both individually and collectively struggle with the issues of identity. The question is whether education can be seen as disrupting or benefiting the existence of integrated identities (BANKS, 2008). By analyzing women's educational life stories, we explore how they contribute to the women's constructions of perception of "self" and "other." Furthermore, we examine how different education stories create closeness or distance from members of different social groups. [2]

The article is organized as follows: First, processes of identity construction and life narratives and how they are related to the educational arena are discussed, followed by a presentation of BAR-ON's theory of Jewish-Israeli construction which serves as the benchmark for the current study. Second, we describe the socio-demographic makeup of the three groups of women (Mizrahi Jews, Former Soviet Union (FSU) Jews and Bedouin women) and we discuss the city of Be'er Sheva and its surroundings. Third, the research setting, the sampling procedure of participants and the interview schedule are explained. The narrative of each participant is then analyzed, following the stages of identity construction as discussed by BAR-ON (2005). Finally, the discussion section points to the similarities and differences noted in the women's life stories, indicating the need

to expand Bar-ON's theory to include the concept of "cultural distance from the internal other" and suggests future avenues of research based upon these conceptualizations. [3]

2. Identity Construction and Education

In order to understand social identity in a multicultural society, the relationships between groups must be addressed (TAJFEL & TURNER, 1986). Identity is perceived as a means by which people connect to the real or to the imagined, to the concrete and to the symbolic, as they perceive their personal and social worlds (BHABHA, 1990). The construction of identity is a dynamic process that develops and changes over the life course of the individual, and depends upon one's group membership (TAJFEL, 1981). This approach emphasizes the ongoing dialogue between intrapersonal (psychological) and interpersonal (social and cultural) components in the construction and understanding of identity (SARUP, 1996). In the Jewish-Israeli case, BAR-ON (2005) pointed out that any attempt to understand Jewish-Israeli identity requires the investigation of this process of identity *vis-à-vis* "the other." [4]

BAR-ON (2005) suggested that initially, Jewish-Israeli identity was constructed by a small and homogeneous Ashkenazi Jewish elite (Jews who originated from Europe and especially Eastern Europe and immigrated to Israel in the first half of the twentieth century), operating within unique historical and political circumstances. This identity was created by contrasting several unique "others," categorized as either "internal others" (the Mizrahi Jews who came from the Middle East or North Africa, orthodox religious Jews and Holocaust survivors) or "external others" (Muslim Arabs and the Nazis). This differentiation between the "external" and "internal others" is based on previous research on Israeli society, such as studies by HOROWITZ and LISSAK (1989) among many others. These studies manifested the fact that despite being small in terrain and number of inhabitants, due to its diversity of populations and cultures, Jewish Israeli society is marked by cultural, religious, economic, political and social scissions. Thus, while acknowledging others as Jews and/or Israelis, each group maintains the variants of its unique Jewish and/or Israeli identity and modes of conduct and consequentially, multiple "internal" and "external others" co-exist. This state of affairs led BAR-ON (2005) to suggest the existence of the "internal other" as compared to the "external other." According to him, the formation or first stage of constructing Jewish-Israeli identity was characterized by a *monolithic* view of oneself and the different "others." A monolithic view means that a dichotomy was present in terms of the perceptions of the collective self as totally good while the "other" was perceived as totally bad. During this monolithic stage, the Arab and Palestinian others were perceived as a real danger to the existence of the Jewish-Israeli collective and were dehumanized (ROUHANA & BAR-TAL, 1998). The internal (Jewish) "others" were stigmatized, forced to neglect their culture and accept the new Israeli ethos and culture (ALMOG, 1997). They were also treated as inferior in comparison to the Ashkenazi Jewish hegemony (SHENHAV, 2006). With time, as the elite group lost its overpowering ability to control the development of the collective, a *disintegration* of the monolithic construction took

place, leading to a second stage, characterized by a more complex perception of both internal (same culture, religion etc.) and external "others." As a result, the media as well as political life became more pluralized. This in turn led to the incorporation of a second generation of Mizrahi Jews and a first generation of FSU (Former Soviet Union) immigrants in all spheres of Jewish-Israeli culture and society (YUCHTMAN-YAAR & SHAVIT, 2003). In relation to the external "other," some Jewish-Israelis continued to perceive the Arab Palestinians as a danger, while others came to view them as potential partners. [5]

According to BAR-ON (2005), the second Intifada¹ formed the neo-monolithic construction of identity, leading to a more simplified and dichotomous perception of the Palestinian as totally bad. At the same time, this phase was marked by incoherence, similar to that found in the stage of disintegration. It was characterized by the perception of others as neither good nor bad but rather as more complex. BAR-ON also postulated that this disintegration holds the possibility for the emergence of the next stage, that of *dialogue*, both with the internal and the external "others," leading to mutual acceptance and tolerance. However, this was perceived by BAR-ON as a future possibility and does not represent the current position of Jewish-Israeli society. [6]

While describing Jewish-Israeli identity as dynamic in nature and by considering both the "internal other" and the "external other," BAR-ON and his colleagues (BAR-ON, 2005; LITVAK-HIRSCH, BAR-ON & CHAITIN, 2007) focused their efforts on understanding the role of the *external* others, more specifically, the Palestinian and the German others. But they did not assess the role of the various *internal* others in shaping this identity. The aim of this study is to elaborate his theory by focusing on two groups of women: the first belong to two of the groups formerly considered as playing a major role as "internal others" within Jewish-Israeli identity processes, namely, second generation Mizrahi Jews and first generation FSU Jews. The second group includes Arab Bedouin women who belong to a local group from the region of Be'er Sheva and play a central role as "external others." [7]

Using the theoretical platform suggested by BAR-ON (2005), we will examine the life stories of each of these women and its impact on the perception of the "others," noting the stages of identity construction that emerge. Attention is given to the women's life stories through the prism of their educational experiences, as it is assumed that these experiences can reveal divergence and semblance existing in the case of those considered as "others," their identities, and how education creates closeness or remoteness within and between groups living in geographical proximity. [8]

In the following section, several main aspects of these three populations are discussed. We also relate to the city of Be'er Sheva, considering that

1 Also known as the *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, the second Palestinian uprising was a period of intensified Palestinian-Israeli violence, which began in late September 2000 and ended in 2005. The death toll, including the military and civilian population, is estimated to be about 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis, as well as 64 foreigners.

understanding life stories of members of specific groups requires their placement within the larger socio-cultural surroundings (KAINAN et al., 2006). ROSENTHAL (1997) noted that the life histories of individuals are deeply influenced and embedded within larger socio-cultural environments. Such attention is important specifically when the life stories share a common denominator, namely, groups living in close proximity to each other, yet having quite different ways of life and status in society. Moreover, in understanding life stories of individuals from different groups it is important to be aware of the fact that individuals are influenced not only by their own experiences in life but also by their families and by the histories of their collectives (ROSENTHAL, 1997). As SINGER (2004, p.444) wrote:

"Narratives are inevitably created to meet the demands of social roles and historical-cultural niches; they force us to ask about their audience and how their construction seeks to answer certain problems raised by the various subgroups to which we belong." [9]

Therefore in exploring the educational stories of members from different groups, one should consider the history of the groups in their current and past environments. [10]

3. Mizrahi, FSU and the Bedouin Groups Within Israeli Culture and Society

Comprising a total of 60% of Israel's population, Mizrahi and FSU immigrants and their progenies (BEN-RAFAEL, 2007) have attracted considerable research attention regarding the ways their presence has helped to shape the changing facets of Israeli culture and society both at national and local levels (BEN-RAFAEL, 2007; FIALKOVA & YELENEVESKAYA, 2011; LESHEM & LISSAK, 1998; SMOOHA, 2008). [11]

First generation Mizrahi Jews arrived during the 1950s from North Africa and the Middle Eastern countries bringing with them their unique identity and customs. On arrival, they encountered a "melting pot" immigration policy which aggressively demanded of them to adopt the Ashkenazi hegemonic ways, based mainly upon Eastern European cultural practices. According to SMOOHA (2008) this policy was to scar many of them, and has been considered a failure in terms of their assimilation. SMOOHA notes that this was not the case for FSU immigrants who arrived during the 1990s, and that the two groups also differed with regard to available resources. [12]

While Mizrahi Jewish families were large, usually uneducated and in most cases poor, FSU families were small (usually one or two children) and, although in most cases they lacked material resources, "their high human capital [in terms of educational achievements] compensated for the absence of material capital" (p.14). In addition, while during the 1950s Israel struggled with extreme economic hardships, since the 1990s it has been considered a "highly developed country" (p.12) thus enabling Israeli authorities to grant considerable financial aid to FSU

immigrants who were free to use this aid according to their needs and wishes, among other things for higher education which was offered, gratis to the immigrants (LESHEM & LISSAK, 1998). Finally, first generation Mizrahi Jewish immigrants were "placed in the periphery of the country and in the inner cities" (SMOOHA, 2008, p.8) and as such, were directed to lower level educational institutions. While government policies attempted to bring FSU immigrants to settle in peripheral towns, the majority of them converged on the larger Israeli cities, with only a relatively small number of them living on the periphery for lower housing and living costs (FIALKOVA & YELENEVESKAYA, 2011). It has been noted that "the ascendancy of Mizrahi political strength opened the way for FSU's to express their own particular ethno-cultural orientation" (BEN-RAFAEL, 2007, p.81). Conjointly, members of these two groups engage in unique occupations and provide the Jewish-Israeli dominant culture with differing interpretations of what it is to be an Israeli and a Jew (BEN-RAFAEL, 2007). As a whole, Mizrahi and FSU Jews are considered to be groups that have successfully integrated within Jewish-Israeli society (YUCHTMAN-YAAR & SHAVIT, 2003), but women belonging to these two groups face unique and different challenges. Research suggests that second-generation Mizrahi women, similar to their mothers, are still seen as "inarticulate, vulgar, and oversexed" and are perceived as "the traditional backward other" (NAGAR-RON & MOTZAFI-HALLAR, 2011, p.654). Concerning FSU women, REMENNICK has noted that the attitude of native Israelis and especially those of non-European origin towards FSU women is marked by "entrenched sexism" (1999, p.455). [13]

With respect to the Bedouin, following the 1948 War of Independence only a small number of the population remained under Israeli rule, and while some still retain their traditional nomadic ways of life, others were resettled in seven towns established by the Israeli government (ABU-RABIA-QUEDER, 2008). As a result of the move from nomadic life to town life, considerable changes took place in the spheres of economy and education (ABU-RABIA, 2001). For example, by losing their traditional income from raising sheep and goats with no satisfactory substitute, the Bedouin population at present is characterized by low income levels and high levels of unemployment while the towns in which they reside provide fewer services to their residents compared to Jewish settlements. The educational level is relatively low (ABU-SAAD, 2001). However, Bedouin university students occupy a unique position in their communities, as they have managed to overcome the difficulties related to their group's marginal status within Israeli society (KAINAN et al., 2006). Research suggests that the ability of Bedouin students to succeed in the Israeli higher education system, marked by its Western values, would not have been possible unless support was given by family members, and especially fathers, who have encouraged their children to acquire higher education (KAINAN et al., 2006). [14]

This was even more prevalent in the case of Bedouin women students. Only during the late 1980s did the first Bedouin women gain access to the Israeli higher education system and were able for the first time to get acquainted with Jews "on an equal footing ... as separate educational systems keep Arabs and Jews apart during their studies in primary and secondary school" (ABU-RABIA-

QUEDER, 2008, p.385). Researchers disagree with regard to the ways higher education is perceived by Bedouin students. While some point out that male Bedouin students aim only to better their economic and social positions through higher education (KAINAN et al., 2006), according to other researchers female Bedouin students have recognized that education has enabled them not only to gain power and financial independence (PESSATE-SCHUBERT, 2003), but has also led to considerable changes in their personal and social identities, as education "transformed them into enlightened women" (ABU-RABIA-QUEDER, 2008, p.394). Nevertheless, educated Bedouin women sometimes pay high personal and social prices as they are exposed to and influenced by two very different cultures: their own culture, from which they come and to which they return to after their studies and Jewish Israeli culture to which they are exposed to during their studies. These two cultures are different not just in their norms and customs, but also in power differences within the Israeli society (ABU-RABIA, 2001; ABU-RABIA-QUEDER & WEINER-LEVY, 2008). [15]

4. Be'er Sheva: Geographic and Demographic Aspects

This locality was chosen in the research for its unique demographic make-up and the dramatic changes it has undergone. There are 558,500 inhabitants in the Be'er Sheva district or "Metropolis" (GRADOS, 2008), located in the Negev (the southern region of Israel) of which 372,600 are Jewish and 154,900 are Arabs, the majority of them Bedouin Muslims. The Bedouin population resides mainly in small towns and villages within the district, while Jews live mainly in the city of Be'er Sheva and in a few settlements around it ([THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS, ISRAEL, 2011](#)). The city of Be'er Sheva, the seventh largest city in Israel with 186,100 inhabitants, is marked by a weak socio-economic status (THE CENTRAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS, ISRAEL, 2011) and considered a peripheral city as it is geographically remote from Israel's main central cities. [16]

Up to the 1990s, the majority of the city's residents were of Mizrahi origin, and had arrived in Be'er Sheva shortly after their immigration to Israel in the 1950s (DAHAN, 2011). Until the 1970s, this group was quite homogenous in terms of education, income and occupation and belonged to the lower strata of Jewish-Israelis. Since then a considerable number of members of this group attained middle class status, most notably second generation Mizrahi Jews, with members of this cohort holding the majority of positions in the public and local authorities in the Negev (GRADOS, 2008). Despite the upward mobility of some of its members, feelings of neglect, ongoing bitterness and suspicion still dominate the way the residents relate to the hegemonic group, entrenched as they are in what is considered historical discrimination (DAHAN, 2011). This is due to the fact that historically the city was headed only by Ashkenazi mayors who were perceived to be treating the Mizrahi residents as inferior. According to DAHAN, the Ashkenazi group comprises between 15%-18% of the total population of Be'er Sheva and most of them live in the more prosperous neighborhoods of the city and its surroundings. They hold major positions in the economic, political, civil and cultural spheres of the city life (DAHAN, 2011). [17]

Immigrants from the FSU comprise a quarter of the city's population, and their arrival in the city led to the establishment of new neighborhoods considered "islands" of immigrant communities, which are geographically and culturally set apart from the rest of the city's population (DAHAN, 2011). Relations with the middle-class secular Ashkenazi are fairly good, but this is hardly the case with Mizrahi Jews, as both groups relate to each other stereotypically, expressing mutual anger and distrust (DAHAN, 2011). [18]

The area surrounding Be'er Sheva serves as a home to nearly 170,000 Bedouins, who live in towns and villages. They exert a strong presence in the city as students at the Ben Gurion University, as manual workers, and while making use of the city's services. [19]

5. Methods

5.1 Sampling and participants

This study is part of a larger research which aimed to trace relations between groups in Israel. The first author was responsible for conducting interviews with residents from different groups of the Be'er Sheva region. Twenty people were interviewed mostly women aged 20-60. Interviewees were chosen to provide a representative sample of the different groups living in the area. Some of the interviewees were recruited through the snowball and convenience sampling methods (MARSHALL & ROSSMAN, 1998), while others were chosen by the first author due to their membership in a certain group. In the present article we have chosen to report on the stories of three pairs of women who belong to the three social groups living in Be'er Sheva and its surroundings: Mizrahi Jews, immigrants from FSU and Bedouin women. These stories were chosen as they embodied a host of ways interviewees discussed themselves and their relations with others in general, and within the educational arena in particular. [20]

5.2 Data collection and method of analysis

Data collection took place between October 2010 and November 2011. Interviews were conducted either at the participant's homes, place of work or at the Ben Gurion University, depending upon the participant's preference. Interviews, lasting between two and three hours, were taped following the participant's agreement and were transcribed. In most cases interviews were conducted in Hebrew, and in few they were facilitated by a translator, depending upon the interviewee's preference. As both Bedouin interviewees are fluent in Hebrew, they preferred to conduct the interviews in this language. The translator, a Bedouin woman, was consulted in three cases in which the interviewees, in order to illustrate a point, made use of unique Arabic idioms during the interview. [21]

During the first phase, we asked the interviewees: "Please tell me your life story" (ROSENTHAL, 1993). The theoretical rationale behind this methodology rests on the perception of the individual as a creator of stories, and as the constructor of his/her identity through his/her life story (BRUNER, 1990; GERGEN, 1992). At

the same time, a life story is not only a personal story, but also a reflection of socio-cultural and socio-historical relations (BRUNER, 1990). From this perspective, a life story serves to connect the individual and the collective, representing the encounter between the socio-cultural meaning and the personal meaning accorded to events and experiences throughout the life span (LOMSKY-FEDER, 1997; ROSENTHAL, 1993). [22]

In the second part, interviewees were asked to discuss their experience with different groups in Be'er Sheva so as to elicit their perceptions, attitudes and stories relating to various "others" living in the city. They were asked: "Please tell me about your experiences with people from different groups who live in Be'er Sheva." We attempted to avoid asking questions during the narrative itself, asking for clarification or elaboration only after the interviewees had finished telling their stories. Our questions related only to themes that they themselves had raised, and we generally did not introduce additional issues. [23]

Analysis is based on the thematic approach suggested by LIEBLICH, TUVAL-MASHIACH and ZILBER (1998). Their method, which combines a holistic approach to the text with a thematic analysis, affords the researchers the opportunity to look at each interview as a holistic unit, and then trace the main themes that emerge from the material. In the analysis we discovered that the women devoted much of their time in the interviews to discussing stories of their educational history and that these were related in different ways to how they perceived "others" belonging either to their internal or external groups. [24]

Additionally we used the idea of ethnic script, introduced by LERNER, RAPOPORT and LOMSKY-FEDER (2007) as a metaphor to describe a stereotyped set directions for social behavior. LERNER et al. consider the script to be a cultural pattern that describes normative behavior according to an actor's role and social situation. The script operates as an organizing pattern for biographical narratives (SAMUEL & THOMPSON, 1990). Using this concept, LERNER et al. (2007) applied two levels of analysis: 1. the personal story, which aims at identifying the central themes in each narrative and in our case focuses on the educational story within the life story; and 2. the general context, which aims at analyzing the main themes in light of the socio-cultural context of Be'er Sheva. [25]

Moreover, as part of the analysis, and in order to trace the stages of identity construction presented by the interviewees in their narratives, the interviews were analyzed using BAR-ON's theory (2005), which addresses the different perceptions of self and "other." [26]

The process of analysis was as follows: First, each author separately read the interviews as a whole and wrote her/his general notes regarding identity and the perception of "others." Second, each author read the interviews looking for: 1. personal and family background; 2. The educational story of the interviewee from childhood to adulthood; 3. Perceptions and experiences with "others" who live in Be'er Sheva. These themes were decided upon after reading and discussing the

interviews and notes together, and were based on the levels of analysis LERNER et al. (2007) have suggested. Third, each author analyzed the interviews according to BAR-ON's stages of identity construction (monolithic, disintegration, dialogue). Afterwards, the analyses done by the individual authors were compared. In the case of disagreement, a third reader was involved. During the analysis, in addition to BAR-ON's general stages of identity construction, a new concept, "Cultural distance from the internal others" (CDIO)," was identified. The concept describes the contribution of educational stories to the understanding of the perception of different others. [27]

6. Results

In the following section we first present the life stories discussed by second generation Mizrahi women, stories which are at the intersection between education and relations with others. We then present life stories of FSU and Bedouin women. The segments taken from the interviews and presented in the following were translated into English by the authors. [28]

6.1 Second generation Mizrahi women

Nati

Nati, the youngest of three children, was born in Be'er Sheva in 1988. Her parents arrived in the city as young adults from Tunisia with their large extended families all of whom resided in one of the veteran neighborhoods of the city. Neither parents acquired higher education. Nati currently lives with her parents in one of the neighborhoods built during the building boom of the 1990s which accompanied the arrival of FSU immigrants to the city. She works as a kindergarten assistant in a nearby kibbutz. Nati portrayed the new neighborhood as highly heterogeneous, comprising residents who are Ethiopians, FSU immigrants, and many traditional native Mizrahi Israelis. [29]

According to Nati, her experiences as a child during her kindergarten years were unpleasant and tense as the teachers found it hard to deal with the new immigrants. However, discussing her primary schooling, Nati stated: "We were all friends, the Russians, the Ethiopians, the native Israelis." This state of affairs changed during high school years as "[t]he Ethiopians became the 'jokers' ... messed around and did not study well and the Russians used to drink and smoke." This led Nati to confine her contacts only to second generation Mizrahi girls like herself. Nati's parents, although uneducated, valued education and were very disappointed by the fact that she did not do well at school and failed in her matriculation exams. Her parents attributed this to Nati's laziness and to the fact that, since she was quiet and shy, her teachers paid little attention to her. As a result of this failure, Nati's older sister persuaded her to be tested for learning disabilities, which was indeed the case. [30]

No high school diploma meant that Nati's aspiration to attend teachers college could not be met. Thus, she participated in a short non-academic course for

kindergarten assistants. Her dream for the future is "to become a kindergarten teacher." [31]

Nati works as an assistant in a kindergarten in a kibbutz where the majority of the members are Ashkenazi Jews. Her attitude toward them is ambivalent. She mentioned that when she first arrived at the kibbutz she was aware of her difference. "I was so different, I lived in the city, I dressed differently, I thought differently." While some of the kibbutz members received Nati warmly, others "sneered." She discussed favorably her relations with new immigrant Ethiopian kindergarten children who live on the kibbutz, and said: "I like to help them; it feels good, and they need help." She discussed with dismay an incident in which one of the Ethiopian children was hit by his father, stating: "It was awful for me to see him hitting his child, but there was nothing I could do." Nati was also critical of some of the kibbutz members who treated the Ethiopian children as a threat to the health of the kibbutz children, wrongly accusing them of suffering from poor health. [32]

Her attitude towards FSU women is clearly expressed in this statement:

"They are very dangerous, these women." She explained angrily that "[t]hey [Russian women] ruin families, they steal Mizrahi men ... I witnessed such instances many times ... these Russian women, they lack any dignity and respect for others ... I'm afraid that one of them will attempt to steal my boyfriend." [33]

When discussing the Bedouin others Nati recalled attempts by young Bedouin men to approach her, related the stabbing of one of her cousins by a young Bedouin, and recalled many incidents of home and car theft in her childhood neighborhood by young Bedouin men. She said: "As a child I used to be very afraid of them ... I was afraid that they would try to break into our home ... to this day I am still very afraid of them." [34]

Rachel

Rachel was born in Be'er Sheva in 1960. Her parents married as adolescents, and following the death of their first three baby boys, had six daughters. They emigrated from Morocco during the 1950s and lived in one of the veteran neighborhoods of the city. In keeping with her father's wishes, Rachel studied at an all-girls religious high school which provided a poorer quality of education to its students as compared to the local secular high schools. She majored in education and childcare. Subsequently, she began to study at a teachers college, but dropped out. Rachel believes that had she studied at a secular high school she would have been more successful in her attempt to acquire an academic degree. Rachel married at the age of twenty-three and has four children (three boys and a daughter). [35]

She portrayed her childhood in warm terms, and pointed out that the neighborhood, populated by poor Mizrahi families, was divided between those who lived on the wrong side of the tracks marked by the presence of "criminals

and bad influences," and families like her own which did their best to provide their children with good values and education. Rachel stressed the importance she attached to endowing her children with good values and education, and ensuring that her daughter had better schooling and a safer environment in which to grow up. To this end, the family rented a home in one of the city's newest and sought after neighborhoods, thus unhappily distancing her family from her extended family and friends. Discussing her current residence, a neighborhood located near the university and populated mainly by Ashkenazi Jews, she noted that she does not feel at home in the neighborhood: "It is private and safe here but not warm." However, in school Rachel is very active on the parents committee, organizing activities for the children. She encourages her daughter to make friends with children from the neighborhood who, in her opinion, "come from good educated families." [36]

Concerning her attitude towards FSU immigrants, Rachel noted that "they put high priority on education," a stance she certainly appreciates. She recalled some instances in which she assisted FSU women who were newcomers to her neighborhood to find work or supplied them with used clothes and furniture. She said: "I was very happy to help and they were happy to receive help." However, she noted that she does not have a close relationship with them since "I feel very different from them [the FSU immigrants] in terms of language and culture." [37]

Rachel noted that she does her best to avoid any contact with Bedouin, and stated that she rarely visits the city's old center where "they [Bedouin] hang around." In comparison, she discussed her close contact with one of her former neighbors, an Arab woman teacher, originally a resident of northern Israel, who arrived in Be'er Sheva to work in one of the Bedouin towns. Rachel noted that she respected and liked the Arab teacher who helped her sons with their schoolwork. [38]

6.2 FSU immigrants' first generation women stories

Eva

Eva was born in the Ukraine in 1968, the only child of highly educated parents, who, while she was still young, encouraged their daughter to pursue an academic career. Describing her childhood in positive terms, Eva noted that her Jewish origin contributed to her feeling different: "Because I was Jewish I never felt as though I was a 'true' Ukrainian." She was a good student and was appreciated for her educational achievements at home and at school. Despite the fact that her parents decided to stay in the Ukraine, Eva immigrated to Israel in 1995 with her grandmother and settled in Be'er Sheva. She explained her decision to immigrate as emanating from the feeling that there is "no future in Ukraine" and as a "young and clever woman" she believed she could manage anywhere. A few years later, her parents joined her, and during this period Eva obtained an MA and later, a Ph.D. in economics. She married a former FSU immigrant. Eva states that at times she feels that she is confined within a "Russian social and cultural ghetto," as she is surrounded only by former FSU immigrants, absorbs only Russian

culture and hardly interacts with native Jewish-Israelis. She stated: "I hold nothing against them [native Jewish-Israelis]; they are simply not part of my life." Discussing her attitude towards the majority of her current neighbors who are less educated second generation Mizrahi Jews, Eva said "I have nothing in common with them. They are different in culture and language." She hopes to move to another neighborhood, one which is populated mainly by Ashkenazi Jews, a group she considers to be closer to her in terms of cultural and academic background. This move, she believes could foster a fuller integration within Israeli society and culture. When asked about her attitude towards living in Be'er Sheva she replied: "It is a normal city on the periphery. I would prefer to live in the center of Israel, but it is much cheaper here and there is work, so we live here." [39]

When relating to external "others," Eva was hesitant, but after a few seconds of silence she said: "As you know the Russian community usually holds a negative view of Arabs, but this is not the case with me. To me what is important is whether people are cultured and educated, regardless of their origin." Eva considered the possibility of removing her daughter from her current all-Russian kindergarten and sending her to a joint Arab-Jewish kindergarten which is located not far from her home. Eva said that she had heard positive reports about this kindergarten as all the children are sons and daughters of academics and professionals. [40]

Discussing this further she stressed: "Ideology is not an issue in my view. I want her to be in a private kindergarten with good children, not too far from home, where she can learn Hebrew and be happy." She mentioned that she keeps a distance from the local Bedouins as they are a "source of problems." [41]

Nina

Born in 1968 in Varonish, Nina is the second daughter of highly educated parents. She mentioned her childhood and adolescence in passing, stating that "[i]n most cases being a Jew was not an issue." [42]

Nina obtained her Masters degree in history and civic studies at a Russian university and soon afterwards began her work as a teacher in a local high school. After working with children suffering from cerebral palsy, Nina wrote her Ph.D. thesis on coping mechanisms of these children with their handicaps, and obtained a lecturing position at the local university. The decision to immigrate to Israel was a result of disappointment with the new Russian government and its policies. Arriving in Israel with her family in 2001, she found the first years were hard, as she had to work as a cleaner or a cook. Because of a special program offered at the Ben Gurion University for new immigrants interested in becoming social workers, Nina's family moved to Be'er Sheva where she and her husband took part in the program. After serving as a research assistant to one of the university professors, Nina became a lecturer at the university. She expressed her positive attitude towards life in Be'er Sheva, a city she is fond of in comparison to the cities where she had lived in during her first years in Israel. According to Nina, "[p]eople in Be'er Sheva are warm and friendly and many here

helped me along the way." She found the question about dealing with the 'others' difficult. She stated:

"It is a difficult question, because not all native Israelis are the same. Consider for example my Moroccan neighbor. She works at the supermarket and I know her family endures financial hardships, so I feel for them. Yet I truly find it hard to relate to her culturally, because we are so different. I also find it hard to relate to my other Mizrahi neighbors with their large families and lack of formal education. It is not that I have anything against them; they are just too different from me in terms of culture and behavior." [43]

In comparison, she mentioned her close relations with her colleagues, all highly educated native Ashkenazi Israelis. Despite the close relations, Nina expressed a sense of inferiority to them, as she is always on "the needy side." Yet she is proud of her educational achievements and her Russian cultural background. [44]

Nina's relations with Bedouins are confined to the university setting. She stated:

"My parents held strong communist convictions which they passed on to me. To me, members of minority groups deserve more consideration than those of the majority group. As I began my teaching, a colleague of mine warned me that Bedouin students are manipulative in their efforts to gain good grades. I dismissed this as signifying a lack of understanding by a member of the elite of the ways of Bedouin students. Yet, in time, I came to realize that my colleague was right. However, I still hope to prove him wrong." [45]

This quote demonstrates ambivalence towards the Bedouin other. On the one hand, because of Nina's value system and her own experiences with members of the Jewish minority in the USSR, she identified with the Bedouin minority and would like to help them. On the other hand, she felt deeply disappointed as result of her encounters with dishonest Bedouin students. [46]

6.3 Bedouin women's' life stories

Samira

Samira, the eldest of four daughters of a Bedouin physician, was raised in Be'er Sheva and from an early age was ordered by her parents to excel in school. Her father wished his daughter to maintain her contacts with her Bedouin community and Bedouin traditions and registered her to study at a Bedouin primary school at one of the Bedouin settlements. However, despite her good grades, Samira felt that her potential could not be fully realized because in her opinion, her teachers lacked the necessary qualifications and abilities to motivate their students to excel. Therefore, she convinced her father to let her study at a Jewish high school in Be'er Sheva. He agreed, on condition that Samira would not take part in any of the school's extracurricular activities such as field trips and parties. Initially, the Jewish students, and especially those of Mizrahi origin, treated her badly and called her names. In time, she managed to gain the respect of the students, and

established strong ties with Jewish girlfriends. Samira attributed the change in attitude to her good grades and her outspoken political opinions. However, since she was not allowed to participate in the school's extracurricular activities she sensed that she was different, and recalled: "I was always different but they all respected me." [47]

At university, Samira met educated Bedouin women, and subsequently became more involved in her Bedouin community. Together with her Bedouin friends she began teaching in Bedouin schools and established an NGO devoted to the empowerment of Bedouin women through education. She referred to that time as "a very good period as I felt I was doing something of great importance for my community." Yet, in time, a rift developed between Samira and her Bedouin partners. She noticed that shortly after completing her PhD in education, her Bedouin friends became colder to her, claiming that her educational achievements had caused Samira to become snobbish and distant, a claim Samira fiercely rejects. Since then, Samira has felt a strong sense of disappointment with her community and has strengthened her ties with former and current Jewish educated women. These women "accept me as an individual, as Samira who is a working woman and a mother." Samira is proud of her Bedouin origin and of her efforts to improve the education available to Bedouin women. However, she feels rejected by at least some members of the Bedouin community for being individualistic and seeking a career. In trying to bridge the tensions and provide her children with an "integrative worldview," she placed them in an Arab-Jewish kindergarten in order for them to learn both languages and cultures. [48]

Amira

Amira, the daughter of a Bedouin family of ten children, lives in one of the Bedouin villages near Be'er Sheva. Her late father, the graduate of a teachers college, taught in the village school. He encouraged her to pursue her education as he recognized her motivation to excel in school. [49]

Amira stressed that "my father always encouraged me not to give up my studies; it was important for him and for me." Amira became the first woman of her family to acquire a college diploma, specializing in nursery school education. [50]

Besides mentioning her father's support for schooling, Amira praises her husband, a strict Muslim who supports her educational aspirations. She pointed out that as part of their marriage arrangement her then-to-be husband agreed that she would continue her schooling, which she still does, participating in various courses. For Amira, education serves as a means of acquiring a profession, improving her family's economic conditions and contributing to the improvement of her tribe's welfare. She said: "It is my duty to work in my community, to help and improve the state of education for my tribe." At that point she noted that she has been witnessing a growing interest in education in Bedouin society and hopes to take an even more active part in these developments. Amira operates a kindergarten in her community, and believes

that, as a result of her schooling and work, she is highly respected by the women of her tribe. She stated: "They ask me questions about the children, and respect me for my education." Yet Amira feels that in some respects she is excluded from the lives of the women of her tribe. This is because, in the small village where she currently lives with her husband, she is the only woman who works for her living. Consequently, she finds it difficult to maintain ongoing and informal relations with other women who, while performing their daily chores, frequently consult with and assist one another. [51]

During her academic studies, Amira's relations were almost solely confined to other Bedouin female students, and she had only formal, respectful and limited exchanges with her Jewish professors. This could be explained by her husband's reservations about establishing close relations with Jews. She pointed out that her husband drove her to and from college every day in order to "keep me safe and to remind me that our tradition forbids married women from travelling unaccompanied." Currently, Amira hardly ever meets Jews and the only Jewish woman with whom she is in contact is her supervisor in charge of the kindergarten that she operates. [52]

7. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the intersection between the effects of education for women and their subsequent relations with others, as factors shaping their identity construction in a multicultural society, by examining the life stories of six women belonging to three different groups in Israeli society. [53]

Looking at the results, the main theme that emerged was that education serves as a mapping tool which places the "self" and the "other" as either close or distant in terms of identity construction. This was manifested in the various life stories told by the interviewees, highlighting both the importance they attached to their past educational experiences and how life stories are constructed at the intersection between personal and societal factors (KAINAN et al., 2006). [54]

Moreover, in understanding the process of identity construction (BAMBERG & GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2008; SINGER, 2004), each woman can be seen to construct her identity differently at different phases of her life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood—with changing perceptions of the other whom she meets during these different phases. [55]

However, while there are changes in the construction of identity and the perception of "others" during life phases, the perception of education seems to be constant and stable. Education is perceived by all three groups as an important tool for integration into Israeli society, achieving power, social status and money. For the Mizrahi Jews education is perceived as a social status and a tool for social mobility (SMOOHA, 2008), for the FSU participants, education is power and successful integration (LERNER et al., 2007), and for the Bedouin, a society in flux, education is a sign of high status, empowering both self and society as well as being a way to earn money (ABU-SAAD, 2001). [56]

Looking at each individual story in relation to education, it is apparent that the parents, and especially the fathers in the case of Mizrahi and Bedouin women, played a crucial role in encouraging their daughters to gain access to education, regardless of the actual successes that their daughters achieved. In the case of FSU immigrants (Eva and Nina) and Bedouin women (Samira and Amira), higher education meant following in their parents' footsteps, fulfilling their own expectations of themselves as well as that of their fathers. [57]

Based on our interviews, we suggest that in line with the theoretical framework suggested by BAR-ON (2005) and the research findings of his colleagues in relation to the "external other" (LITVAK-HIRSCH et al., 2007) the perception of both internal (FSU and Mizrahi Jews) and external (Bedouin Muslim) "others" mainly describes the monolithic stage and rarely proceeds to the disintegration stage. We found no signs of the dialogue stage which allows for a greater complexity of perception and tolerance towards others in current Israeli society. In order to demonstrate this assumption we will discuss each group's life stories in relation to education and the perception of the other. [58]

The first group to be discussed is that of the Mizrahi women, Nati and Rachel. Both reported a deep sense of disappointment and of missed opportunities as a result of their not gaining access to higher education, despite their own wishes and those of their parents. In reporting their life stories, it also became apparent that relations with others were examined through educational prisms during the life-course of each of the women. [59]

For Nati, the younger of the two second-generation Mizrahi women interviewed, the prism varied. She found the experience of being an assistant in a multicultural kindergarten, composed of Ethiopians, FSU immigrants, and Mizrahi religious native Israelis, unpleasant as she had difficulty adjusting to and accepting the different cultures and behaviors of children originating from different groups. The opposite was true when she discussed her own multicultural primary school, a place where she easily made friends. During this short period of her life, young Nati viewed internal others either very negatively or very positively, expressing an underlying monolithic view of them (BAR-ON, 2005). Nati's learning disabilities, which prevented her from gaining a high school diploma and thus obtaining access to college, led her to work in a less preferred career as a kindergarten assistant in a kibbutz composed mainly of another group of internal others, Ashkenazi Jews. Nati defined herself as being culturally "very different" from this group, despite sharing the same religion. Here, again, she expresses a monolithic view, despite acknowledging the various positive and negative attitudes that different members of this group expressed towards her. Nati judged the two groups (internal and external) most harshly and for different reasons. She appraised the FSU women (i.e., "internal others") negatively, because she perceived them as "stealing men." This attitude echoes REMENNICK's (1999) claim that native Israelis and especially those of non-European origin perceived FSU women with entrenched sexism. Thus, for her the FSU women represented a psychological threat. Likewise, Bedouin men (i.e., "external others") are also perceived as a source of physical threat. We can see that, at this point in her life

story, Nati's identity construction is hindered by a sense of a missed opportunity to fulfill her ambitions. This is a result of not gaining access to higher education and she is marked by a negative monolithic view regarding her identity construction through her relations with others, internal and external, with the exception of the Ethiopian children with whom she works. These children do not represent a threat but rather an opportunity to empower herself by helping them, since, as newcomers to Israel, they need that help. [60]

Rachel's life story, the second Mizrahi second-generation interviewee, is also marked by a feeling of wasted educational prospects. She, in contrast to Nati, managed to gain access to college, but, having a high school diploma from a lower ranking school, felt herself unequipped to deal with the college requirements and dropped out. Discussing her ways of relating to others, Rachel's life story is dotted with references to education as a yardstick that she uses to evaluate both internal and external others. She noted that she grew up in a poor neighborhood populated by Mizrahi families, which she distinguishes as being either "criminals and bad influences," or worthy of praise in terms of having good values such as in families like her own who applied their best efforts to ensure that their children gained access to a good education. As a mother, Rachel has done her best to duplicate her parents' model, and provided her own children with such opportunities. She attained this by uprooting her family from their close social networks and residing in a neighborhood populated mainly by educated Ashkenazi Jews. [61]

While recognizing that their current residence could contribute to her children's future, Rachel does not feel "at home." In a similar vein, and despite her favorable impression of FSU immigrants because of their emphasis on education, she feels culturally distant from them. Thus, for Rachel education constructs a positive monolithic view of both "internal others," the veteran Ashkenazi Jews and FSU immigrants. Yet this is the only one aspect of her identity construction in which she feels some closeness as in all other aspects she feels distance. She holds a monolithic negative view towards Bedouins, but in this respect, without reference to education. When it comes to her Arab teacher neighbor, Rachel expressed feelings of closeness and respect. Here, we witness disintegration of the monolithic perception towards the "external other," based on personal acquaintance and positively shared experiences. Previous research similarly indicates that personal acquaintance and shared experiences lead to the emergence of the process of disintegration (LITVAK-HIRSCH et al., 2007). Moreover, in Rachel's case this positive stance and progress to the stage of disintegration is closely related to the value that she attaches to gaining an education. [62]

The life stories of FSU immigrants Nina and Eva reveal similarities and differences. Discussing her life in the Ukraine, Eva noted that from an early age she was treated positively as a result of her academic achievements, yet, time and again, either subtly or not, she was reminded of her Jewish origin. Her decision to immigrate to Israel originated from the sense that as a young and clever woman she could find her place in a new country, and indeed she

managed to do so, rapidly attaining higher degrees in economics. In BAR-ON's (2005) terms, Eva's mode of relating to others could be classified as marked by a mixture of monolithic and disintegration attitudes, leading her to develop a more complex perception of both "internal" and "external others." This is most apparent when examining her statement that to her "what is important is whether people are cultured and educated, regardless of their origin." Thus, while she is quite reserved in her relations with Jewish-Israelis and expresses a negative stance towards Bedouin, she maintains that Ashkenazi Jews are her equals in terms of culture and education, and considers the possibility of schooling her daughter in an Arab-Jewish kindergarten which caters to children of academics and professionals. [63]

In contrast to Eva, Nina maintains that during her years in Russia her Jewish origin had no profound impact on her. The intersection of education and the role of others in identity construction gained a special meaning in her life story once she arrived in Israel. Nina experienced a complex chain of personal and educational vacillations (from being a cook and a cleaning lady during her first years to a university lecturer later), which affected the ways she perceives herself and others. [64]

LERNER et al. (2007) suggested that for many new immigrants from the FSU education is an acquired resource with the potential for creating a common ground between groups, mainly educated Ashkenazi Jews, and for excluding the Mizrahi Jews. In keeping with this suggestion, it is proposed that both Nina and Eva stress their wish to become closer to the Ashkenazi group by relocating their homes to neighborhoods where most of the population are veteran educated Ashkenazi Jews. This can be seen as a way of enhancing social integration by physical, cultural and educational closeness. Their wish to move to another neighborhood demonstrates the importance of a geographical and social context, which in Be'er Sheva is marked by the prominent physical as well as social and economic distinctions between the different neighborhoods (DAHAN, 2011). [65]

In light of BAR-ON's theory, while their views are not robustly negative and monolithic, Nina and Eva do not qualify as holding a "disintegrated view" (BAR-ON, 2005). Thus, the possibility to elaborate BAR-ON's theory is apparent by introducing the concept of "cultural distance from the internal other," henceforth referred to as CDIO. This concept suggests that while sharing a geographical space and a common history, members of the group feel culturally apart or close to other members due to their differing educational aspirations and achievements. [66]

The life stories of the Bedouin women, Samira and Amira, are marked too by the stamp of CDIO, emerging from their educational experiences and relations with others. From an early age, Samira was placed in a unique position between two communities. Driven to excel in school by her father, Samira found herself in an educational system that she found unsatisfactory (i.e., the Bedouin one) and in order to fulfill her potential, moved to one designed for her "external other" (a Jewish school). In that respect, Samira is quite different from other members of

minority groups in Israel who rarely meet their Jewish counterparts during their school years (ABU-RABIA-QUEDER & WEINER-LEVY, 2008). [67]

Within that school, Samira managed to find her place only after her peers acknowledged that she was an excellent student. Yet she still felt different and distant as her father forbade her to participate in the school's extracurricular activities. Her studies at the university enabled Samira to create stronger bonds than ever before with her community of origin, as she became a member of a group of educated Bedouin women who actively sought to change the educational level of Bedouin women. In this way Samira represents what YUVAL-DAVIS (1994) describes as a way in which empowerment breaks down boundaries between the public and the private spheres and allows for the personal to connect to the communal. [68]

Samira perceived her academic and social achievements as personally empowering, enabling her to create an NGO which encourages higher education among Bedouin women and facilitating a bridge between her and her community. This means that access to higher education led Samira, as well as some other educated Bedouin women, to experience a substantial change in their personal and social identities (ABU-RABIA-QUEDER, 2008). Yet after gaining her Ph.D. Samira's relations with her educated Bedouin female friends turned sour, leaving her to strengthen her relations with her Jewish educated female colleagues. Thus, for Samira, gaining education was perceived positively by her Bedouin colleagues up to a certain point in which the CDIO was too apparent, while education enabled her to strengthen her bonds with her Jewish associates. [69]

Amira's life-story in terms of education and relations with others is less complicated. Her schooling up to college level was within the Bedouin community, and during her college years her relations with Jews were restricted to limited and formal contacts, according to the wishes of her husband. Amira harnessed her educational achievements to improve her family's economic conditions as well as her tribe's welfare. And while education did contribute to Amira's social standing in her community (KAINAN et al., 2006), this improvement came at a price: being the only working woman of her extended family, she feels distanced. Thus, while not similar to the case of Samira, Amira also experiences CDIO. [70]

Moreover, we suggest that the difference between Amira and Samira in their perception of the "Jewish other" is also a result of the difference in their home location. While Samira has lived all her life in Be'er Sheva and interacted with Jews throughout her life, Amira has only lived in a remote Bedouin village located some distance from the city and therefore did not meet and interact with Jews. This is an example of how the geographical and social environmental spheres contribute to the educational story of each woman and to her perception of the other. [71]

Through the life stories of women of different backgrounds, this study aimed to demonstrate how identity construction takes place as a result of the complex relations between education and relations with others in multicultural societies.

We presented the ways educational stories serve as a map in understanding women's experience of closeness and distance in relation to others who belong to their internal and external groups, within the environmental and social context of Be'er Sheva. Demonstrating the interrelations between education and the perception of others as part of identity construction by using BAR-ON's theory of the different stages, the findings lead to the elaboration of BAR-ON's model by suggesting the concept of "cultural distance from the internal other" (CDIO) as shaped by educational aspirations and achievements. With the suggested contribution, we are aware of the limitation of our research which examined small numbers of life stories, focused on one geographical and social context only and even within this context did not explore all the groups who live in the city. [72]

Another possible shortcoming of the current research is related to the definition of "internal" and "external" others which was based upon existing studies and theory (BAR-ON, 2005; HOROWITZ & LISSAK, 1989). During the formulation stage of the research, we raised the possibility of including a direct question asking participants to identify who they consider these internal and external others. It was finally decided to leave this question out, as it was considered too highly loaded. Including such a question at the beginning of the interview could have had a major impact on the ways participants tell their story, thus, for example, leading some to focus their story entirely upon this aspect, or conversely, to avoid it as much as possible. Inclusion of this question at the end of the interview could have made at least some interviewees feel uncomfortable when learning the aim of the interview. Future studies should address the question of how to bring interviewees to directly identify their internal and external others without obstructing their discussion of their narratives. [73]

Moreover, future studies are needed to elaborate the conceptual framework suggested here by comparing how men discuss these aspects of identity construction in their life stories, and examining whether there is a difference in the way men and women belonging to the same group perceive and discuss these aspects. Furthermore, the concept of CDIO leads to several other avenues for future research. First, does CDIO entail the possibility of maintaining one's group cultural identity or not? In this case, for FSU immigrants Eva and Nina CDIO created a bridge to the group they wished to approach (the Ashkenazi group), without losing their own unique and cherished cultural (Russian) heritage. For Bedouin Samira higher education meant a widening gap in terms of CDIO from her community of origin and, at the same time, narrowed the gap and brought her closer to her "external other," the educated Jews. Second, other avenues of future research could examine how the concepts of internal and external others and CDIO are manifested within multicultural societies other than Israel. [74]

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