

**Crossing the Chasm to Pick Up the Gauntlet:   
Higher Education and Christian Arab Women in the North of Israel**

By

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DEDICATION

To the courageous young women who participated in this study.

Your voices will be heard.

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This has been a challenging, long and exciting journey. But accomplishments are not the result of just individual endeavour.

Many thanks to my supervisor Dr. Sabine Little for her guidance and support throughout this project. Her experience and knowledge have taught me how to work with care, accuracy and intelligence. It is unlikely this project would have come to fruition without her understanding and attention to detail.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated the higher education experiences of Christian Arab women from the north of Israel. For some, it is their first multicultural educational experience. Israel has a complex socio-political history, and a mixed race higher education policy is bold, as Arabs and Jews are mostly segregated educationally until age eighteen.

There is scant research on Christian Arab women in Israel and this study focuses on their higher education experiences as related to socio-cultural, historical, political, and religious contexts. A feminist approach gives them a respectful and legitimate platform from which to speak and thematic analysis helps create a more comprehensive picture of their aspirations, and the practical realities and implications of the multi-dimensional perspective of higher education. Data was collected from twelve (student) participants using semi-structured interviews.

The participants understood the academic experience as one expected by family and cultural group, and believed that financial and social empowerment would result. Arabic has relative unimportance in Israel, and this study finds that the participants' Hebrew literacy was not strong, constraining most effective studying practices. Recommendations include changing emphases within schools, society, and higher education to offer greater opportunities regarding language development and social interactions.

Identity was affiliated to religion and Christianity had a defining role in the lives of participants. Higher education as part of a Jewish culture was perceived as developmentally liberating and using the experience to identify personal qualities and challenges was acknowledged. Its significance in the social and cultural fabric of Israel indicates the importance of optimising the experience for all students. An underrepresented and involuntary minority status did not affect participants' desire to use to their advantage a structure which offers capitals to augment lifestyle choices.

A unified future was the only reasonable outcome for citizens of Israel in which the participants' saw themselves as significant actors.

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# INTRODUCTION

Those who reside within the physical borders of Israel are continually confined and defined by national, religious and ethnic boundaries. Although arguably imaginary, these boundaries often become inescapably real in Israel. People are perpetually occupied with the work of marking them, wielding them like weapons, including and excluding, acknowledging or rejecting values and ways of life, even denying the Other's right to exist. (Beckerman, 2004, p. 198)

This powerful and evocative quotation opens a book chapter entitled 'Acts of Courage: Reshaping Tradition in Palestinian – Jewish School Ceremonies'.

Using the word 'courage' in the title is significant because, as Beckerman explained, the presence of a sharply defined and segregated education system means any attempt at mixed race education is quite a 'daring exercise' (p. 199). It is practical as well as theoretical and embodies hopes and dreams of people who perceive a more cooperative future for the citizens of Israel.

Within its disputed borders, Israel has a population containing a diversity of countries of origin, different native languages, and cultural traditions (Svirsky and Mor-Sommerfeld, 2012). Its society is comprised of a complicated past and a present embellished with differences, deep divisions, and outward displays of intermittent violence.

Christian Arab citizens of Israel are one indigenous minority group in a politically controversial and practically tense country (Landau, 2015). In the main, this tension is related to the historical change concerning the status quo in Israel for Arab citizens when the state changed its status and character in 1948 (Brecher, 2017).‏

In addition, on-going local conflicts and violent eruptions, an on-going crisis relating to Islamic State extremism, as well as Israel's unenviable location, bordering Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt in a politically unstable Middle East, add to the anxiety of daily life.

## My Research

The setting of my research is an academic college in northern Israel. Higher education is open to all citizens regardless of racial or ethnic group and I suggest a racially and ethnically diverse higher education environment is also a 'daring exercise', considering the controversial socio-political situation of the country. For some men and women, it is their first educational experience which includes individuals from other linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

My research aims were to discover more about what lies behind the higher educational aspirations of Christian Arab women. They represent a small part of the overall whole of the country and I investigated their higher education experiences as they straddled different cultures, languages, and religions.

My research question offers a possibility to understand more acutely how Christian Arab women involved in higher education programmes handle life at college. The study explored which elements of college help achieve positive learning outcomes, which elements hinder it, and which personal and practical tools or strategies help achieve a constructive learning experience. Furthermore, it investigated how Christian Arab women identify themselves, especially in the light of constantly changing linguistic and cultural domains.

### Title

The title, 'Crossing the Chasm to Pick Up the Gauntlet: Higher Education and Christian Arab Women in Northern Israel', acknowledges the significant divide between ethnic minority groups in Israel and the dominant Jewish culture. Definitions of the word 'chasm' emphasise unfathomable depths (Chasm, n.d.). A chasm can be either literal or figurative and in this case relates to the divide in a country which is perceived as being physically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally separated.

‘Picking up the Gauntlet’ is based on the medieval phrase of accepting a challenge, or taking a dare. For some young men and women in Israel, it requires courage to step into the unknown in order meet an intellectual challenge as well as a linguistic and social one. As higher education is perceived to offer opportunities, it is a challenge many dare to take.

Policy dictates that a large percentage of higher education in Israel is conducted in Hebrew (Kheimets and Epstein, 2005). Policy also dictates that most school education until age 18 is separate between groups (Education Policy Outlook Israel, 2016). Therefore, the majority of Muslims, Druze, and Christian children are educated in Arabic, and Jewish children are educated in Hebrew. The result of this is that in general, it tends to be more testing for native Arab speakers to pursue higher education studies.

### Research Question

The above considerations have led to the following research question.

In the linguistically, culturally, religiously, and politically divided society of Israel, how are Christian Arab women meeting the challenge of higher education programmes?

It is further divided into the following sub-questions.

1. Why are Christian Arab women choosing higher education programmes?
2. Which elements of a higher education system most help and hinder potential learning outcomes and which personal characteristics and practical strategies are important for enabling and maintaining success?
3. How do Christian Arab women students manage changing linguistic, social, and cultural domains, and how does this affect their sense of identity?

### Importance and Relevance

Although there is little dispute universally that higher education is important, regarding women, it is not a given that higher education is available universally. It is also important to note that some higher education students are denied a free and untroubled access to higher education because of racial and political tension and discrimination (King and Hill, 1993).

Al Haj (2003) contended that promoting higher education in Israel for the Arab population is one of the most significant moves the country can make for enhancing Jewish–Arab relations. More recently, Cinamon, Habayib, and Ziv (2016) maintained that there is need in Israel for deeper investigations into the nature of these experiences for minority groups, especially relating to how higher education impacts future life choices and career development. This research was intended to emphasise the needs of minority women as higher education students and to offer their voices of experience to administrations and educators when considering the intellectual and social futures of their countries. It represents an effort to contribute to understanding their challenges and to show their strengths and possibilities as future game-changers.

Hurtado et al. (1999) maintained that focusing on the atmosphere in and around campus should be prioritized in order to create the diverse learning environments necessary for integration. This involves ‘understanding the environment’ from the point of view of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, ‘creating opportunities’ for better relationships between students, and realizing the educational benefits of a more educated diverse society (p. 5). They emphasised the importance of socio-historic context to the response of institutions to diversity, and to the way in which individuals experience their immediate learning environments and suggested that related research could contribute to the promotion of academic outcomes for students. 'Such information would begin to document how institutions reflect society or promote progress by producing graduates for a society we aspire to become in the future' (Hurtado et al.1999, p. 19).

## Historical Context and Background

Involuntary minorities in general are often the result of a settling population which conquers or dislocates indigenous groups. Israel is a nation with an uneasy relationship with its indigenous population, which has grim memories, stories, and experiences related to decades of periodic warfare.

Sachar, (2013, p. 25) argued that Jews were viewed as a 'despised and oppressed minority' worldwide with a right to the land of Israel. He suggests that they saw their position as one which initially provided safety for a population spread throughout the eastern diaspora, especially those living in Russia during the nineteenth century.

Israel emerged as a new state upon the termination of the British Mandate in Palestine on 14th May 1948 (Forman and Keder (2004). Palestine was partitioned into two separate states for Jews and Arabs, containing 56% and 42% of the territory, respectively (Abu- Saad and Champagne, 2006). When the state of Israel was declared, it was defined 'as the state of the Jewish people, inheritor of the biblical land of Israel and the Kingdom Judah' (Merza, 2012, p. 1). War erupted as a result of opposition by representatives of the Arab League and Palestinian Arabs to the partition plan (Pappe, 1994; Landau, 2015) and was fought against Lebanon and Syria in the north, and Iraq and Transjordan in the east. In addition, there was fighting along the border of Egypt in the south, and against Palestinians living in the country at the time (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Knesset.gov.il/holidays/eng/independence\_day\_war.htm).

Before the war, Arabs formed the majority in Palestine, comprising two-thirds of the population (Al Haj, 2002, p. 172). The official armistice, which brought the hostilities to an end in July 1949, left more than 6,000 Jews and between 12,000 and 15,000 Palestinians dead (Golani and Manna, 2011). In addition, 78% of Palestinians who had lived in mandatory Palestine were relegated to refugee status (Morris, 1988; Golani and Manna, 2011). At the end of the war, Israel controlled 78% of the territory, conceding the West Bank to Jordan and Gaza to Egypt. This war, which is referred to as 'the War of Independence' by Jews and 'Nakba' (catastrophe) by Palestinians, can be understood from different narratives, as historical events are perceived with different emphases and memories. Palestinians for example, had to deal with a homeland lost. Their society had all but fallen apart, and many of their villages had been destroyed (Golani and Manna, 2011). Accordingly, many recognised the war as an ongoing crisis (Natour, 2016). Jews, in contrast, celebrated the birth of a country which provided safety and a home, allegedly free of discrimination, oppression, and persecution. The state’s independence is grandly and officially celebrated (by Jews) each year. This takes place on the day after Remembrance Day, which officially mourns all soldiers and civilians killed in conflicts since the state's founding.

Jewish sovereignty in ancient Israel was suspended in 74 AD and inhabitants have been subjected to various levels of xenophobia throughout the diaspora for two millennia (Pedahzur and Yishai, 1999). In particular, the near annihilation of European Jewry during World War 2 served as the catalyst and driving force for the establishment of a homeland for Jews. This took place in a country with an indigenous Arab civilian population that was generally unwilling and unhappy about the new status quo. Today this population is striving for independence and recognition, while at the same time living side by side with a population some perceive as usurpers (Hussein and McKay, 2003).

Two societies exist within the state of Israel: Jewish society that dominates and Palestinian-Arab society that is dominated by the Jewish hegemony, and lives at fluctuating levels of friction with the majority society. One implication of this is that Palestinian and Jews inhabit two separate spaces, with separate education systems. (Arar and Massry-Herzalah, 2017, p. 39)

### The Current Population of Israel

The current population of Israel (April, 2018) is 8,842,000 million residents. (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/latest-population-statistics-for-israel>). According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2017), 6.1 were Jews, comprising 75%; 1.7 were Arab citizens of Israel, comprising 20.7%; and 350,000 others account for the remaining 4.3 %. Christian Arabs make up slightly less than 2% of the total population (<http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st02_02&CYear=2017>)

Muslim Arabs, most of whom are Sunni, constitute a population of almost 1.5 million, and reside mostly in small towns and villages throughout the country. Within this larger group, there are approximately 250,000 Bedouin, connected to thirty tribes.

Circassians, were offered a home in the Ottoman Empire after the Russian conquest of Circassia and the Caucuses in 1864 and its subsequent deportation of inhabitants. They number approximately 4,500 in Israel. They are Muslim, but constitute an unusual group as they lack the cultural background of larger Islamic societies. As non-indigenous citizens, they do not identify with the perceived historical injustices of native populations and have chosen to identify themselves as Israeli citizens. Men may choose to serve in the Israeli Defence Forces and women can participate in national community service. Although they maintain close ties with their own languages, the school-age children in this community are taught in Hebrew (Merza, 2012).

Approximately 137,300 Druze inhabit northern Israel. The Druze community is officially recognized as a separate religious entity. Its members speak Arabic and their culture is Arab. However, their faith is a new interpretation of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is not open to conversions from others of different religions. Members of this community may choose to serve in the Israeli Defence Forces as they voted against the nationalism of the mainstream Arab community in 1948 (Aridi, 2001).

Christian Arab citizens of Israel are an unusual if not unique minority as they do not conveniently fit into the category of ‘Palestinian’ or ‘Jew’. The displacement of Christianity by Islam in the Middle East, the birth of Israel, and the immigration of millions of Jews from the diaspora to Israel has left the Christians of the area a significant minority. Today, the Christian Arabs of Israel number approximately 168,000 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017, http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ\_shnaton\_e.html?num\_tab=st02\_02&CYear=2017). They are further separated from each other as they are affiliated to different churches including the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Armenian Churches.

One of the most significant demographical changes in Israel has been a slower growth rate in the Christian population compared with the Muslim and Druze populations. In Nazareth, the number of Christians fell from 52% in 1961 to 34% in 2002 (State of Israel Prime Minister's Office and the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

There are assumptions and generalizations in the literature regarding the word 'Palestinian'. On the one hand, Palestine is mostly and non-specifically used to name an area of land that existed before the land became known as Israel, and Palestinians are the Arab indigenous inhabitants of the area before 1948. Although I have differentiated between the different groups, Arab inhabitants are not always differentiated according to their religions (Kanaaneh, 2002; Smooha, 2002). I understand Palestine today to mean the contested area of land, encompassing the 'Green Line' (1949) boundaries as well as the territories of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Eastern Jerusalem (Appendix 3)

## Summary

This introduction included a brief history, aimed at providing a background regarding the different groups living within Israel's borders. Arabs and Jews regard sovereignty over the same land as being rightful and essential for their existence and both describe themselves as ‘victims of outsiders as well as each other’s violence’ (Bickerton and Klausner, 2018, p.4).

It also introduces and situates my research and explains its purpose. From here onward, the thesis is organized into the following sections: Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion, and Conclusions.

In the Literature Review, I have attempted to broaden the context within which the research question is situated. It contains an explanation of the overall education system in Israel and raises questions related to policy decisions as well as Israel's democratic status. In addition, it addresses some of the theoretical perspectives regarding issues of integration and cultural difference, especially within the field of education.

The next chapter investigates the concept of methodology from a philosophical and practical standpoint. It considers potential approaches to the enquiry as well as focusing on feminism as a position which has particular methodological relevance. I offer personal responses in this section which relate to my presence in Israel as well as a reflection about becoming bilingual. It also explains the process of analysis in order to make clear the process from data to findings and representation. This sections leads into ‘The Findings’ chapter which presents historical reflections, experiences within academia and individual perceptions of self as overarching domains. It introduces the main theme and sub themes and offers graphical representations as a means to show as clearly as possible hierarchies and relationships pertaining to the data.

The Conclusions chapter answers the research question and addresses the relevance and implications of the study. It also offers recommendations for policy and practice as well as explaining the limitations of the research.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

Individuals often find themselves living in different social, cultural, religious, and linguistic environments from that of their birth. This means they need to deal with challenges related to their lifestyle, which may be different from those of the majority society (Parekh, 2005).

This review intends to illustrate how higher education experiences and opportunities are related to a larger framework of life in Israel. Higher education as experienced by Christian Arab women draws on a variety of historical, political, social, cultural, and religious constructs; accordingly, a significant part of this thesis has been dedicated to explore this, in order to situate the research.

### Terminology and Definitions

Simpson and Yinger (2013) suggested that having a clear definition of a term or concept enables individuals to clarify thought and understand more deeply. This in itself is not a controversial statement. However, their suggestion that any definition cannot be 'true' in a final sense is significant, as it is aligned epistemologically with the individual and unique perceptions of 'truth' of qualitative research. It accepts that definitions need to remain flexible because they may change. This can be understood more clearly in the study of Liebler et al. (2017), which found that 9.8 million people had responded differently in the 2010, compared with 2000, when asked on the U.S.A Census about their race.

Ironically, this may indicate either certainty or uncertainty, so I believe it is important to relate to the concepts of race and ethnicity carefully. The participants in this study are Arabs, and I understand Arabs to be somewhat united by language, culture, and history. Within the larger Arabic group, there are divisions, differences, and similarities related to countries of origin, religion, and culture.

In the Introduction, I mention the words ethnic and race. My research describes ethnic minority women, so I clarify my understanding of the terms. The word ethnic is defined as 'relating to a population subgroup (within a larger or dominant national or cultural group) with a common national or cultural tradition' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The word race is defined as 'a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Definitions of the word 'minority' have remained relatively stable over the years. This is despite both theoretically and practically a greater tolerance for difference, a move away from an ethnocentric ideology, the relatively new concept of globalization and subsequent migrations and demographic changes as a result. In 1945, Louis Wirth described a minority as

any group of people who because of their physical and cultural characteristics are singled out from others in a society in which they live for differential and unequivocal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (p. 347).

Seventy years on, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* described minority as 'a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group (2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/minority>. Retrieved May 15th 2018).

Minority status does not necessarily correlate with population size. In some cases, one or more so-called minority groups may have a population many times the size of the dominating group. This could apply to blacks under apartheid, and women, for example.

In 1951, Helen Mayer-Hacker defined a minority group to be one which was singled out for different and unequal treatment because of its physical and cultural characteristics (p. 60). Her ground-breaking work at the time raised questions regarding both the status of women and their perceptions regarding their lives in an essentially male dominated society. On the same theme, Ogbu and Simons (1998) prioritized the words power and power relations as defining factors relating to a minority group, as opposed to the number of individuals involved.

I chose to study only women. When I mention that women are the minority gender, my intention is to relate to and define minority in terms of power distribution rather than by number. Women are a still a minority in the sense that they lack authority and the right to choose, and have less privilege and prestige as compared with men (Erofeeva, 2013; Osotimehin, 2013). In addition, women are still discriminated against in various places within the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres (Demirgüç-Kunt, Klapper, and Singer, 2013; Goldenberg and Roberts, 2013; Cohen-Almagor, 2018). I relate to this again in section 2.3.1.

## Israel - Democracy or Ethnocracy?

### Interpreting Democracy

Different interpretations of democracy exist. Ghanem (1998) contended that Israel cannot be eligible for democracy status, as it does not fulfil the basic premise of what a democracy stands for which he understands to be two or more groups as being equal in practice. He contends it should comprise their equal participation in deciding the common good of the state and their members having the opportunity to enjoy the same civil rights.

Without entering the debate about the nature of modern democracy, we perceive it as a system of government based on several key principles: (a) equal and inclusive citizenship and civil rights; (b) popular sovereignty and universal suffrage; (c) protection of minorities; and (d) periodic, universal, and free elections. (p. 255)

Giddens (2013) also included the importance of egalitarianism in a democracy and Sullivan and Transue (1999) and Almond and Verba (1963) emphasised the importance of equal influence regarding a country's citizens within the political debate.

Yiftachel (2006) too, declined to describe Israel as a democracy. He described the state as an 'ethnocratic regime' (p. 3) and one which promotes the growth of a main group through dominating power structures whilst promoting a democratic façade. He offered three observations about Israel (p. 5), which challenge the basic principles of a modern democracy.

* The advancement of Jewish over Arab citizens.
* The privileging of Jewish diaspora (and hence immigrants) over local Arab citizens.
* The blurring of state borders, which allows West Bank Jewish settlements to continue to form a (de facto) part of Israel, while their immediate Palestinian neighbours become disenfranchised.

According to Yiftachel (2006), settler colonization is characterized by different ethno classes. These include a founding dominant and politically driven group, a group of later but similar immigrants of different cultural backgrounds, as well as deposed indigenous group or groups. According to Sassen (1999), a later discrete class of people who are characteristic of an ethnocracy includes immigrant workers brought in as a result of globalization philosophy and practice, but who largely remain absent from the society's main political framework and cultural character (p. 151).

It is hard to argue that Yiftachel's (2006) remarks regarding ethnocracy do not apply to Israel. Israel had founding fathers and there have been waves of Jewish immigrants since the country's inception. In addition, Israel has an Arab-speaking indigenous population as well as 'guest' or 'alien' workers who regularly enter Israel from Thailand and the Philippines. Smooha (1997) suggested that Israel should be defined as an ethnic democracy, as it recognizes ethnic differences and accords some collective rights. However, he noted that Israel fails to treat all groups equally, which he claimed is an issue demanding further investigation.

The words 'systematic exclusion' were used by Jabareen, (2006, p. 1055) to describe the daily problems of Arabs in Israel. He asserted that 'the state practices systematic and institutionalized discrimination in all areas, including land dispossession and allocation, housing, education, language, economics, culture, and political participation' (p. 1055). This is supported by Ghanem (1998), who focused on the exclusion of Arab citizens of Israel at the structural (political decision making, compulsory military service, broadcast media) and operative (discrimination in budgets, legislation and allocation of lands) levels. Rabinowitz (2017) focused on the situation of Arabs in Israel as a group not only dispossessed of lands and rights, but also limited in terms of any sort of growth within new and emerging environments. Margalit (2017) noted that Bedouin are still displaced and dispossessed of their lands.

Al Haj (2002) claimed that Jewish Arab relations have developed under the shadow of conflict. This appears to manifest itself as a feeling of injustice on the part of the Arab citizens of Israel who have to find a way to exist in a situation of limited opportunities in a society whose ‘democracy is not always compatible with the ethno-national character of the state’ (p.173).

However, Ghanem (1998) and Al Haj (2002) conceded that Israel is different from, and better than some countries, as it offers clearly defined rights to its ethnic minority groups. There is representation for Arab citizens of Israel, there are opportunities for integration, and some integration exists. There are different political philosophies and parties, elections – open to scrutiny, free press, and civilian authority over the army, as well as popular support for democratic institutions, society, economy, and the media. Smooha (1997) noted that Arab citizens can collectively pursue the struggle for change, and do not face repression by the authorities. Al Haj (2002) relates opportunities for ‘collective struggle’ as ‘being an integral part of the citizenship and national components of their (Palestinian) identity’ (p.173).

This indicates that there is a platform which acknowledges Arab citizens, and a system recognising protest. However, having a stage to dissent, air views, and organize does not necessarily empower Arab citizens to generate and implement change. Although all citizens of Israel have freedom of speech, movement, organization, religion, and the right to vote, there are restrictions which intimate policies of exclusion built into a system which claims to abide by democratic principles.

### Human Rights

In 1989, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights created a document which is specifically related to indigenous minority groups (Alfredsson, 1989). This document cited 28 rights of indigenous peoples, including 'the right to maintain and use their own languages for administrative, judicial and other administrative purposes' (Article 8), and 'the right to all forms of education, in particular the right of children to have access to education in their own languages, and to establish, structure and control their own education systems and institutions' (Article 9) (p. 258).

A recent amendment to the document in August 2013 set out to provide 'the protection of the distinct identity and cultural integrity of indigenous peoples through

* The right to maintain and strengthen their distinct cultural institutions (Article 5)
* The right to belong to an indigenous community of a nation in accordance with the customs of the community or nation concerned (Article 9)
* The right to practice, revitalize and transmit their cultural traditions and customs (Article 11)
* The right to control their own education systems and institutions providing education in their own language (Article 14 and 15)
* The right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures, customs, spirituality, traditions and judicial systems (Article 34)
* The right to maintain control and develop their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge (Article 31)
* The right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Article 8 (1)).

In a 1998, the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website stated that Israel had signed the international covenant for human rights and the humanitarian articles of the Helsinki delegation. It went on to say that Israel was faced with a challenge of protecting human rights and that was especially relevant in light of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The literature tends to emphasise what is not being done rather than what is, and much of it charges Israel with intolerant government policies (Suleiman, 2002; Arar, 2012). However, Israel has been broadly able to show that it meets almost all the above-mentioned amendments, with the exception of articles 14 and 15. Arabs in Israel do not have autonomy over their education system (Jabareen 2006; Agbaria, 2015).

### The Democratic Paradox

The document which served as a policy blueprint for Israel’s treatment of Arab citizens was the Proclamation of Independence, created at the same time as the War of Independence or Nakbe. This document, published in English in 1948, made the following assertions:

[The State of Israel] will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the holy places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of The Charter of the United Nations. ([www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm); https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/231)

A more recent statement referring to some of the above points regarding the Christians of Israel and women in particular, can also be accessed in English through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Israel’s minorities, including over one million citizens who are Arabs always have full civil rights. Israel’s government will never tolerate discrimination against women. Israel’s Christian population will always be free to practice their faith. This is the only place in the Middle East where Christians are fully free to practice their faith. They don’t have to flee. In a time when Christians are under siege in so many places, in so many lands in the Middle East, I’m proud that in Israel Christians are free to practice their faith and there is a thriving Christian community in Israel. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.) (http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/People/Pages/SOCIETY-%20Religious%20Freedom.aspx)

Theoretically, policy in Israel appears to support its minority populations, so it is puzzling that there is harsh criticism in the literature regarding their difficulties. Life in Israel for Arab-speaking citizens appears to represent a reality which does not entirely reflect the promises made by governments.

### Multiculturalism and Pluralism – Approaches Within a Democratic Framework

Multiculturalism is an approach which functions within a democracy. In spite of the evidence that suggests that all of Israel's citizens are not treated equally, there is a framework in place, which in part explains the contradictions between policy and practice.

Multiculturalism in its broad form makes it possible for people to live together as a whole, but separately in their own groups (Karayanni, 2007). A pluralist ideology appreciates and accepts cultural groups on their own terms and understands they have unique socially mediated ways of perceiving the world. It is a response to the problems associated with assimilation offering integration at a level which enables autonomy for individuals within their cultural group structures. A multicultural philosophy desires to empower and respect difference.

Karayanni (2007) isolated four accommodations related to Israel which indicate a respectful approach to difference. One is religious jurisdiction. Arab-speaking citizens of Israel have the legal right to control matters of marriage, divorce, child custody, maintenance, and inheritance.

Another is the official status of the Arabic language. In addition, there is the existence of a separate education system (in Arabic), and there is the exemption of Christians and Muslims from national service.

However, as well as serving the aim of respecting cultural difference, accommodations also present problems which impact on daily life, going some way to provide explanations relating to the democratic paradox. In every case, there is an argument as to why to accommodate, but on the other hand, there are implications which adversely affect life experiences and opportunities.

A system which defers to cultural difference has to have ways of implementing a reality which is as good as it can be for all citizens. It is unclear, in the case of Israel, whether granting the abovementioned accommodations has ensured a safer more cohesive society, and one which is best for women.

Within this framework, I chose to begin a research project that touches on the lives of a group of Christian Arab women in higher education, living in the politically disputed and troubled state of Israel, a country which, despite its complexities, is a place which offers high-level study opportunities and first-class research institutions and facilities.

## Education

### Women and Higher Education

Research which supports the aim of broadening knowledge relating to women's higher education is valuable, as women's experiences regarding schooling are complex, diverse, and culturally specific. This study, which approaches the higher education experience from a multidisciplinary perspective, intends to add to this knowledge base.

The situation for women is changing, and sometimes for the better. In developing countries, in particular, educating women is a growing phenomenon related to greater productivity, improved health, and social and personal development (King and Hill, 1993; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Jackson, 2009; Ames, 2013).

A consistent theme is one which proposes that women are choosing education in order to access opportunities otherwise denied to them, in order to improve their future life choices (Pessart-Shubert, 2003; Pardhan, 2005; Froerer, 2012; Ames, 2013). This theme was reflected in my study, as the relationship between higher education and future life choices was unanimously acknowledged.

In part, it is the result of greater awareness regarding power and awareness of potential shifts of power within structures which help women realize their potential in ways previously inaccessible. In Nigeria, for example, Mark and Asheazi (2016) equated educating women with empowerment, and argued that education gives women opportunities to break free from cycles of marginalization and poverty reinforced through generations. Shah, Lodhi, and Ahmed (2016) found that in a province of Pakistan, highly educated women were more socially empowered than less educated women. The study recommended that the continuing struggle for access to higher education is important for women, and emphasised the role of government in ensuring that women are guaranteed socio-economic development.

Empowerment is an enduring theme. In a study concerning Israeli Arab women, a participant chose the words 'today a woman's weapon is her studies' (Cinamon et al., 2016, p. 134), perhaps to emphasise and imply a belief in the strength and influence of higher education in future life choices and opportunities for women.

However, in some parts of the world, there are still barriers to higher education for women. Sahu, Jeffery, and Nakkeeran (2017) indicated deeply rooted gender inequality, sometimes connected to social, cultural, and economic constraints. In some cases, there are existing frameworks which offer potential chances, on the one hand, while contradicting with difficulties of practical realisation, on the other (Pardhan, 2005; Adely, 2009; Anastasia and Teklemariam, 2011; Froerer, 2012).

On a practical level, this relates to educational opportunities which simply may not be feasible or accessible. Reasons for this could be related to location, transportation, family responsibility, fees, disability, cultural priority, and so on (Pardhan, 2005). It can also include the language of instruction in higher education in countries like Israel, which require fluency of the majority language for students with other native languages.

On a more abstract level, the idea of restraining policies may also refer to attitudes and behaviours of those in power and methods of implementing courses and teaching. Freire (1970), for example, addressed the irony of authority within democracies. He explains how countries may have democratic values theoretically in place while controlling opportunities for students to fully participate in the education process.

This example relates to concepts of power of Bourdieu and Foucault, both of whom advanced theories regarding power structures and negotiation of the dynamics of power for individuals moving between fields. Foucault's theory of disciplinary power (1977) and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (1979) and translated in 1984, were ground-breaking in the way they attempted to account for, explain, and critique the character of power in modern society (Cronin, 1996).

Both theorists focused on the relational aspect of power in society and the ways in which power is transferred and maintained and how structures implying order are preserved. Individuals represent threads of the network serving as the fabric of perpetuation. Freire (1970) focused on perpetuation of weakness as it is internalized as a result of the operating systems in practice. This process - the opposite of self-determination and transformation - is about reinforcing weakness within already weak populations. Bourdieu's emphasis on the embodiment of habitus (Reay, 2004) and capital as individuals move between fields indicates the dichotomy between freedoms serving to reinforce power structures.

Oppression is sometimes disguised. Potentially, theoretically or politically correct moves and laws (which may or may not relate to beliefs regarding gender equality and human rights) are undermined by practice which does not entirely allow the full consumption and enjoyment of the services available. In addition to this, and to further protect the disguise and support the structures of misused power, there is the long-term internalization and acceptance of oppression through the socialized channels of culture. This leads to an even greater need for research which addresses at a grass-roots level what is available, what is going on and how education is working – or not – for the women who represent a significant part of the world's population and future.

Looking at how power is exercised from the perspective of the oppressed, Rose (1999) referred to Foucault's indication that power is dynamic, acting as a creative force which is able to shape and develop individuals. Abu-Lughod's (1990) study of Bedouin women emphasised the productivity of power, citing Foucault (1980) in order to show the numerous ways it can be creatively employed by a weaker female population in order to gain an important edge in times of need.

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure and forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (p. 119)

In her paper, she focused on the relationship between resistance and power. By examining in great depth different modes of resistance in practice, she endeavoured not only to understand more clearly traditional power structures, but how their enactments and applications enlighten us about the complex interactions of historically changing structures of power (p. 53).

### School Education in Israel

School education and the Arab citizens of Israel is a topic that has been researched extensively and has focused on aspects related to the educational experience, including the social, psychological, academic, political, and cultural. It is difficult to find a policy statement that deliberately sets out to disadvantage Arab students, but the consensus indicates that to some extent, this is what is happening (Arar, 2012).

An enduring theme relates to discrimination regarding resources. This includes the quality of classroom facilities and number of teaching hours (Khattab, 2003; Okun and Friedlander, 2005; Golan-Agnon, 2006; Arar, 2012; Feniger and Ayalon, 2016; Hagar and Jabareen, 2016). Lower budgets indicate a negative effect on outputs related to lower achievement for Arab students (Arar and Massry-Herzalah, 2017).

Founded in 1948, the Ministry of Education made decisions regarding not only what the status of Arabic would be in Israel, but how it would fare in the education system. Most children learn within the state education system, but Jewish and Arab schoolchildren, as well as secular and religious Jews, are normally segregated (Arar, 2012; Agbaria, 2016).

Sectors include the Jewish State Secular, the Jewish State Religious, the Jewish Independent (Ultra-Orthodox), the State Arab sector further subdivided into Arab, Bedouin and Druze, and independent Christian and Druze sectors (Feninger and Ayalon, 2016). Christians benefit from its independent sector which is characterized by high educational and behavioural standards (Feniger and Ayalon, 2016) which many perceive as a practical solution for closing the educational gap between the Arab and Jewish sectors. The education system divides and separates the different groups from one another and can be understood as an ironic response to any aims of integration (Agbaria, 2016).

A tight and centralized policy defined the early approach of the state to educational affairs, which focused on the policy objectives of building a ‘nation state’ (p.176) and offering a framework ready to absorb and educate the influx of Jewish immigrants (Benavot and Resh, 2003).

Under the State of Education Law in 1953, the goal of the Ministry of Education was to organize an education system which until today maintains responsibility for educating children from pre-school to grade 12. The Ministry sets both pedagogical policy and organizational policy.

There are four main tiers in the education system. Kindergarten begins from age 5 (which does not take place within the school building and functions as a mandatory culmination of pre-kindergarten programmes), elementary schools teach grades 1–6, junior high or middle schools teach grades 7–9, and upper secondary schools teach grades 10–12). Compulsory education begins in kindergarten and continues until grade 10 (Benavot and Resh, 2003).

There are ongoing debates and disputes surrounding the Arab education system. Arab education in Israel is theoretically the responsibility of the Arab Education Division of the Ministry of Education but the Arab education system does not have authority to determine its goals and criteria. The result is a continuing controversy, because despite having its own curriculum, the Arab education framework is supervised by the Ministry of Education where Arabs do not have significant representation (Abu-Saad and Champagne, 2006; Hagar and Jabareen, 2016). It is possible to note that in the Facts and Figures document (Ministry of Education, 2013) none of the authors was of Arab ethnicity, even though it is clear that policy is set down for the Arab education system in the document. The consequences of this suggest central control is still prevailing, and that Arab educators still have some way to go before they have significant negotiating power regarding the school curriculum.

The curriculum in the Jewish and Arab high schools contains certain compulsory subjects and a number of electives (Feniger and Ayalon, 2016). Both sectors have Hebrew as a required subject but significantly Arabic is an elective in the Jewish sector. Matriculation is based on accumulating points; (each study point is equal to three weekly study hours per year or one a week for three years). Exams can be taken at different levels of difficulty (2, 3, 4, or 5) and points are awarded accordingly. To matriculate, a student needs to attain a minimum of 21 points, including compulsory subjects and one 5-point (advanced) module. However, this certificate is not enough to ensure entrance into higher education as students must also pass an exam to predict academic performance, 'the psychometric entrance test', which includes verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and English (Feniger and Ayalon, 2016).

A system of testing was introduced in Israel in 2002 to check standards of educational attainment in schools (Feniger, Israeli, and Yehuda, 2016). Known locally as 'the Meitzav'(Indices of School Efficiency and Growth), it tests pupils (every three years, in Grades 2, 5, and 8) in native language literacy (Hebrew or Arabic), mathematics, science, and English (Feniger et al., 2012). One aim is to detect gaps and mistakes (Jabareen, 2005) and some policy makers believe that this is useful in raising the achievement of pupils and improving teaching methods, as well as a basis for ensuring transparency and accountability within the school system (Feniger, Israeli, and Yehuda, 2015).

It is difficult to access representative data, as many factors influence results, but it is fair to suggest that the policy to implement this examination pressures schools to focus more on the subjects tested (Feniger, Israeli, and Yehuda, 2015). This implies that native Arabic speakers may lose out on potential hours for learning Hebrew if there is international school-league table that creates pressure to perform well on the Meitzav.

When Or and Shohamy (2017) surveyed the results of the Meitzav in their investigation into English proficiency in Israel, they noted that the Arab sectors as well as the ultra- Orthadox Jews had the worst results compared to the Jewish secular populations.

There is significant activism on the part of Arab civil society which continues to press for more influence for Arabs within the Arab education system and, in particular, its aspirations for control over the curriculum (Jabareen and Agbaria, 2010). The founding of the Arab Pedagogical Council in 2008 was an initiative of political educational activism, through which organizations, groups and activists are able speak out for rights they claim are essentially lacking.

### Educational Approaches in Conflicted Societies

Israel is not the only country where ethnic group differences have created challenges within the education system. Kovac' et al. (2017) described 'inflammable' (p. 32) situations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Ireland and Cyprus, where situations of tension are triggered by political interests and histories of war related to religious or territorial disputes. As schools represent influential settings relating to identity formation, understanding, and development, the organization of education environments and the signals they project are important (Kovac' et al., 2017). Related to this is the idea that schools become vehicles for social change (Hays, McAllister, and Dowds, 2017), that schools can be used in positive ways to facilitate the growth of societies which focus on tolerance between different groups (Danesh, 2006; Weinstein, Freedman, and Hughson 2007) and that interaction between ethnic groups indicates better potential outcomes for reconciliation (Meernik et al., 2016). Although each of the above-mentioned countries is unique, and each government has its own reasons and ways of addressing the situation, a common thread is the challenge of creating an education system which gives representation to all parties once a post conflict situation or peace agreement is evident without creating situations of isolation and segregation.

After changes in approaches to education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Pašalić-Kreso Muratović, Rangelov-Jusović, and Trbić, 2006) and Northern Ireland (Duffy and Gallagher, 2017), in the years since the settling of disputes, both countries have been involved in a different approach to education, whereby teachers, resources, and in some cases, buildings are shared (Gallagher, 2017; Hays et al., 2017; Kovac' et al., 2017). In Northern Ireland, this has been a large project, implemented over four years until 2018 which aims to incorporate 65% of all its schools (Borooah and Knox, 2017). As well as attempting to share mainstream education and improve education, it also has the objective of improving reconciliation outcomes between the groups (Borooah and Knox, 2017; Duffy and Gallagher, 2017). In Northern Ireland, the language aspect is irrelevant, but between the Serb, Croat, and Bosnian communities, it is a factor that is given as one reason for separate administrations and educational programmes, even though in some cases school buildings are shared Kovac' et al., 2017).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Meernik et al. (2016) contended that schools are often still segregated along ethnic lines, which offers an environment potential of perpetuating different ideologies and beliefs. The 'two schools under one roof' policy (Kovac' et al., 2017) is more about resource sharing than breaking down barriers between different ethnic groups by providing a means of contact between the children. So even though the different groups live in relatively close proximity, communities remain disconnected as a result of adherence to beliefs and attitudes and because of formal structures in place by the international community (Kovac' et al., 2017).

The more recent literature stands in some contrast to the positive, widely employed peace integrative curriculum of 2000, implemented in 112 schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, involving thousands of educators and tens of thousands of scholars (Danesh, 2008). The project was mainly sponsored by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency. Their conclusions were that the most important impact, related to interpersonal contact and relationships created between students and teachers, which then resonated into their wider communities (Danesh, 2008). Buyukcanga (2011) also indicated possible relationships between segregation and sustaining conflict, as well as how peace education initiatives could be a contributing factor in peace resolution.

### Education in Arabic: A Blessing or a Curse?

By allowing Arabic to be used as the medium of instruction in schools, policy makers enabled Israel's Arab-speaking citizens not only to strengthen and develop cultural and historical roots and family relationships, but also legitimized Arabic as a language and elevated it to having an official function. Amara et al. (2009) maintained that

keeping Arabic as the language of instruction is what has helped maintain Arabic in the sociolinguistic landscape as an important language, and it has preserved more than anything else the individual national identity of the Arab within the Hebrew state. (p. 142)

Arar (2012) chose the word 'segregated' as opposed to 'separated' to describe the Hebrew and Arabic school environments. This oblique criticism points to the ultimate result of the policy, which was isolation of the Arab sector and creating a substantial divide between the two groups. This ensured that any educational or social encounters between Jewish and Arab children were unusual.

So, while the education system gives an appearance of accommodation to cultural difference and educational pluralism, the respect and importance placed on cultural preservation may serve a deeper aim against integration, and supportive of separation between the groups.

Arab students in secondary education in Arabic have to find time not only to learn Arabic (Arabic features a state of diglossia) (Dakwar, 2005), but also to achieve a level in English and Hebrew good enough to integrate into higher education and the national work force. Literary Arabic is used for writing, while spoken varieties are used for communication. Or and Shohamy (2017) contended that this is a factor accounting for the gap in English achievement in English between the Arab and Jewish populations (p. 67).

In 2013, the Ministry of Education allocated the following hours to language study. Hebrew is not considered a foreign language. English is the first foreign language learned.

Table 1. Weekly Hours of Language Education in Israel for the Hebrew and Arab Sectors

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LANGUAGE EDUCATION** | **GRADES  1 – 6** | **GRADES 7-9** | **GRADES 10-12** |
| **Arab sector**  **Reading, writing, literature – ARABIC AND HEBREW** | 10.3 | 9.3 | 10 |
| **Foreign language (ENGLISH)** | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| **Jewish sector  Reading, writing, literature – HEBREW** | 7.7 | 6 | 4 |
| **Foreign language (ENGLISH)** | 2 | 4 | 6 |

Source: Facts and Figures Ministry of Education, 2013.

In the document it is not specified in the Arab sector, how many hours are to be allotted to Arabic and how many to Hebrew. There are extra hours allotted in the Arab sector to account for learning Hebrew, as Hebrew literacy is a requirement for higher education. Whether this is enough, is investigated in this thesis. This table also indicates pressure on school administrations and, in some cases, potential for inconsistencies regarding what and how to prioritize within the domain of language study on the part of the school.

Ironically, the decision to respect the cultural and linguistic importance of Arabic created a barrier that potentially disabled many opportunities for harmonious and constructive relationships between the two groups. And this would have been the case even if there were a natural proximity between groups (Arar, 2012; Hagar and Jabareen, 2016).

### Alternative Education: For Some, Not All

Co-existence may indicate a cooperative lifestyle for different groups living in close proximity. Frequently the term has implied political influence, as its implementation often relies on government funding and legal and practical support to provide the opportunities to bring people together by way of programmes and initiatives which positively serve everyone involved. During the last few decades there have been efforts in Israel by educators and social scientists to evaluate education programmes aiming to develop behaviours which advance tolerance and co-existence (Stephan, Hertz‐Lazarowitz, Zelniker, and Stephan, 2004).

The only possible mass collective official educational meeting place between Arabs and Jews before 1997 was in the higher education environment. Since then, there have been a number of bi-lingual and bicultural initiatives.

A movement to promote mixed education using both Hebrew and Arabic resulted in the foundation of the non-governmental organization (N.G.O.), the Centre for Bilingual Education in Israel, which in 2003 changed its official name to Hand in Hand – The Centre for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel (Arar and Massry-Herzalah, 2017). It focuses on teaching in an environment where both Hebrew and Arabic are the languages of instruction to all pupils. Hebrew and Arabic speakers learn together in order to promote a behaviour which supports their beliefs of overcoming conflict and living harmoniously.

At the beginning of the school year in 2016, 1,500 students attended Hand in Hand schools in six locations in Israel. These schools are non-religious and accredited by the Ministry of Education. There is a strong common goal among parents and teachers centred on an ideological belief regarding the need to co-exist. This implies cross-group recognition and tolerance combined with securing a confident individual identity (Beckerman, 2004).

In addition, there is a flourishing Ministry of Education programme called Education for Shared Life in most of the secular elementary schools in the mixed city of Ramle (Payes, 2017). In keeping with Danesh (2006, 2008), and Weinstein et al. (2007), and their research in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Section 2.3.3), ‘it is based on the assumption that regular face-to-face contact has the power to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations’ (Payes, 2017, p.20). Its aims are to improve relations between Jews and Arabs and raise educational standards (Payes, 2017). The programme in Ramle has incorporated the methodology of cooperative education programmes in Northern Ireland (Section 2.3.3), which has delivered benefits to both the society and the students (Payes, 2017).

However, the conclusions of this study indicated that in spite of a mission to provide a balance and equality between groups, the programme does operate on unequal status. Mainly this is due to the higher socio-economic status of the Jewish community and the fact that the contact language of the school is Hebrew. In addition, the Jewish students tend to be higher achievers.

Yet, the strong positive teacher relationships, co-operative syllabus design and the importance attributed to Arabic as a carrier of culture do much to provide an environment of tolerance, as well as playing a part in mitigating local disputes and conflicts outside the school and within the community. Another programme in Jerusalem (2015, 2016) has been initiated and others are beginning in the Negev desert region and centre of the country (Payes, 2017).

Another alternative to state education options are semi-private schools which are supported in part by the state, local council, or both. In the Arab sector, some schools are privately owned, and overseen by different Christian denominations (Okun and Friedlander, 2005). These schools have higher status than state schools, and are understood to provide a broader education and one which is of higher quality. On the surface, there tends to be an overwhelming vote of confidence for these schools which provide a meaningful bridge by way of special programmes and alliances with universities to higher education for the participants. Some of the participants in this research attended these schools and felt initially that the schools provided a better quality educational alternative than schools that were state funded. However, they are only available to families with sufficient funds and those conveniently enough located.

### Curriculum

Agbaria (2016, p. 1) contended that 'all education forms are political by nature and should be seen as sites for political struggle. Hence different socio-political contexts produce different educational regimes'.

In 1913, the Director General indicated that the aims of the education system were to produce 'well-prepared graduates capable of succeeding in a rapidly-changing global village' who were able ‘to actively and meaningfully participate in the work force and contribute to the national economy’. In addition, students were positively encouraged to 'build an Israeli society which is based on love of one's fellows, unity, mutual responsibility and social justice building up and defending the homeland of Israel' (Facts and Figures document (Ministry of Education, 2013, p.5). As not all Arabs are allowed to defend the country and some may not wish to do so, the aims are political and to some extent exclusive.

There appear to be inconsistencies within the school curriculum for Arab and Jewish students. Budget, as previously mentioned in Section 2.3.2, is related of course, but I focus on the more philosophical aspects of perceptions of self and the other as also being important. Telling the story of a people and civilization enables children to understand their ancestry and legitimizes their place in the world, not only as citizens of the future, but as individuals with the wealth and experience of history to guide and inspire them.

Most 'democratic' countries contain diverse populations. Therefore, the relationship between political ideology and a philosophy which at the most basic level respects diversity, can give that attention partially through a school history or culture curriculum. Podeh's (2000) contention that 'forging a nation's collective memory is an integral part of nation building' (p. 65) emphasises the importance and power of education.

Not everyone would agree entirely with the importance of 'nation building' through a school framework (Al-Haj, 2005), especially in divided societies. Normally, the dominant group's perceptions of historical events are most available, especially as a means to rationalize a present, but this may further aggravate feelings of animosity between the groups (Al-Haj, 2005). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the responsibility of any national curriculum in terms of how it relates to past events.

Education policy determines what content is chosen or omitted, what is emphasised in the content, how that content is expressed, and how much time is given to it. If a country's education policy reflects political dogma, then that content will be in the best perceived interests of the nation, according to that viewpoint. Abu-Saad (2008) and Arar (2012) warned of the debilitating effects this might have on nations that have their histories ignored or retold.

It has been the common experience of indigenous peoples to have their histories erased and retold by colonial powers, and all too common for indigenous peoples to be powerless and passive participants in a process of 'de-education', or the dispossession of the knowledge regarding their own peoples and history. (Abu-Saad, 2008, p. 17)

In Bosnia, (as mentioned in Section 2.3.3), different ethnic groups learning in the same building have their own curriculum which represents the different opinions regarding the history and political situation (Kovac' et al., 2017).

In the past, summaries of textbooks have presented Palestinian Arabs as less important than Jews. Regarding co-existence between Jews and Arabs, emphasis is placed in Arab text books but not in Jewish ones. Al Haj (2002) indicated that a sense of isolation from the state of some Arab youth could be related to any lack of heritage content within the school curriculum.

During the 1980s, attempts were made to change the nature of relations between the Jews and Arabs in Israel. With an overall aim of moving toward co-existence, the then Minister of Education, Yitzhak Navon, implemented a policy which aimed at enriching the knowledge of Jews about Arab nations and eliminating expressions of hate and stereotyping (Bar Tal, 2004). While acknowledging improvements in the sense of 'presenting a more open and complex perspective than the previous curriculum',Al Haj (2005) maintained that the ‘new textbooks, like the old ones, present a typical Zionist narrative that aims to safeguard national-Zionist values’ (p. 47). However, he concluded that any attempt at a multicultural ideology is doomed to fail when a ‘specific national ethos’ (p. 47) is central to any dialogue. Studies have explored a link between latent racism in Israeli society and Sheps (2016) contended that generations of Israeli citizens and non-citizens have been exposed to a single cultural narrative. This is most clearly expressed through the history and civics curriculum in schools.

So, returning to the Declaration and its intent to provide freedom, justice, and equality of social and political rights for all - in language, education and culture – a closer look reveals a situation that does not entirely reflect the statement of resolve.

### Future Emphases

More recently, there have been indications that some effort is being made to close the gap between the education systems.

In January 2016, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues published a report which outlined a government approved five-year plan for economic development within the Arab sector. Its aim was to address the gaps between Jews and Arabs in Israeli society. Between 10 and 15 billion New Israeli Shekels (more than 200 million Pounds Sterling) was allocated. According to the report, the four areas related to education outlined for improvements were:

1. enhancing the quality of educational staff and pedagogy in Arab schools;
2. advancing core studies with emphasis on math, Arabic, and Hebrew, as well as '21st century skills';
3. adding new classrooms and promoting constructions of new schools; and
4. developing informal education in Arab localities through a system-wide plan which would ensure that allocation to Arab citizens does not fall below their 20% rate of the general population (today, only 5% of the national budget for informal education is allocated to Arab society (Government Resolution 922. Economic Development Plan for the Arab Sector, 2016).

In the report a mixed response from Arab leaders is acknowledged due to its failure to meet a larger sum requested during negotiations. However, the report was recognised as being unprecedented in scope and an important step in the struggle towards a more equal reality for the Arab citizens of Israel.

### Diversity in Higher Education

The educational environment is one aspect in an otherwise complex world for minorities. It incorporates teachers, teaching methods, services, peers, course content, and physical, political, and geographical context, all of which influence the learning process in some way.

Hurtado et al. (1999) highlighted the complex interconnected relationships concerned with improving the educational experience in higher education environments. Focusing on the educational climate, they emphasised the importance of the interrelationship of a number of factors including racial attitudes, socio history, and structural organisation, as well as the problems of over generalization. This document is important even though it relates to different racial and ethnic minority groups in America, which include 'American Indians, Latinos and African Americans' (p. 15). Like the groups in Israel, these groups have different histories and attitudes regarding their position in American society. Native Americans, for example, as an indigenous population forced into minority status would have a different perspective to that of African Americans.

Related to this is the conclusion regarding diversity in higher education by Gurin et al. (2002) that informal interaction between different racial and ethnic groups is important regarding students' social and academic growth. However, simply putting students into the same environment is not enough, and appropriate organization and planning is necessary to ensure positive interactional outcomes.

In addition to the importance of environment, Ogbu (1992b) declared that the challenges cultural minorities face, are less related to approaches such as 'multicultural education' and more about the minority culture and its relationship to mainstream culture. He contends that in America, ‘minorities whose cultural frames of reference are oppositional to the cultural frames of reference of American mainstream culture have greater difficulty crossing boundaries at school to learn’ (p.5). This indicates that in addition to the educational environment – and any good will involved – satisfying learning outcomes are related to the deeper nature of the connection between the minority and majority cultures..

While cultural, language, and opportunity barriers are very important for all minorities, the main factor differentiating the more successful from the less successful minorities appears to be the nature of the history, subordination, and exploitation of the minorities, and the nature of the minorities' own instrumental and expressive responses to their treatment, which enter into the process of their schooling. In other words, school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the fact that the nature of the minorities' interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure. (Ogbu, 1987, p. 317)

This is very significant for residents of different ethnicities in Israel as the interpretation by individuals regarding the connection between cultures is not straightforward, clear, or generalizable

### Cultural Ecological Theory

Cultural ecological theory is an effort to explain minority school performance and responses to minority education. Ogbu and Simons (1998) identified two main aspects; one, the way minorities are treated or mistreated by mainstream culture, the other, the way minorities choose to or able to react to the opportunities available to them within their school environments.

How minorities relate to their situations from a cultural aspect are important (Ogbu and Simons, 1998) and are known as community factors or community forces. Another feature to be considered is how the group became a minority; and whether it was voluntary or involuntary (Ogbu and Simons, 1998; Foster, 2004).

In a survey of Arab citizens of Israel born from the 1920s to the 1970s, Okun and Friedlander (2005) discovered that the disadvantage of Muslim Arabs can be accounted for only ‘partiallyby differences in the social status of their parents and characteristics of their neighbourhoods’ (p. 163).

They compared different groups including Arabs, Jews, men and women Arab and analysed determinants of educational attainment including social, economic, demographic, and community factors in childhood. Their findings which suggest that ‘long-term historical difference, as well as perceived discriminatory government behaviour need to be taken into account when considering disparity in education achievement’ (p.163), lend support to Ogbu’s claim that long-term historical differences among groups are factors in explaining inconsistencies in educational realizations (Ogbu and Simons, 1998).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) classified minorities into three broad groups:

* voluntary (immigrant minorities);
* refugees, migrant guest workers, undocumented workers; and
* involuntary (non-immigrant minorities).

They also classified descendants or later generations as a separate but related group. Separate, because they are in a different position to that of their forebears, but related, as they are influenced by community forces of their forebears. This is relevant for the purpose of this study, as in Israel, the majority if not all of the Arab student minority population is descended from an original population in place in 1948.

According to Ogbu (1990), those who are involuntary minorities do less well at school than those who are voluntary or autonomous minorities. Whereas voluntary minorities have an instrumental approach to the school environment, involuntary minorities have an oppositional approach. Even in the face of discrimination, voluntary minorities adapt, adjust, and accept, but involuntary minorities develop behaviours which emphasise a sense of mistrust (Foster, 2004).

My research did not per se investigate the factors relating to achievement, did not take place in the U.S.A., and did not deal with children. However, the above-mentioned strands that Ogbu classified as being indicative of 'performance' (the way minorities are treated or mistreated by mainstream culture, and the way minorities perceive and respond to schooling as a consequence of their situation) could be significant in relation to the approaches to higher education of any minority group, including ethnic women in higher education programmes in Israel.

Foster (2004) indicated that cultural ecological theory continues to be a solid resource for researchers interested in minority student communities. However, he made the point that Ogbu was preoccupied with minority and failure and did not emphasise high-achieving minority students. My focus on higher education experience and coping strategies placed emphasis on positive outcomes, as opposed to negative ones.

O'Connor (1997) found that low-income African-American teenagers who ‘expected to realize their ambitions’ (p. 593) and were in fact succeeding academically. These findings also departed from Ogbu's cultural ecological model, as the teenagers expressed optimism and high academic achievement while recognizing their subjugation. Their determination to use infrastructure within the structures which they perceived as being biased helped them toward academic success. This thesis approaches the higher education experience with participants who were succeeding academically and finds O'Connor's findings relating to ambition and determination within a challenging environment relevant.

### Higher Education

Arabs and Jews study side by side in higher education programmes across the country. Arabs in Israel represent 13% of the overall student population while making up 21% of the total population of the country (Zilkha, 2017). Higher education is supervised by the Council for Higher Education and consists of 9 universities and 32 colleges, including 22 teacher training colleges; 12 of these are private and 20 are public (Zilkha, 2017).

The colleges of education, which are accredited teacher training institutions, are funded and supervised by the Ministry of Education (Agbaria, 2010). These were authorized in the 1990s by the Council of Higher Education as a means of expanding and equalizing higher education opportunities in Israel (Ayalon and Yogev, 2005). Evidence indicates however, that providing more physical places to study does not mean they are necessarily utilised by those needing them most. As places are available to all students, they increase opportunities for less able privileged students who are able to exploit second-tier higher education more efficiently than others (Shavit et al., 2007).

The language of instruction in universities and colleges in Israel is Hebrew, with the exception of three education colleges which use Arabic (Council for Higher Education). An implication of this is that any Arab without fluent spoken and written Hebrew will be denied the opportunity to attain a university degree in Israel – unless it is in education. It might be judicious to offer more opportunities for learning in Arabic, but ironically there are indications that the number of Arab students learning in Hebrew speaking colleges of education has increased significantly in comparison with those choosing to study in Arab colleges.

From a practical point of view, higher education in the Arabic language limits work opportunities and career development in Israel. Although there is no universal agreement that higher education represents one of the major channels for social mobility (Al-Haj, 2003; Shohamy and Kanza, 2009), Arab speakers may be disadvantaged. Regarding work, if Arab speakers choose to attend Arabic speaking institutions, without good Hebrew it is likely they will find it more difficult to enter the local job market.

In addition, all students in Israel – whatever their native language – cannot graduate until they have passed an English exam indicating they are able to critically read and understand an academic article in English. This indicates that as well as needing to have fluent Hebrew literacy skills, Arab-speaking students also need reach a high level of English comprehension.

In Israel, there has been an increase in the educational attainment of Arab Israeli women, but their rate of participation in the labour market is still somewhat lower to that of Jewish women. Cinamon, (2009), Abu-Rabia-Quederand Arar (2011).

Smith (2015) emphasised the power of diversity as an agent of social change. In Israel, higher education is regarded as imperative for Arab citizens due to its perceived importance regarding the political and social rehabilitation of the Arab population in the country (Al-Haj, 2003).

As the top jobs of today had not been invented in the year 2000 (Darling-Hammond, 2015), it is important that higher education establishments focus on an education system that will promote and equip students with the skills needed to create an efficient local work force of the future. To create opportunities and develop higher education programmes to maximize opportunities and skills is challenging and to create programmes with diverse student populations is perhaps more so.

Smith (2015) acknowledged that it is time to move on from the place of accepting diversity to the more committed position of how best to build diversity into the centre of higher education, 'where it can serve as a powerful facilitatorof institutional mission and societal purpose' (p. 3).

It is not unusual to find research on Palestinian women in higher education in Israel (Abu Baker, 2002; Sa'ar, 2007; Popper-Giveon and Weiner-Levy, 2012; Geiger, 2013). However, it is more difficult to find literature relating to higher education experiences of Christian women. Research relating to higher education and minority women in Israel includes research with Bedouin women (Pessart-Schubert, 2003, 2004; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2006, 2008, 2010; Halevy, 2009; Abu-Saad, 2016); Druze women (Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy, 2008), and Muslim women, (Arar et al. 2013; Greenberg and Sagiv-Reiss,2013; and Seginer and Mahajna, 2016). As already mentioned in Section 2.1.1, this indicates both an importance and awareness that each group has a unique culture and history relating to the state, and in spite of a shared language - potentially different responses to the multifaceted higher education experience.

All groups recognise that higher education is an important factor for a better future life and has an important socioeconomic impact on development. This is particularly noticeable within the Bedouin society of Israel. As the group at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, enrolment in schools and universities for men and women has increased in tandem with changing attitudes and beliefs about the benefits of education related to work opportunities and a possibility of closing the socioeconomic gaps (Abu-Saad, 2016).

Literature relating to Bedouin women of Israel (Pessart-Schubert, 2003; Halevy, 2009) and Muslim women of Israel (Abu Baker, 2002; Greenberg and Sagiv-Reiss, 2013; Cinamon, Habayib, and Ziv, 2016) all draw attention to continued gender related discrimination within the groups. This is not to say that discrimination within the Christian Arab society does not exist, but with regard to the participants' educational life, this research indicates relative equality within the school environment and support from male family members.

The fact that Christians tend not to live in contested territory within Israel may account for the lack of literature available. They represent a minority within a minority within a minority. This triple jeopardy is related to their being minority Arab citizens within a Jewish state. In addition, minority Christian Arabs constitute a minority within a Muslim Arab majority (Horenczyk and Munayer, 2007). Moreover, they represent the minority gender. In addition, the Arabic language also has minority status when compared to Hebrew.

I hope this study will complement the body of literature which exists regarding the women in Israel. It aims to inform and provide a framework for understanding the implications of higher education for minority culture and language students. In their study on educational experiences of Muslim women, Cinamon et al. (2016) called for further examination of minority groups in Israel, as well as further afield.

## Hebrew and Arabic: The Two Official Languages of Israel

Hebrew is a language that belongs to the group of Semitic languages, and its origins date to the second millennium B.C.E. Historically, it was widely used, but the result of a revolt against Rome in the 2nd century A.D. left the position of Hebrew seriously weakened and Greek and Aramaic replaced it as the local lingua franca (Fellman, 1985; Sáenz-Badillos and Elwolde, 1996). From the third century (until its revival), Hebrew almost ceased to be a spoken language (Dieckhoff, 2004). However, it survived long periods of obscurity due to religious texts which kept the written language available and in use (Fellman, 1973b).

Religion powerfully influences society in the sense that it shapes relationships, values, and aspects of day-to-day existence (McGuire, 2008). The relationship between religion, identity, and language was prominently felt during the Middle Ages and both Latin and Hebrew shared the role of languages providing an important connection for their users. For Jews, religion – and the written language – had been central in determining identity, as the Jews had no shared nationality, only a religion to unite them. Christianity, on the other hand had footholds in a number of places – and the people within them were developing national identities with different languages. The use of Latin was rejected in favour of a modern nationalistic authority (Fellman, 1973a).

There was no common spoken language of Jews living in Palestine before the state of Israel was established and the dominant language in 20th century Ottoman Palestine was Arabic. In addition to being the day-to-day language of the native Arab population, it was also the lingua franca of the Ashkenazi Jews who spoke Yiddish, the Sephardic Jews who spoke Ladino or Judeo-Spanish and others who spoke a range of European languages (Fellman, 1973a).

Today, Hebrew has more than 8 million speakers and is often described as the most successful language revival project, or one of the ‘most outstanding sociolinguistic phenomena of all times’ (Fellman, 1974, p. 427); Freeberg, 2013). Its unprecedented rise to success in Israel is largely related to the 1948 policy to collapse the various Jewish identities into a single category of 'Israeli'. I further discuss acculturation strategies and outcomes in Section 2.5.6. The success of the assimilation project can be ascribed to the desire of the incoming population to take on a new identity. However, the importance of making Hebrew a day-to-day part of the Jewish character had been implemented during the 1880s (Fellman, 1973b). Well before the inception of the country, the language had been revived to a certain extent as a means to unite, identify, and give people a common language – understood to be one of the characteristics necessary to establish an independent nation. The feasibility of implementing an otherwise unspoken language came at a critical time, when more Jews in the Diaspora were themselves being influenced by nationalism, adopting other languages, and potentially jeopardizing Hebrew to the same obscurity as Latin.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda is the individual generally given credit for initiating the resurgence of Hebrew (Fellman, 1974; Safran, 2005). Palestine was a country which offered territory and a place for Jews to rekindle their relationship with Hebrew as well as connect with their biblical roots. In 1948, it was adopted as the language of Israel, and the policy had a clear objective. One language for the Jews exemplified a ‘melting pot’ approach, emphasising assimilation and uniformity. Jews previously scattered around the Diaspora came to Israel with different languages, lifestyles, and experiences. The Jews of different ethnic groups already existing in Palestine and those immigrating into Israel threatened a cohesive Israeli identity and potentially, the legitimacy of the Israeli state. The policy intended therefore to debilitate any attachment to original identities formed in diasporas and provide immigrants with a new language to match their new status and identities (Freeberg, 2013). Any functional mechanism to implement language policy used by a government, however, was only as good as the cooperation of the people it affected, and immigrants arriving in Israel after World War II were a compliant population willing to shrug off previous roots, especially had they been in countries which had either signed up to the Nazi agenda, or chosen to overlook it.

The motivation behind making Hebrew the language of the Jews seemed designed to eliminate differences between people and create a language with which all Jews could mutually identify. However, in doing so, the policy created another and possibly intended linguistic situation which removed the position of Arabic as the main language and lingua franca of the region. The groups of Arabs living in Israel at the time had different religious orientations, but they remained a cohesive and bonded whole by way of their shared knowledge and use of the Arabic language.

Since 1948 and by law, Arabic is an official language of Israel, 'a rare case of an ethnic nation state that grants the language of the minority group with a legal status which is *prima facie* in practice one of equality' (Saban and Amara, 2002, p. 22). The status of the two languages, however, is not perceived as equal. Hebrew is part of a national identity, while Arabic is a language mostly used and understood by the Arab community (Falah, 2017).

In spite of a legal obligation to publish legislation in Arabic, ensure all official forms be available in Arabic, and create full access in Arabic to courts and civil service, there tends to be a consensus that Arabic is largely declarative (Harel-Shalev, 2005; Jabareen, 2006; Yitzhaki, 2010). In addition, the status of Arabic has eroded over the years. Arabic is not perceived as a state language; even though it has official status and the restricted use of Arabic in public domains reflects its 'unimportance in the national Israeli sociolinguistic fabric' (Amara et al., 2009, 142; Shohamy and Kanza, 2009).

At a pragmatic level, Arab speakers enjoy the right to preserve culture through institutions and are able to benefit from Arabic-speaking theatre, newspapers, and television channel (Harel-Shalev, 2005). However, it is the Hebrew language that remains essential for day-to-day functioning in Israel. Today when Arab speakers leave their town or village, they are almost unable to function without Hebrew (Amara et al., 2009). The irony of this is that today they are becoming a bilingual population, whereas many native Hebrew speakers do not speak Arabic. This indicates a perceptive psychological power shift in a global world where more is often equated with more choices*,* and more choices often offer better outcomes.

Regarding its adoption of a dual official language policy in 1948, incorporation rather than omission was the politically correct move on the part of the government (Arar, 2012). Today, as Israel is not perceived in a positive light on the international stage, any attempts to further demoralize its Arab citizens by officially removing Arabic's status would be a dubious move in the current political climate. However, in 'covert ways', policy ensures that Hebrew not only dominates but is the vehicle for full participation in society (Shohamy and Kanza, 2009, p. 84).

## Language, Culture, and Identity

### Historical Overview and a Changing Global Society

Who we are, how we fit into our environments, and the connection between our private and outer selves, has philosophical roots. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all debated the mystery of personal identity and how an individual relates to the larger world in different ways (Gioia, 1998). The continuing debate is complex (Lin, 2013), as groups become part of a more integrated world culture.

Concepts of culture have changed throughout history. Franz Boas (1852-1942), broke away from early racial and evolutionary concepts and emphasised the peculiarity of culture as a response to a group's reaction to their environmental conditions and specific historical development (van Meijl, 2008). Cultures are at their most basic level, unique interpretations of circumstances and events which create lifestyles, which themselves become the catalyst for creating new events. Therefore, culture is not a fixed entity, but rather an evolving way of being that differentiates one group from another (van Meijl, 2008).

Parekh (2005) defined culture as an 'inherited system of meaning and significance' (p. 3) and related activities, relations, and life in general to the value attached to them. Collective identity is created, he suggested, when systems of meaning are embodied in beliefs and practice.

Since the onset of globalization, culture, in the sense that it describes and differentiates between peoples, has become a concept that affects more people in tangible ways and plays a central role in popular discourses of multicultural societies (van Meijl, 2008). Therefore, over the last decades, the degree and intensity of the relationships between countries has increased dramatically (Arnett, 2002), involving more people in the business of adaptation and cooperation, and forcing more states to take a cooperative rather than an autocratic position regarding their mixed communities.

Individual mobility has increased for a number of reasons, including better technology and communications, and cheaper, more efficient travel. Individuals today have financial, professional, and practical opportunities to live in different places and initiate temporary or permanent life-changing experiences. However, along with the possibilities that mobility offers, an exposure to multiple cultural, racial, linguistic, social, and educational experiences may be challenging.

An expanding global job market is sometimes seen as the chief engine driving the movement of people around the world; an adverse side of globalization is often perceived as being one which breaks apart stable and homogenous communities and the common cultural identity they have created. Although it might be argued that a tendency to homogenize further weakens bonds, Smolicz and Secombe (2002) and Tomlinson (2003) noted that paradoxically, the deeper globalization digs in, the more determined individuals are to reclaim disappearing cultural identities and preserve them.

In contrast to moves initiated by choice generated by desires for personal gain or opportunity, individuals are sometimes obliged to move for more or less serious reasons triggered by crises at home. These might include coups and ethnic cleansing (Roizblatt and Pilowski, 1996), economic collapse or lack of work, wars, and extreme phenomena such as environmental degradation, biological hazards, disease epidemics, technological hazards, and geophysical hazards (Myers, Slack, and Singlemann, 2008).

Vertovic (2007) uses the example of the phrase 'world in one city' (p. 1025), which became the slogan for the successful 2012 U.K. Olympic bid. It emphasises not only diversity, but the evolving role of 'super diversity' (p. 1024) apparent in so many countries in the world.

Larger societies may also incorporate culturally different smaller groups in various ways and for various reasons into their greater whole. For different reasons an invading tribe will encroach into already inhabited lands and conquer and sometimes marginalize indigenous societies. The outcome of each scenario is that majority and minorities co-exist in different ways, depending on how the balance of power is organized by the majority and interpreted by the minority.

The reality of today is that worldwide, people of different cultural origins are in contact on a regular basis as they share the same and permanent home base. People of different cultural backgrounds meet, collaborate, and live together. This impacts the political arena, beginning with its philosophy towards migration, which then influences policy funding and organized social and practical response on a national scale (Vertovic, 2007).

The indigenous Arabs of Israel are an example of a group whose physical boundaries have not changed, but its position of power and autonomy within borders have been subject to political change as a result of incursion, war, and international law.

### Identity, Language, and Perceptions of Self

One significant consequence of migration or changing demographical circumstances is that it has implications regarding the individual and group perception of self (van Meijl, 2008, p. 166). Literature related to identity can be investigated from separate and interrelated disciplines (Norton, 1997; Riley, 2007; Block, 2009) and can be understood from both structuralist and post-structuralist positions.

Block (2009) offers a comprehensive summary of the broadly post-structuralist approach of identity, which he claims has been adopted by many social scientists.The following quotation is lengthy, but considering the complexities of identity, this account manages to incorporate and relate different aspects as well retaining clarity and focus.

these social scientists frame identities as socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language. Identity work, occurs in the company of others – either face to face, or in electrically –mediated mode with whom, to varying degrees individuals share beliefs, motives, values, activities and practices. Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future. Individuals are shaped by their socio-histories, but they also shape their socio-histories as life goes on. The entire process is conflictive as opposed to harmonious and individuals often feel ambivalent. There are unequal power relations to deal with, around the different capitals – economic, cultural and social – that both facilitate and constrain interactions with others in the different communities of practice with which individuals engage in their lifetimes. Finally, identities are related to different traditionally demographic categories such as ethnicity, race, nationality, migration, gender, social class and language. (Block, 2009, p. 27)

This thesis investigated higher education experiences of Christian Arab women students in Israel and hoped to investigate how the women identify themselves relating to their multicultural and bi-lingual education environment. As participants switch between home and college environments regularly, the impacting influences of culture and language are significant.

Incorporating some of the ideas of Block (2007) and Norton (1999), it is important to accept any collective identity with its symbolic construction, socio-history and political implications (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002). Living in a conflicted environment indicates different perceptions of past events, and provoke different feelings regarding the legitimization of the others' perspective, as well as acknowledging the different narratives (Sagy et al., 2002). Much has been written about the different narratives between the Jews and Arabs generally living in Israel, but only a small number of studies have looked into the relations between the Christians and other Arab groups (Srour et al., 2013).

Reasons for this might include that Christians and Muslims share a language, Arab heritage and a once common Palestinian historical belonging. In addition, there have been mutual historical conflicts against the Ottomans, British, and Jews, and together, both groups are a minority population in Israel.

Paradoxically, Srour et al. (2013) concluded that shared enemies and a common belonging encourage a mutual acceptance, whereas religious and social differences create problems between the groups. Christians therefore find themselves with some things in common with other Arab groups, which give reasons for attachment and others which provoke rifts.

Despite being a newer religion than Christianity, (which began with the life of Muhammed ibn Abd Allah (570–632) (Donner, 1999)), Islam has developed into a powerful religion worldwide. It represents the main opposition in many countries, including Israel (Esposito, 1999).

The number of Christians in Israel is significantly smaller than the number of Muslims, (Section 1.2), and the religious histories and beliefs of both groups differ. Although there may be essentially an awkwardness regarding allegiances, Azaryahu and Kook (2002) suggested that Christians are attempting to retain individuality and separateness in order to avoid assimilation within a larger Palestinian nationality which reflects an Islamic perspective.

Nazareth, for example, represents one of the most significant Christian centres. As a sacred place for Christians it sheds light on the life of Jesus of Nazareth and that of his mother Mary (Uriely, Israeli, and Reichel, 2003). A changing demographic structure now indicates that two-thirds of the population there is Muslim, and tensions exist regarding the strong symbolic identification with Christianity. Intentions of Muslims to build a mosque in the old city of Nazareth in 1999 created disputes, protests, and disagreement between the two groups (Cohen-Hattab and Shoval, 2007).

As collective identity is created, shared, and experienced through symbolic representation and by way of an attachment to symbols, identities are maintained (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002). The symbol of the crucifix is a powerful and outward sign. It enables Christians to show to other groups their allegiance and loyalty to Christianity and differentiate them from other groups.

In a study which explored acculturation orientations of young Christian Arabs in Israel, Horenczyk and Munayer (2007) found that in spite of a desire to keep group identity, respondents expressed a greater readiness to adopt elements of the Jewish than Muslim society. Inner conflicts between Muslims and Christian Arabs in Israel were also noted in a study by Mana, Sagy, Srour, Mjally-Knani (2012) which examined inter-group relations between Palestinian Muslims and Christians. They found that whereas Muslims were readier to incorporate the Christian minority into their identity, Christians tended to keep their differences intact.

Hall (1990) suggested that there are two ways of thinking about an identity related to culture. The first focuses on

one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us as 'one people' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. (p. 223)

An unchanging and fixed reality reflects a consensual and homogenous society. This mirrors a structuralist approach which interprets events and gives value and meaning in a fixed, conformist and inflexible manner (Norton, 2010). In contrast, Arnett (2002), Riley (2007) and Block (2009) understood identity to be the way in which people perceive themselves in relation to a more dynamic social environment.

Although Norton's (1999) understanding of identity is included in Block's previous definition, I incorporate her words as they significantly emphasise an individual on a vibrant timeline of potential. As an applied linguist, her focus on the connection between language and identity was underpinned by the belief that each speech act is not just an exchange of information. It is a reorganization of who the self is and how that self relates to the social world within which it resides at a given moment in time.

I use the term identity to refer to how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future. (p. 410)

By acknowledging that identity is a product of social interaction, it would appear that the major vehicle (in spite of other symbolic resources available) for creating an identity is language (Jiang, 2000; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Nunan and Choi, 2010). When Riley (2007) said that 'language has a role in shaping how members of a group relate to the world to one another and to others' (p. 11), he indicated not only the co-operative or co-constructive elements of identity creation, but also the potential partiality and temporariness of such an enterprise. Environments and situations are vulnerable to change as are the people involved in them.

This approach to the relationship of language and identity supports a post-structuralist view that language is not impartial, rather it purveys social meaning in a frequently changing and dynamic world (Norton, 2010). It accepts that linguistic communities are heterogeneous and possibly non-consensual and that meanings through language need to be debated.

This relates to Hall's (1990) second position on identity, which recognizes that

there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened – 'what we have become . . . Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending, place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (p. 225)

Language therefore is the medium of discussion, the medium of self-investigation, and the means by which a greater self-knowledge and understanding can develop.

The participants in this research exemplified a group needing a relationship in order to study. Subsequently, they had to deal with its social and historical representation. This is important, as is its potential requirement for future work options in Israel. This scenario, conceptualized by Kim (2003), acknowledges how the sense of self is caught up with other dimensions including politics and power relations and indicates the entangled and somewhat complex relationship between language, culture, and identity.

Eastman (2014) rejected any suggestion that ethnic identity is acquired automatically with language use, and argued that the relationship between language and identity is one of association, even choice. She claimed that a person may use another language for specific purposes without actually claiming or developing an ethnic identity.

As language users, individuals are vulnerable to be judged on their language skills by others. Second or foreign language users therefore often feel stress or embarrassment when unable to use their native language to communicate and have to make do with another language, often that relating to the majority culture.

Norton and Toohey (2011) used a vignette of an immigrant struggling with English to illustrate the powerful relationship between language aptitude and identity, as perceived by those outside. Martina was unable to communicate fluently at her work in a fast food restaurant and in spite of coming into Canada with professional qualifications (a quantity surveyor); by those outside she was 'positioned as a dehumanized and inanimate broom' (p. 413). She was judged and her skills, abilities and identity remained hidden behind the wall created by her inability to speak English well enough.

One critical linguistic experience I had as a new immigrant to Israel was similar to Norton and Toohey's example. As a new mother, and with poor Hebrew language skills, I visited the health clinic with my son. The nurse asked me loudly and slowly in English if I knew how to play with my son. She then took a small towel and hid her face and showed me how to lift and remove the towel from my face in order to play 'peek a boo'. She repeated this action many times, hiding her face and showing her face to be sure I 'understood' how to play the game.

What is critical about this incident was my emotional response and the intensity with which I remember my anger and frustration with the nurse and my sense of powerlessness at being unable to reveal my 'self', which was entirely inaccessible behind the wall of the Hebrew language. I was mute and powerless, and I smiled politely and left the clinic in shame.

Related to this is the rather scantly researched area of how bi - and multi-lingual individuals are using language and what languages work best for different types of expression as related to identity (Pavlenko, 2006). Although this is complex, it is relevant for individuals inhabiting different domains and frequently moving between languages and cultures. Pavlenko (2006) concluded that 'languages may create different and sometimes incommensurable, worlds for their speakers who feel that their selves change with the shift in language' (p. 27). What this indicates is that it is possible for bi- and multi-linguals to behave and feel differently when in different linguistic domains.

Koven (2006) asked whether bi-linguals express feelings and emotions differently in two languages. Her study involving a French-Portuguese migrant living in France showed a more forceful, intense and angry affect in French than Portuguese. This, in turn, led the participant and interlocutors to perceive the girl as more or less calm, depending on the linguistic context. If culturally accepted values and accepted behaviour patterns allowed more or less access to forcefulness and profanity rather than grammatical language structures (the two languages are similar), this indicates the importance of the sociolinguistic dimension between emotion and bi-lingualism. It also has implications for exploring identity across different cultural and linguistic domains. When Koven (2006) said 'social actors in many communities may regularly have access to multiple, verbally mediated ways of performing affect' (p. 85), she implied that this is a matter of choice for speakers.

Identity is a complex and multifaceted issue and restrictions of space prevent me from doing it justice. However, I have tried to focus on some of the relevant aspects for the purposes of investigating the words and feelings of the participants in the study as they live in an environment which is multicultural, bilingual, and one which has a deeply emotional history for its citizens.

### Family

The Arab culture prioritizes family relationships and collectivist behaviour, and strong family bonds represent the very root of Arab heritage (Haj Yahia, 1995; Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2005; Barakat, 2005; Zoabi and Savaya, 2017). It is the strongest network in society. Co-operative behaviour between family members both secure and improve the position of the family within the community. In addition, individual achievements and disappointments become those of the family.

Self-image, esteem, excellence, security and identity are evaluated on the basis of their relationships with the family. Both at times of stability and crisis, a family’s reputation and honor take precedence over other considerations. (Haj Yahia, 1995, p. 431)

It is also relevant that the interdependence of family members is manifested in shared responsibilities and tasks, and that any discontinuation of support on the part of the family causes reduced self-confidence and anxiety (Haj Yahia, 1995). This concept emphasises a fixed rather than flexible culture and concerns itself with group identity. It relates to Hall’s (1990) first conception (Section 2.5.2).

However, this is contradictory to the reality that the world offers a flexible and diverse way of living. The presence of state structures like education and social welfare offer opportunities for life and work outside the family domain (Barakat, 2005). Therefore, a more collective and fixed response relating to value judgments is now open to enquiry as younger members of communities, including all Arab communities in Israel, are exposed to cultural diversity outside the family neighbourhood.

However, as long as the power of the family retains its strength as a psychological and physical protector of its members, any ensuing desire to change the status quo initiated by those who travel outside the family perimeter is just as liable to create friction as opposed to healthy discourse. But even within this seemingly rigid collectivism and structuralist ideology, more recent research has demonstrated significant changes within Arab families in Israel during the last three decades (Barakat, 2005; Haj Yahia and Lavee, 2017).

Although in general, a secular Israeli Jewish family may be described as being more liberal than that of an Israeli Arab family (Mikulinar, Weller and Forian, 1993), Israel is characterised by difference relating to attitudes and values (Katz, Lavee, 2005).

In their research with a large group of Muslim and Christian Arab women spanning three generations, Haj Yahia and Lavee (2017) found indications of a less traditional and more egalitarian lifestyle for its younger members. The factors promoting this were living more closely to Jewish communities and a more intensive interaction with Jews.

The field of Jewish-Arab mixed relationships is not well researched (Hakak, 2016). Historically, families in Israel are religiously homogenous and in the main, Arabs and Jews do not intermarry (Vardi-Saliternik, Friedlander, and Cohen, 2002). As both sides are minorities, Arabs in Israel and Jews worldwide, assimilation is undesirable (Hakak, 2016). The paradoxical situation for Arabs as fellow citizens and enemies minimizes opportunities, which is reinforced by separate community living (Hakak, 2016).

However, structural factors offer one explanation influencing the incidence of intermarriage, and include the presence of opportunities for individuals to meet and get to know others from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra, 2006). Mixed race higher education is an example.

### National and Global Identity

As well as being socially and culturally consigned, identities can be assigned by the state (Weedon, 2004). In the past, a national identity was more related to citizenship, and was most likely one which complemented the individual and group identity. However, social, technological, political, and economic changes have enabled a global world, which has significant implications for all its citizens.

In many nation states a national identity does not include all the states' citizens (Lin, 2013). In the state of Israel, it is limited to those of the majority Jewish culture. The result is a minority population identifying with their own cultures in their own language in 'an-other' country which does not necessarily reflect who or what they believe themselves to be. Cultural gulfs between different groups further problematize communication, and efforts to bridge subsequent gaps succeed to a greater or lesser extent depending on political will and needs, resources, intrinsic or instrumental requirements, aspirations, and pride.

Alongside the concept of national identity, there is a notion of global identity. This represents a situation whereby people develop a global consciousness by way of television, the Internet and social media. Global identity gives individuals a ‘sense of belonging to a worldwide culture and includes an awareness of the events, practices, styles, and information which are part of a global culture’ (Arnett, 2002, p.777). In practice, this means that people who are part of separate and conflicted *local cultures*, consume and identify with the same greater *global culture*. This may have very significant impact on how people see themselves in relation to others and may have a greater place within the spectrum of identity study in the future. At the local level, even now there is potentially and practically a hybridization effect, further supporting the belief that identity and culture are not fixed and are susceptible to external influences which will affect responses to them in turn effecting change.

There is a connection between this idea and the work of Greenfield (2009), whose theory of social change viewed socio-demographic changes as driving changes in cultural values (Weinstock et al., 2015). Previously tight knit, homogenous communities with less education (and less influence from outside), are in general as affected by technology as other groups and subsequent expanding social relations and opportunity. The effect is that technological development is affecting and potentially shifting values from family interdependence to individual independence. Weinstock's study dealt with an Arab population in Israel, so it is particularly relevant to this thesis.

In their study, which described changing values across three generations of family women members, the researchers noted the central role of mothers (also noted by Barakat, 2005) and their intermediate position, connecting their own values to both their daughters' and mothers' lives. Not being significantly different to either, they acted as a bridge between the generations. Social change is inevitable and this example of generational co-operation further supports the intersection between language, culture, and identity as represented in a global world in the process of transformation. It especially confirms the emphasis collectivist societies place on emotional closeness, and the importance and concern related to the next generation (Mikulinar, Weller and Florian, 1993).

### When Different Cultures Meet

Human behaviour as a response to external stimuli is neither a one-way process nor uniform or constant. Each individual responds to stimuli according to their own personal history, character, capability, and understanding. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) argued that behaviour is a continuous interaction among all components, in line with Bandura’s concept of reciprocal determinism (1978), which suggests that behaviour is not only the result of environment, but in turn also influences that environment and cognitive possibilities of the individual. More recently, developmental psychologists and cultural anthropologists have viewed human development as an interaction between socio-cultural forces, biological and psychological forces – a transformative process which create a diversity of 'biopsychosociocultural' entities (Berry and Vedder, 2016).

In the past, it was suggested that individuals of minority groups living within different cultures were disadvantaged, as psychological distress would negatively impact their lives. This assumption is now understood to be incorrect due to the positive opportunities related to intercultural living (LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, 1993). That is not to say, however, that there are no challenges for people who move and live in countries different from their birth and for indigenous peoples whose reality is changed when confronted with immigrants and immigration.

When peoples of different backgrounds meet, they are exposed to differences in languages, behaviours, institutions, religions, beliefs, norms, and more, all of which are part of the physical, psychological, and social whole of the larger bounded society (Sam and Berry, 2010). Somehow, they must find a way to live together by way of adopting different strategies which enable them to adapt to intercultural life (Berry et al., 2006). How, and how well groups and individuals manage the change, and how well and whether they are able to adapt, depends on the different circumstances individuals find themselves in, their particular psychological well-being and socio-cultural competence (Sam and Berry, 2010).

### Acculturation

The term 'acculturation' has been relevant in the social sciences for more than 80 years and is a process of change between individuals and groups resulting in the phenomena relating to the contact between different cultural groups and their individual members (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936; Berry, 2005). According to Sam and Berry (2010):

It acknowledges the reciprocity of the influences that cultural groups have on each other during acculturation and involves changes in behaviours, social structures, and cultural practices (p. 474).

The memorandum of 1936 served the aim of providing a tangible base for further study due to its comprehensive and detailed classification regarding aspects of the phenomenon as it was understood at the time. Its purpose was to analyse and organize 'the problem' … and [it] incorporated the categories of approach, analysis, processes, psychological mechanisms, and results of acculturation' (p. 149-152). All have been developed to some extent and the categories are still relevant for more up to date research (Berry and Sam, 1997). Initially adaptation was understood as a group phenomenon, whereas today the process and consequences are investigated from a more individual perspective (Ward, 2008).

Acculturation acknowledges the influences cultural groups have on each other and the processes and outcomes involved. In 2005, Berry described it as a 'dual process of cultural and psychological change', (p.698), and Berry and Sam (2010) described it as a notion that takes place over an unspecified (sometimes lengthy) time period, emphasizing the influence of changing situational factors and how they alter individual experiences and outcomes.

When Parekh (2005) said that culturally diverse populations 'subscribe to different though overlapping systems of meaning and significance' (p. 3), he also acknowledged the reciprocity and mutual cultural influence. The process may be challenging and one that impacts on different life domains. Moreover, it will have implications not only relating to an individual’s beliefs, values and behaviours, but also on a person's self-worth and place in society.

The notion of adaptation is related to acculturation, and Sam and Berry (2010) described this as 'psychological well-being and how individuals manage socio-culturally' (p. 472). Not all people adapt to cultural change in the same way, and there are external and local influences which make the acculturation experience difficult to detail. One example is an acknowledged relationship between national policy and dominant society attitudes as linked to acculturation outcomes of minority populations.

Variations of how people adapt are known as acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005), and contain how a person responds psychologically and physically. Early concepts of acculturation mainly focused on assimilation as an outcome of intercultural contact. It was described by Park and Burgess (1969) as

a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life. (p. 360)

Assimilation is personally motivated in order to integrate with the majority or driven by the state in order to ensure a more homogenous population. In the case of Israel (and as previously mentioned in Section 1.2), Jews immigrating to Israel from diverse cultural backgrounds after the Second World War were encouraged to assimilate in order to create a more favourable demographic situation for the newly created Jewish state. The unique and simultaneous combination of a 'melting pot' and multicultural strategy (Berry, 2005) created outcomes of assimilation and integration. Jews entering Israel were supported and encouraged and willingly became fully functioning participants of the country. At the time, Israel was also presenting a dichotomy, as it simultaneously encouraged a separation between Jews and Arab citizens.

Berry (1997) described different outcomes related to intercultural contact. 'Marginalization' is when individuals lose touch with heritage culture and are ambivalent or discriminated against by the majority culture. 'Segregation' occurs when individuals or groups hold on to heritage culture at the expense of the majority culture. People who retain heritage ties but also interact positively with the majority culture are known as 'integrated'. Assimilation is related to integration but more specifically refers to individuals who integrate at the expense of heritage culture. Theoretically, outcomes of intercultural contact are dependent on the freedom of people to choose, which as inferred in the previous paragraph is not always the case,

The reason Arab citizens were not subjected to direct assimilationist or multicultural strategies was that it was politically undesirable to integrate or assimilate the populations (Abu Saad, 2006). Allowing the maintenance of the Arabic language further enabled segregation between the populations, illustrating the irony of granting civil rights which served to further isolate a minority population.

Higher education opportunities for everyone regardless of their ethnicity could be seen as a policy offering and enabling integration. However, integration is dependent on a positive multicultural ideology and low levels of discrimination, which is paradoxical in the case of Israel.

### Integration and Biculturalism

The concept of biculturalism developed from the notion of acculturation, which refers to the ‘process and of cultural and psychological change that result following a meeting of cultures’ (Sam and Berry, 2010, p.472). The concept of biculturalism is similar to what Berry (1997) termed integration. This idea – that it is possible for an individual to function competently and comfortably in two cultures was examined by LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) in the alternation model of second culture acquisition. This model suggests it is possible to maintain a role and relationship between culturally diverse societies without having to prioritize one, or make sacrifices as a result of the dual membership it requires. It also supposes that people can feel they belong to more than one culture without having to compromise mental health or any sense of cultural identity. It suggests that an individual can choose the degree or manner to which he or she will affiliate with the heritage or other culture.

In addition, it supposes that an individual can change behaviour (including language) to fit a different context and that individual can benefit in different ways if able to do so. However, in spite of conceding that individuals do not have to assign equal status to the two cultures, there is an assumption that the approach to the other culture will be positive. This in itself may not be straightforward, however, as an individual response might not align with a group or family response which implies a conflict of interests. The main difference between the alternation model and Berry's integration adaptation is that the latter allows for a reciprocity between cultures and its implicit assumption they are interwoven as well as being able to retain individuality.

In the same way that a chameleon changes its colour and adapts to a different environment for its essential survival, humans have begun to adapt culturally to gain an edge in the new societies they inhabit. This ‘edge’ is related to the idea that individuals choose an orientation strategy to actively integrate or balance multiple cultures (Martin and Shao, 2016, p. 1410). Choosing implies that individuals have some control over their responses, which is an important issue as having a choice is often equated with freedom, advantage or power (Freire, 1970, p. 48).

What is relevant to minority, indigenous, dominated, or conquered populations are the potential conflicts that can arise by being part of two different societies. The implications of maintaining loyalty to a heritage culture while not only trying to survive but actually succeed in the greater world are complicated by a pragmatic reality versus historical experience.

### Summary

Education policy is the result of a process based on social and political aspirations. Higher education frameworks are designed to complete and complement the high school education experience by offering students a path to further and more specialized electives. Higher education influences students' future careers and life choices and impacts the country from an economic and social perspective. The background I offer in this review considers higher education as part of a holistic environment which is both affected by and affects its surroundings.

My research does not intend to speak for every Christian woman studying in the State of Israel. However, it tries to ascertain the diversity and complexity of circumstances in order to explore perceptions of higher education in an environment which is culturally and linguistically different from home.

Drawing on Ogbu’s (1992) broad guidelines relating to cultural ecological theory (see Section 2.3.9), this project explored the strengths and strategies participants used to bridge the divide between cultures, religions and languages within a society that might be perceived as having unjustifiably assumed control. Their responses related to their bilingual and bicultural lives in different and often separate domains within Israel. Therefore, an understanding of potential adaptations as a response to acculturation is relevant. Israel is a country which was created for an 'other' majority, but which to some degree offers opportunities for all its citizens. Whether the opportunity of higher education is equally accessible will be considered in this research.

In order to acknowledge the importance of context, this literature review set out to describe the setting within which the participants of this study are located. I have done this from a number of perspectives, including the historical, cultural, religious, social, educational, and political. It would never have been possible to cover all aspects of each perspective, but I hope by including a number of significant sources, I am able to create a multifaceted backdrop which gives an indication of the complex environment in which individuals live in Israel. Not every aspect is only related to Christian Arab women; in some cases, environments comprise shared experiences for all groups. In others, the experiences are uniquely appropriate for Christians.

This approach to the literature reflects the methodological approach of Preissle (2006), who claimed that qualitative research 'is characterized by cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary boundaries addressing the complexity of human experience and by endeavours transcending disciplinary boundaries that synthesize and integrate as well as analyse and separate' (p. 685).

Given the importance of listening to the voices of the participants, the following methodology section demonstrates the significance of the qualitative research paradigm, as well as considering potential approaches to the research. In addition, given that this study is about women and encompasses beliefs about women, it contains a feminist perspective in the sense that it prioritizes, differentiates, and acknowledges some of the challenges women face.

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

Although there are different levels of detail regarding methodology, similar definitions span decades. In 1994, Guba and Lincoln described the methodological question as 'How can the inquirer (would be knower) go about finding out what he or she believes can be known?' (p. 108), and in 2015, Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault suggested that it is the rationale related to the ways which researchers choose to address problems and search for answers.

There are more inclusive definitions such as Creswell (2003, p. 5), 'a strategy or plan of action that links methods to outcomes' and Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, and McCulloch, 2005, as they focus on methodology as being a procedural as well as a relational concept. Qualitative research includes a variety of approaches and methods (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2007), so I clarify my intentions as well as accounting for its principles and defining characteristics (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, and Snape, 2014).

Qualitative research represents an overarching term for different approaches to participant observational and interactive research within which there are different ways of interpretation, foci, and emphases. Each approach suits itself to the type of research project conceptualised, the context, the questions, interest, and predilections of the researcher.

Sandelowski (2000) claimed that qualitative designs are often eclectic in that they may all contain characteristics of the others, and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described qualitative research as 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world [which] consists of a set of interpretative practices that makes the world visible' (p. 3). In addition, it places the emphasis on 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry' (p. 8). It is based on the philosophy that there are multiple realities and reality is relative and subjective to each individual whose experiences and temperaments create the lens through which the world is perceived at a moment in time. As individuals explore their distinctive histories, societies, families and cultures, they construct a knowledge base which is unique to them (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2013).

In this project, I explored the situation of women and I describe it as feminist and cultural. I also call it emancipatory if it empowers the participants to understand their lives more clearly and realize opportunities regarding their life situations and choices.

The relationship between the greater culture and notions of self are significant and drawing on the work of Bell (2002), who suggests that story structures are one of the defining features of a culture, the context of this research project incorporated the metaphor that life is a story. A life story unfolds in a physical, social, and historical sphere which is relevant because a series of significant events over the last thousands of years gave Israel its unique story. Over time, all the different people of Israel make up and have been part of a continuing historical, political and religious drama.

People have individual perceptions and experiences depending on their singular, familial, societal, and cultural histories – and as well, all have their own stories to tell. Because of this, I believe the setting – the story of Israel – is important regarding the participants' lives and responses to this research. Stories are not fixed units of information and their content is constantly being restructured according to new events and experiences which take place in the context of life. Current events therefore are likely not only to be related to what has occurred in the past but actually rise from the past as dynamic and developing entities.

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that 'language is understood as the main mode by which the reality of our world is created' (p. 25). Theoretically, I understand this research to be constructivist, as its interest is exploring how language is the medium to create and understand social reality and the ensuing influences this has on the daily lives of the participants.

The method of data collection I considered most appropriate to the inquiry, paradigm, and approaches, was that of semi-structured interviews. Interviews gave autonomy to the participants and the choice as to what was more or less important to explore in detail. Methods of data collection are examined in more depth in Section 3.7.

Qualitative research is a subjective process, related to the values of the researcher (Greenbank, 2003; Scotland, 2012). This research project included the researcher in the sense that I was a part of the process of design, data collection, and analysis. My own distinctive biography influenced choices throughout development of the research. I maintained reflexivity in order to try to account for and include any bias and its effect on the research project. In section 3.5 I embedded a personal statement which provides a short personal history outlining aspects of my life and work as relating to the overall context of the research. In addition, in section 3.8, I include a reflection relating to language and communication.

## Review of the Research Aims and Research Question

My research project hoped to shed light and understand more acutely how Christian Arab women involved in higher education programmes handle life at college and which elements of the system help achieve positive learning outcomes and which elements inhibit them. In addition, I explored how the participants identified themselves, as they moved between changing linguistic and cultural domains in a politically contentious environment. Israel's history is complex for its entire population, and includes terror, violence, and warfare. This context situates the research and has a significant part in the current lives of the participants of the study.

In this study, I was interested in the notion of biculturalism, as it is perceived in terms of the different and often changing physical environments the women inhabit. Regarding the future, I hoped to gain insight as to how and if Christian Arab women saw themselves as socially evolving, as a result of their multicultural life and higher education experiences.

I recap on my research question here in order to demonstrate the fit between the question, design, and philosophy of the research.

In the linguistically, culturally, religiously, and politically divided society of Israel, how are Christian Arab women meeting the challenge of higher education programmes?

1. Why are Christian Arab women choosing higher education programmes?
2. Which elements of a higher education system most help and hinder potential learning outcomes and which personal characteristics and practical strategies are important for enabling and maintaining success?
3. How do Christian Arab women students manage changing linguistic, social, and cultural domains, and how does this affect their sense of identity?

## The Fit of the Paradigm to the Focus of the Research

When Sandelowski (2000, p. 335) said: 'all inquiry entails description and all description entails interpretation', she was suggesting that interpretive methodology in general reflects a major anti-positivist stance and acknowledges that people see the world in different ways. Mustafa (2011, p. 25) described reality as the product of subjective experience which may be referred to as 'humanistic, constructivist or naturalistic'.

As I was looking to explore personal experiences of women studying in an academic college, I chose a qualitative, interpretive approach to the research. Qualitative research is directed at appreciating a phenomenon from a subjective perspective (Scotland, 2012), and attempts to understand the world as lived by the people in it looking at culturally derived situations and historical situations of the social-life world (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

I use the word 'phenomenon' on more than one occasion during this research, so I clarify its meaning from dictionary sources. Merriam-Webster defines it as 'an observable fact or event' (Phenomenon, n.d.b). It is also described as being a 'fact or situation that is observed to exist or happen, especially one whose cause or explanation is in question' (Phenomenon (n.d.a).

When Thomas (2009, p. 75) focused on how 'we are interested in people and the way they interrelate – what they think and how they form ideas about the world; how their worlds are constructed', he recognized that the world is created in different ways by each of us and is subjectively experienced (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 2003; Krauss, 2005; Wellington et al., 2005).

What represents knowledge is constructed by a process of putting together the diverse and fragmented parts of life's experiences. As life's experiences are often complex and interrelate, the 'knowledge' constructed is both partial and related to the particular time frame of the investigation.

Krauss (2005) posited that meanings associated with different phenomena are the most fundamental feature of the human social setting. Individuals have unique and different experiences and interpret and understand the greater framework in which they live through individually subjective perspectives. Therefore, pragmatically and philosophically, it is difficult to accept the world as being fixed or given. A constructivist standpoint is one which focuses on the multiple meanings of individual experiences which are historically and socially constructed (Schwandt, 2003).

Certain aspects of the world might appear physically ‘fixed’ because of externally enforced criteria. Examples of these are university entrance examinations, waiting lists for operations at the National Health Service, the price of petrol, where the buses stop, Sunday shopping, and so on. However, they are temporary because of their dependence on greater social, political, legal, and religious contexts, which are constantly susceptible to change. The reason I mention this is because the way people relate to phenomena changes as well. This might depend on different internal and external influences like changes in physical and mental health related to things like retirement, promotion, and family issues, for example, as well as environmental issues like floods, hurricanes, heavy snow, and so on - all which make up the unique social and personal reality of the individual. So even if people come from the same religious, linguistic, socioeconomic background and culture, it will never be possible to generalize about what represents truth or knowledge, because meaning is subjectively, temporarily, and personally derived, understood, and experienced. In the context of my study which involves Arab Christian women students in the north of Israel, in spite of their group affiliation, their personal histories and experiences influence their perceptions of the academic learning environment within which they study.

The most fundamental feature of the human social setting is that of meanings, and a 'naturalist or constructivist view posits that knowledge is established through the meanings attached to the phenomena studied' (Krauss, 2005, p. 759). 'In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

In a situation which allows for and supports an accumulation of ‘truths’ by way of individual realities, qualitative research accepts that knowledge is softer, partial, and more experiential. It is based on insight which is of a personal and unique nature. Truth is related to what is created. It is contextual, subjective and relative to the individual experience and 'influenced by gender, ethnicity, social class, faith background, sexuality and so on…' (Wellington, et al., 2005, p. 6). This indicates that meaning is built in different ways even if it is in connection with the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998, p.8).

Denzin (2009) retells the Indian folk story of the six blind men and the elephant. An elephant escapes from the zoo and confronts the six blind men. Each man describes the elephant. Because they are only able to perceive a perspective of the whole and not its entirety, the men reveal how it is never possible to arrive at a truth which is unequivocally ‘true’.

One moral of the story is that all individuals are blinded by their own perspectives, whether or not they are able to see with their eyes. This reinforces the need for a constructivist approach based on the epistemology and ontology of a subjective knowledge and reality. It also accounts for the fact that things might change, (one blind man meets another and reappraises accordingly for example), and shows the importance of context.

Another moral of the story relates to a different and potentially more complete truth being the result of combined efforts and experience. Philosophically, this implies that a ‘truer' knowledge will come from the amalgamation of many voices, all giving their perceptions or understandings of the experience. So, in order to complete the puzzle and arrive at a more universal truth; the implication is that all the unique and individual realities must be fitted together – which is precisely what interpretive research is all about.

However, this constructed truth is not a fixed or single truth; it is one meaning created through the combined understandings of the group at one moment in time which still makes it dynamic, temporary, and context-related. However, it is a representation of knowledge even though a different truth could be created at a different time.

In the case of Israel, for example, with its history of wars, struggles and suffering peoples, aspects of life have been and continue to be understood and interpreted in different ways. These experiences may be perceived as profoundly liberating, life-saving, or excruciatingly confounding, limiting, and even life-destroying, depending on the particular context or reality through which they are experienced. The example mentioned in the 'Introduction' regarding different interpretations by the Jews and Arabs of the War of Independence or the Catastrophe illustrates this point.

Bearing this in mind, this research supports the philosophy that qualitative research is based on a relativistic, constructivist ontology that assumes there is no objective and unanimous reality, rather a reality that is subjective, flexible, and dynamic.

By beginning my research question with the words 'in a linguistically, religiously, and politically divided society', I not only acknowledged the significance of human agency and social relations, but also the powers inherent within the social structures of society in which people live and function. Individuals have the capacity to make choices within their environments only relative to how much the environments limit or influence that freedom, or the extent to which they are perceived to influence freedom. However, accepting the premise that an individual can initiate action and has some choices does not deny the assertion that certain people and communities have a more challenging task of maximizing opportunities and situations than others.

Philosophically, freedom is a complex issue and beyond the scope of this project, but even in ‘democratic’ societies there are different types and levels of freedom. The ability, or perceived ability to respond to a situation is dependent partly on factors which are related to its expression within the structures woven into the greater societal framework.

This could create a methodological dilemma: Should participants of certain categories – marginalized peoples, ethnic minority groups, women, people with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities, substance abusers, children living below the poverty line – and so on – not have their cases researched with an intention at the outset of being able to do something to improve their situations? Should all research related to education be striving from the outset to improve it?

If the answer to the first question is yes, it contains the presumption that the researcher’s values, perceptions, and agenda openly determine and motivate the research, which may have a limiting effect on the ultimate potential of the research. However, is not necessarily directly contradictory to any other qualitative research approach, because researcher interest and subjectivity are an accepted and inevitable part of the process. It is the matter of degree which makes a difference. When qualitative research is visualized as a continuum, it is the degree that affects outset goals, redefines emphases, and creates new boundaries.

The reason I put this forward is because this research deals with a vulnerable population in a politically challenged country with tendencies to violence, and war. Therefore, it is possible to approach this research from different perspectives. Greater understanding of the phenomena might inspire positive change in the future, both personally and strategically for the participants as well as any other internal policy decisions regarding further education and all students involved.

Regarding the second question as to whether education research should be striving to create improvement, I believe the answer to be yes, and agree with Eisner (2017, p. 214) when he claims that the purpose 'of educational research and evaluation is the achievement of a virtue: the creation of knowledge thus enlarging our understanding of education and leading to its improvement'.

Educational research needs to be comfortable in its desire to explore, co-operate, and give space and time to focus on the individuals in the environments that matter and make up the day-to-day experiences that shape the impending future of the planet. It needs to be research that is not driven hard by preconceptions or political agendas, but is softer and open to honest enquiry and flexible in interpretation.

This, I believe, will bring to the surface the real issues that might be attended to, rather than those presupposed by the researcher. This supports the suggestion of Giangreco and Taylor (2003) that 'educational research doesn’t so much prove anything or establish ultimate truth as much as it reduces our uncertainty and hopefully helps us to better understand our world so we can strive to improve it' (p. 134).

## Considering Potential Approaches to the Inquiry

### Phenomenology

'Phenomenology is a philosophy, a methodology or an approach to study or research' (Sloan and Bowe, 2014, p. 1293). It uses analysis of significant statements as a way to explore the participant’s view of the world and can illuminate a phenomenon of interest through careful description. Osborne (1994) and Smith (2004) suggested that phenomenology is dedicated to the detailed examination of personal experience (p. 50). It offers a deep understanding, and attempts to uncover meaning by way of capturing the essences of an experience or event (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007).

### Grounded Theory

Knowledge of the epistemological and theoretical roots of grounded theory enables appreciation of the philosophical and theoretical developments since its inception in the 1960s. Initially, the traditional claim of grounded theory was that theories are *discovered*, 'the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 12). More recently, they indicate they 'agree with the constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are told by research participants whilst trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and lives both to the researcher and themselves' (Corbin and Strauss, 2014, p. 26).

So, whereas grounded theory focuses more on the negotiation of meaning; phenomenology emphasises capturing meaning by way of detailing, disseminating, and describing experience as a phenomenon. However, it is not a given that any search for meaning stands in opposition to constructivist theory and practice, or that constructivism is not deeply interested in meaning.

Although Osborne (1994) focused more on intuitive processes, from a philosophical point of view, qualitative methodology, including phenomenology and grounded theory, emphasise an inductive approach and operate at a level grounded in the text. In practice however, there is often more of an inter-play between inductive and deductive approaches when semi-structured, as opposed to open interviews, for example, are the chief method of data collection.

Bringing a preliminary organizing framework to the analysis appears to stand in direct contrast to a purely inductive method. However, in reality, any researcher expertise, or knowledge of existing literature, research topic, or questions will to some extent influence, if not determine the nature of the analysis. However, a reflexive approach can reduce potential predetermination and manipulation in favour of an attentiveness to both expected and unexpected emerging themes as they appear.

### Narrative Inquiry

Narratives enable people to share their life experiences with future generations. They create evidence of cultural membership and enable readers to access history and compare those times with others. A current narrative is a foundation for a narrative of the future. Narratives are both fixed – in the sense that events happen in a certain way at a certain time and are perceived accordingly. However, they are also temporary in the sense that the variables surrounding the event or experience are unlikely to be replicated. The 'same' place and experience could have profoundly different interpretations depending on the different environmental and physical factors and feelings surrounding the experience. Duff (2002) claimed that people make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them and that they are reshaped and re-storied as time unfolds and personal and social experiences change.

According to Webster and Mertova (2007), ‘narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience’ (p.1), based on a theory that by nature, people tell stories, and have lives that incorporate stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Stories are influenced by feelings, emotions, and assumptions related to previous stories. These may or may not be conscious or acknowledged, but lend themselves to articulation. Narratives allow an external expression of ‘internal representations of phenomena, events, thoughts, and feelings’ (Andrews et al., 2013, p.5).

Throughout the interviews participants exemplified, clarified, or emphasised points, either overtly or covertly. In addition to the 'point' being attended to, it was brought to life sometimes through a story. Stories are significant, as they can be used as a buffer between speakers in order to disguise a point to make it more suitable, acceptable, or appropriate.

Smith (2007) suggested that in spite of the fact that 'it is difficult to come to a set of definitive conclusions on matters related to narrative', there are some recurring broad views. These include the possibility of narratives being effective in social and individual transformation and their importance in constructing selves and identities, 'people understand themselves as selves through the stories they tell and the stories they feel part of' (p. 391). Methodologically, the idea of collecting narrative data by way of interview, images, art, film, or creative drama offers opportunities for individuals to express, tell, show, and ultimately be heard.

### Summary

These approaches all have a relevance to my research, as all address questions of meaning and understanding and all support data gathered by interview. Analytically, all support a process of decontextualization and recontextualization in order to create categories from which a final product can be drawn (Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007). I therefore chose a blended lens which allowed knowledge to develop from dominant and significant themes inherent in the data. In addition, by acknowledging different interpretive scopes, I hope to be able to provide a multi-dimensional picture.

In line with Thomas (2006, p. 238), my work is inductive as the interview questions only guided some of the emerging categories. I therefore believe an integrated approach is the most candid way to analyse this data.

## The Researcher in the Research

Greenbank, 2003 indicates that the values of any researcher will impact on the research in some way, so I offer a reflexive approach. Carr (2000) claimed partisanship is not something to be avoided or ignored, as he suggests that

Far from being some kind of unwelcome intruder …, partisanship is an essential ingredient in educational research whose elimination could only be achieved by eliminating the whole research project itself. (p. 439)

Creswell (2003) recommended investigators honestly write any feelings of bias and other personal thoughts related to the research and present them in any final research report. This accommodation of values can be acknowledged by researchers, including biographical details and or making a statement about their underlying values. So if I agree that there is no depersonalizing (Greenbank, 2003), it is important to make clear that researchers bring themselves to the process of inquiry.

I am part of the greater society of Israel and I understand and interpret life through a particular lens based on personal experience. I have political beliefs, ideological values, sympathies, and a moral code and personal history. I offer an account of some thoughts through the research to assist me in understanding that I am part of the society, culture, and history of the country which represents the backdrop to this project.

Relating to the vulnerability which so many people of all religions and groups experience in Israel, and the confusion of loyalties and sensitivities toward political correctness, I share a reflective account of my personal involvement in Israel as a woman, mother, partner, teacher, and researcher. I include some remarks about the research itself and literature to contextualise this personal account.

The thinking behind this project has always been with me, both as a ‘student’ of the majority culture and as a participant or maybe a collaborator in most of what involves being Jewish. Moving and marrying into mainstream Israeli society as a (non-practicing, slightly confused) Christian with resolve not to convert to Judaism has left me an outsider on the inside. I am the same in some ways and different in others to mainstream and non-mainstream society. How I perceive myself, my world, and life and how I am able to live my life and enable opportunities seem to be essentially related to my somewhat pliable self and the result of being ‘other’.

As mentioned in Section 1.2, Arabs and Jews are trapped by different versions of their own history (Bickerton and Klausner, 2018). This has created an unconcealed and sometimes painful divide between Jews and Arabs and tends to put people on one side or the other. As I do not fall into either category, I find myself striding the void. This has compensations and drawbacks, is sometimes uncomfortable, and often insightful.

For some Jews, it is not about who or what a person *is*, it is about being a *non*-Jew that is significant. I have observed and been subject to prejudice throughout all my life here.

Marriage is often a long-term relationship, not only between individuals but families. Intermarriage might therefore be a situation enabling a softening of boundaries between groups and furthering opportunities for closer interaction (Huijnk, Verkuyten, and Coenders, 2010).

My personal experience has taught me there is generally opposition on the part of the Jewish population towards intermarriage. On many occasions, I have been told how lucky it is I only have sons, as if they marry, their children will be Jews. (Religion follows the maternal line in the Jewish religion.) However, this prejudice is understood to be more politically incorrect these days and I have experienced more discomfort sometimes when things are left unstated but implied and joked about.

Marriage was also a subject of interest for discussion with the participants of this research. Especially significant is the relationship between marriage and family opinion and the effect of acting without family support. As noted in Section 2.5.3, Muhammed Haj Yahia (1995) contended the family is the strongest network in society, and strongly related to identity and security, two issues important when embarking on marriage. Even though there has been a shift towards a more democratic and egalitarian lifestyle for young Arabs (Haj Yahia and Lavee, 2017), each participant in my research emphasised the importance of family in terms of their personal lifestyle choices.

Mainly inhabiting the Jewish domain and speaking Hebrew allows me the opportunity to understand not only the words, but also the nuance of the messages. Non-Jews do not physically standout and only spoken Hebrew accents are markers. Not being a Jew affords me a different status within the Arab communities I am in contact with and maybe gives me an edge. However, within the Arab spaces I inhabit (professionally and personally), I am an outsider, as I have little or no knowledge of specific cultures or religions (apart from Anglican Christianity) and poor knowledge of Arabic.

The context of a politically tense and unstable environment that could significantly affect a potentially volatile and precarious Middle East only emphasises the importance of a more critical understanding of identity for all those who live in it. My biological children are not recognized as half-Jews by law and their marginalization in certain social and structural contexts is something they deal with. In addition, they have their own identity questions and this has prompted my interest in understanding more about how culture and identity are related and how they affect our lives in different cultural and linguistic contexts. Regarding their upbringing related to the bi-lingual and bicultural environment in which we live, my partner and I decided to allow them as much exposure to both cultures as possible, working together but also separately as the situation allowed it.

In line with the claims of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), and Nunan and Choi (2010) that language is central to identity formation (Section 2.5.2), as young children, I took them every year to England – one, two, and then all three together – with the purpose of exposing them to my past, my family, my history, my town, my religion, and my people – all in English. I wanted them to experience England, feel at home there, and make it 'theirs' in whatever way they could. I always went alone with them with the very clear intention of taking Hebrew, Israel, and their father out of the equation.

I always spoke English to them, which I said was a gift and told them they would appreciate it only when they were grown up. So, as the years went by, we walked the streets of London, went to shows, museums, exhibitions, theme parks, and saw Arsenal play on many occasions. We had family dinners, Christmas and church services, 'Butlins', canal boat and touring holidays, and shopping expeditions.

Now they are all grown up, serious Arsenal supporters and don’t need to be taken any more. My eldest son lived with his grandparents at age 27; he worked in London for 7 months and had the relatively unusual experience of further developing a relationship which was created over years of visits and interaction. My second son, age 25, spent extended time there too.

They get off the plane and are 'English' and more than their linguistic fluency, they blend in with all the manners and mannerisms appropriate to the situation. They negotiate the London Underground like locals, and know the 'in' restaurants in town. However, they bring their experience of being Israeli with them and certainly with three years of demanding national service in the Israeli armed forces behind them, and a lifetime of kibbutz values and living, they are uniquely different, as well.

The children were educated in a secular Hebrew-speaking kibbutz school. The language they use with their father is Hebrew. When they were 13, they had their Bar Mitzva. We were able to do this in a modern, Reform synagogue. I went to the preparation course with them and when my churchgoing and practicing Christian parents came for the ceremonies, my father was invited to wear a 'kippa' (traditional religious skull-cap), stand in the front of the congregation, and read a part of the service in English. These blendings and connections between religions, families, cultures, and languages seemed unique moments in time of harmony, peace, and happiness.

In the army, my two oldest boys were given the opportunity of doing a conversion course to become Jewish. One served as a fighting medic in a tank regiment, the other in Intelligence. They both declined the opportunity to convert. My third son has recently completed national service. He trained in emergency and trauma medicine, then trained to teach instructors and finally, trained doctors and paramedics (from other disciplines) in trauma and emergency medicine who serve yearly as reservists. He also declined the opportunity to convert. It does not seem to be a question of what they think is more important or ‘better’. When we have spoken about this, they see themselves as being the owners of two languages, cultures, and religions (and passports) and prefer to stride the abyss, get the rewards, and pay whatever price must be paid for not changing what simply ‘is'.

Reflecting on my own life, which in itself has been subject to discrimination as a non-Jew, I am sensitive to the needs of minorities. I did not convert to Judaism, and I could have done so in order to become part of the mainstream, and the boys would have been defined as Jews had I done so. Instead, we problematized the situation and dealt with it as honestly as we could. We have talked about hypocrisy and organized religion, especially as many people in Israel do convert just to make life more comfortable. To be a non-Jew in Israel is not always easy.

As a concept, identity is related to multiple influences (Section 2.5.2). Who we are, how we fit into our environments, and how the connection between our inner and private selves and outer public selves relate has philosophical and religious roots. People are members of groups or societies, and moving in, out, or between them depends on cultural or societal rules. All cultures recognize the existence of some entity called the self and many people are caught up in the search for self, identity, and recognition and how this manifests itself in the dynamic societies in which we live.

Professionally, as a teacher of English as a foreign language in higher education mainly (although not only) to native speakers of Hebrew and Arabic, I am constantly acknowledging *difference* through emphasizing the English language and everything ‘cultural’ that is related to language in the context of the classroom. So, as a researcher I feel that it is not only the acknowledgement of difference that is important, but also understanding how that difference affects the lives and futures of young people and their environments who are in the minority and sometimes marginalized as a result.

## Feminism – A Position, a Philosophy and Its Methodological Importance

A feminist position entails the research being informed or consistent with feminism, which focuses on enunciating the repression and subjugation of women and 'reweaving the web of life' (Alcoff and Potter, 1993, p. 4). 'Reweaving the web of life' is appropriate as it not only focuses attention on creating change; it also implies that change may not be straightforward, even complex.

Hooks (2000), defined feminism as 'a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression' (p. viii). Although few people would sanction sexism in a blatant or intentional way, she claimed it is accepted as a consequence of prolonged indoctrination by way of sexist behaviours present within their communities. She further used the word patriarchy as a synonym to 'institutionalized sexism' (p. ix) but pointed out that while a sexist society certainly privileges men, sexism is also perpetrated by women.

As mentioned in Section 2.3.1, silent victimization of women is also relevant in Freire (1970), Pardhan (2005), Adely (2009), Anastasia and Telemariam (2011), Froerer (2012) and Sahu et al. (2017). It relates to the internalization of oppression and socially constructed gender differences which if not accepted or approved, are nonetheless part of daily life.

In this research, it was not my initial intention to present participants as distressed or oppressed individuals. Each participant had graduated from high school, passed university entrance exams, and was involved in academic study. Each participant came into this research to talk about her higher education experiences, not the subjugation of women.

However, sexism appears to have embedded itself (Bartky, 1975; Alcoff and Potter, 1993; Hooks, 2000; Thomas, 2017), so I choose to approach this research bearing that in mind. In addition, I chose to study only women, which places them away from any default supposition that gender is irrelevant when it comes to operationalizing and optimizing opportunities. It implies that a successful academic lifestyle including integration into an academic community is not something women can take for granted. The participants of my study were Christian, Arab, and women, but I agree with Golley's (2004) claim that an Arab woman’s 'need for feminism is neither more nor less than the need for women for positive change anywhere else in the world' (p. 522).

I am a female researcher and I chose to study this group with regard to how they managed being in a further education environment and the changing social, cultural, and linguistic domains they inhabited. I believe it is valuable to be party to what it means and entails to be a minority and to be able to ‘use’ this ‘knowledge’ to enable any woman in Israel to realize her academic aspirations as well as considering how it might affect attitudes and policy.

Feminist thought is being experienced in different areas and forms and its influence spans a variety of spheres of activity and sociocultural discourse (Garko, 1999). So, as my research focuses on women, at its roots there are beliefs about women and their place in the world that need to be asserted in order that this study can anchor itself, develop, and retain a focus.

Within the larger context of the study – the Middle East, and more particularly Israel – the Arab community as a whole tends to treat women differently to men and not necessarily as equals. Sa’ar (2007) suggested that the location of the Israeli-Palestinian women is 'structurally contradictory and this basic factor needs to be taken into account in any evaluation of the complex picture of their suffering multiple oppression while evincing impressive presence and achievement' (p. 48).

Methodologically, I understand feminism to be something that stands ‘with’ as opposed to standing in isolation, and make the point that feminism can be united with principles, methods, and analyses of different approaches. However, by accepting that discrimination against women is inherent in one form or another in every society indicates that any research design needs to be compatible with the values and principles underpinning feminism.

This means challenging more traditional philosophies which have consistently marginalized women's voices (Alcoff and Potter, 1993). This view has historical significance as well as current relevance, as it represents one of the foundations of feminist critical thought, which is that any universal human reality is masculinist and androcentric (Stanley and Wise, 1993).

Garko (1999) summarized paradigmatic criteria which serve to clarify an approach to research which supports a feminist praxis in order to show concrete connection between theoretical principles and pragmatic issues. I have already alluded to some of these points in order to indicate their relevance in the wider field of feminist research, but I nevertheless provide the criteria in their entirety in order to most completely represent the claims.

Criteria which serve to clarify an approach to research which support a feminist praxis (according to Garko, 1999):

* 'Women's Everyday Experiences' (p. 168).

This focuses on understanding the everyday world of women's experience.

* 'Misinterpretation and Concealment of Women's Experiences' (p. 168).

This rejects a positivist, patriarchal research paradigm in favour of descriptive research concentrating on the voices of women.

* 'Feminist Consciousness' (p. 169).

This relates to the importance of individuals undergoing a personal transformation in behaviour and ways of thinking about the world.

* 'Relationship between the Subject and Object of the Research' (p. 170).

This accepts that research is a dialogue between the researcher and participant and that the 'researcher and researched are dialogical collaborators who are inter-subjectively and dialectically linked' (p.170).

The points above reflect some of the principles of Acker et al. (1983). These include, ‘contributing to women’s liberation through producing knowledge that can be used by women themselves’ (p.423). In addition, research must ‘apply methods that are not oppressive; and ‘should continually develop the feminist critical perspective that questions both the dominant intellectual traditions as well as reflecting on its own development’ (p. 423).

The third point of Garko on feminist consciousness and women's transformation reinforces the work of Downing and Roush (1985). Their developmental model was based on the premise that a positive and authentic feminist identity is the result of a transformation that emerges as individuals move through five discrete stages. These include passive acceptance, revelation, embeddedness-emanation, synthesis, and active commitment. Passive acceptance of a 'woman's place', lifestyle, and role in life is therefore significant, as this explains in some part how sexism continues to be perpetrated, as Hooks (2000) contended.

My research gave women the opportunity to speak in their own voices and the research was aimed at creating a dialogue in order to gain further insight into their educational experiences. The ‘knowledge’ that was generated was constructed through the accounts of the participants. It reflected their perception of what is real based on their own personal experiences and beliefs. I hoped it would enable them to think about, question, and understand more perceptively their place within the society and culture in which they live and work.

I investigated this subject from the perspective of the participants in the education process. The aim of this was to concentrate on women's voices as being essential not only to inform, but also perhaps to empower and augment the body of knowledge that aims to promote and better understand healthy learning environments.

Neither the participants nor the researcher come to research in a void. They come as members of established social groups and a greater home culture which is different to the national culture. O'Donoghue (2007) maintained that individuals need to be understood in terms of the societies of which they are members. Societies are comprised of individuals, so in order to understand one it is logical to be aware of its relationship with the other.

Garko, 1999, p. 168 revealed that 'A chorus of feminist voices calls for openness and the use of descriptive methods to explore women’s experiences'. This implies not just the ongoing need for feminist research but a way of researching that acknowledges and empowers women as part of their histories, societies, and cultures.

## Methods of Data Collection

Interviews offer glimpses into private worlds. They indicate how individuals make sense of themselves and their lives and experiences and offer opportunities to get at deeper and more complex information. The intentions of this research were to be able to understand more completely Christian Arab women's subjective experiences in higher education including their coping skills in a challenging bi-cultural and bi-lingual environment. The potential for an in depth and wide discussion enabled participants to take control of the interview situation and guide the focus according to their experiences and interests (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Draper (2004, p. 644) called interviews ‘methods that are designed to describe and understand patterns of behaviour allowing access to the intentions, motives, beliefs, attitudes, rules, and values that lie behind them’. Kvale (2008) describes them as ‘an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee’ (p.1).

A relativist, constructivist ontology believes in dialogue as a means of exploring experience and semi-structured interviews enable flexibility and focus. I assumed a feminist, social constructivist position and believe that gathering subjective accounts enabled me to better appreciate how the world is understood from the participants' point of view.

In this research, semi-structured interviews allowed us to engage in a dialogue initially generated by way of the question. However, the questions gave participants the autonomy to pursue individual streams of consciousness, as well as allowing sufficient scope for personal expression. The interviews produced thick descriptions and provided details regarding participants' perceptions of the world.

Nunan and Choi (2010) asserted that the voice of the story teller is an integral part of any research product and the representation of the research is as important as how it is conceptualized and conducted. Voice is manifested in the narrative mode and the negotiation and thought processes to achieve meaning are personal. However, dialogue between the respondent and researcher offers a two-way opportunity for reflection and consideration of the issues relevant to the enquiry. It offers chances for examination and re-examination of themes and ideas. A persistent but patient approach allows participants opportunities to dig deep and ponder issues and ideas that perhaps less often find a platform for introspection. Yow (2005, p. 23) described it as a way 'to negotiate with deeper layers of thinking which might be otherwise more difficult to access and engage with'.

Semi-structured interviews gave me the freedom to inquire. In addition, they provided a framework, as the interview guide acted as an anchor, allowing maximum focus on the words, style, and nuance. Moreover, they ensured that each participant initially had the same opportunities regarding topics of investigation. This framework, which was held together by themes, ideas, and questions, was explored uniquely by each participant and the researcher. The questions did not necessarily dictate the order of the interview. I hope that the non-threatening environment and opportunities offered a way of stimulating thought processes and perhaps exciting the process of liberating a greater understanding or personal 'knowledge'. Appendix 5 offers the interview guide used in this research. In some cases I have indicated potential prompts to encourage participants to engage and remember.

Interviews as method have historically invoked considerable critique and criticism (Dean and Whyte, 1958; Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Kvale, 1994; Alshenqeeti, 2014). Kvale (1994) summarized ten common criticisms related to a qualitative interview. Some are more easily dealt with by epistemological arguments (interviews are not scientific, not objective, not formalized, incomplete, and do not yield generalizable results). However, others, suggesting that interviewees are not trustworthy, do not tell the truth, have selective memories, might have their own agendas, or a psychological need to please or provoke interviewers are more difficult to answer. There are scant responses to these criticisms across the literature, although they are alluded to and partially mentioned. Yow (2005) for example, reported that memory researchers have found that significant events are more likely to be remembered accurately and in detail. Therefore, it is tenuously possible to support the idea that emotionally significant experiences can be reported accurately.

Kvale (2008) claimed that ambiguities and contradictory statements might reflect the 'reality' experienced and illustrate a type of knowledge that is not neat or quantifiable, but rather a mixture of inconsistencies which reflect the truth as it is at that time. His illustration of an interview being an inter-action further clarified the impossibility of any fixed truth, underlining the need for a more abstract and holistic approach toward method.

In order to address some of the criticisms it is important to acknowledge and account for them during the research process which I attempted to do. It is important researchers are skilled enough to formulate implicit meanings and rephrase questions in order to get confirmation or disconfirmation, and also it is wise to conduct a series of interviews over a particular time period in order to obtain a breadth of data. Unfortunately, I was not able to do this as further explained in the next section. In addition, and wherever possible, observation of participants or situations seems to be a valuable and important method of data collection which would complement and further authenticate the interview if the research question supported it.

Braun and Clarke (2013) summarized some of the main strengths and limitations of interviews and I mention some in relation to the insight this research enabled. First, there is the notion of time which is costly. On the other hand, interviews do offer opportunities for deep exploration and rich and detailed data. I found it difficult to find participants willing to give up time to be part of my project and was worried at the poor initial response. I hung fliers in Arabic on the noticeboard of the Centre for Peace and Democracy and on other noticeboards in both campuses of the college. I sent a block e-mail in Hebrew to all Christian Arab students and an Arabic-speaking colleague mentioned this study to her classes when talking about research in general. The fliers briefly explained the nature of the research.

I got no responses to the fliers and only slowly got a few responses to the mail. I resent the letter and got a few more. In the end, I interviewed eight participants individually and had a meeting with a group of four participants.

Before the interview I gave all participants a detailed information sheet (previously accepted as meeting the ethical standards of The University of Sheffield) which had been translated into Hebrew. In addition, the participants signed a consent form which ensured their anonymity as well as their ability to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

The group interview came as a surprise and was unplanned. I initially received an e-mail response from one participant and we agreed to meet up at the student dorms at the end of the day. When I arrived, she met me with three friends and asked if it would be acceptable for her friends to be interviewed as well. They asked if we could do a group interview and I agreed immediately. This change from an individual interview to a group interview was spontaneous and different in a number of ways from the individual interviews. I discuss this more detail in Sections 3.7.2, Group Discussion and in Section 4.3.4, Crossing Cultures.

Students in Israel are busy. Most work to pay tuition fees or do community work in order to get grants which pay some tuition fees. Many of them register for 12 hours of lecture time daily for part of the week, in order to have free day/s for work. In addition, they are pressured time-wise to complete assignments. Arab students often have to spend more time on homework because of working in a second language. All of the students contacted me because they were interested in the research and wanted to be part of a project which focused on them, their experiences and lives in higher education.

Apart from the group interview, I met all the students in my office, which is private, comfortable, and quiet. I put a sign on the door so that we would be disturbed. In retrospect, I feel this may not have been the absolutely best location, but it was not feasible from the students' point of view to leave college, as some of them found time for an interview during their busy study day. However, as location is important, I asked participants to choose the meeting place.

A second point is that interviews may only be as good as the interviewer's skills (Kumar, 2011), and this covers a variety of subtopics, which all relate to interviewer experience. As a novice, I made it my job to try and find out about things which could affect the research in a negative way and prepare. I do not suggest that thinking and reading is enough to offset lack of experience, but I hoped it would enable me to approach the interviews in a calm and thoughtful manner and that what I lacked in experience I would make up with an approach that was respectful, non-judgemental, sincere, and genuine. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that good preparation is the key to successful use of interviews in qualitative research and I prepared an interview guide in advance. A particular scrutiny regarding interview questions that Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest, include carefully considering a number of questions including purpose, any embedded assumptions, cultural appropriateness, and meaningfulness (p.85).

I recorded all of the interviews, which allowed time to observe facial expression, body language, gesture, and tone. I didn't write notes during the interview, as I believed this would detract from the dialogue. However, after the interview I recorded other impressions.

I chose not to videotape the interviews. I felt that the presence of a third party filming, or just the camera itself would be intrusive, and also might not be appropriate.

I offered the participants the opportunity to contact me with written follow-up, but they did not do so. I suggested an e-mail opportunity to comment on or further explain anything that the participants wanted to elaborate on the initial interview. An e-mail would have enabled the respondent to write at a convenient time. I also offered a second interview after a week in order to further reflect on or develop ideas previously discussed. However, although this seemed a methodologically sound idea, it was practically not possible to organize, as the participants were too busy.

On reflection, I think my physical presence was positive. I have much experience with students in general, in groups and on a one-to-one basis as a counsellor as well as a teacher. As a non-Jew, I hoped to be perceived as neutral. This was especially important regarding the location of the research and the historical relationship between Arabs and Jews. It was obvious to the participants that I was not born in Israel as I have a British accent when I speak Hebrew. However, they would not have known that I am not Jewish. I did not make this an issue in itself; the information was transferred in the context of me telling the participants something of my history and decision to live in Israel and what that has meant for me.

The interviews were conducted in Hebrew and translated and transcribed into English. Using Hebrew with non-native speakers may have its drawbacks, but the respondents were used to using Hebrew on a daily basis. Hebrew is also a second language for me, and on reflection, it balanced the ground and might have been beneficial in offsetting any inequality in power relating to my teacher and their student status. Taking into consideration Bourdieu's (1991) view that language is much more than just a means of communication in the sense that it represents a means of power, it is important to note that I was not in a more powerful position linguistically, but rather on an equal footing with the participants. I was alert throughout the interviews regarding the language issues which may have caused potential problems and repeated myself if something was not clear, and reminded the participants to ask me if there was something they did not fully understand or had technical difficulty answering.

### The Pilot Interview

I did not get as many responses from potential participants as I had hoped. However, I still felt it was important to pilot the question guide I had prepared. As in many small projects there is “limited scope for formal piloting” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.85) the first participant agreed to help me do this. I wanted feedback not just on the questions, but also the questioning, so after the interview we talked about the topics covered, the line of questions, and how she felt during the interview. In retrospect, this was extremely important, as discussed in the Section Ethical Considerations 3.10.1.

As we agreed that no significant changes had to be made, we also agreed that I would analyse her words with the other interviews. She felt her words were important, needed to be heard, and considered for use in the thesis. As a result of this meeting, I felt more prepared and confident when embarking on the next interview.

### Group Discussion

A group discussion is another way of collecting data and it has practical advantages as well as methodological significance. The distinctiveness of a group discussion stems from its social, rather than its individualistic nature (Payne and Payne 2011). It supports a feminist approach to research which prioritises a supportive environment for participants. In addition, it is a method of data collection which aligns itself with constructivism in the sense that the group dynamic enables reflection and furthers understanding. It assumes that meaning is socially constructed.

Group discussion has similarities to the wider known method of focus groups (Gugglberger et al., 2015) but its main difference is its lack of narrow focus and specific design as well as its flexibility regarding the direction and focus of discussion.

Even though the group discussion in this research was not planned, due to the poor participant response its methodological significance became clear as the interview progressed. The group worked together to construct a mutually acceptable identity which seemed to come about by sharing individual experiences to create a different identity, which may have been 'truer', as it required a courage which may only have been possible with group support. I further discuss this in the Findings (4.3.4).

## Thinking About the Job of Translation

In this section I offer another personal reflection.

What does it mean to say I know Hebrew and can I do a good enough job of interpreting the message that lies within the words?

When I came to Israel, I did not know Hebrew. Once I was here, I had almost no official learning. So what I found myself doing was imitating whole phrases, sort of understanding what they meant in a holistic way, but not really ever thinking to translate or even separate the words into English or deal with language learning in a formal or organized way. One reason for this was because of the difference between the written scripts of English and Hebrew, as well as living in a mountainous and isolated part of the world before the days of Internet and mega communication.

I live on a small kibbutz with almost no English speakers. In the early days I often found myself in all number of frustrating and funny-sad linguistic scenarios, with people who thought the louder they spoke the better I would understand – even if they spoke really fast, and people who treated me as a bit stupid. I was living in a world of mostly Hebrew and had lots of input which if not comprehensible was entirely focused on purpose of communication.

However, eventually I did manage to ‘get’ Hebrew. Whether I had acquired or learned it, is debatable (Krashen, 1982) but I had in some way sucked in the language from the environment in which I lived. It was all around me, in the kindergarten, on holidays and at celebrations and festivals, and births and funerals and teaching in foreign classrooms and jokes and restaurants and news broadcasts, it was there all the time and one day it seemed to have fallen into some sort of order and I could not only understand, I could communicate. The unknown became the familiar. I had a mother tongue and an 'other tongue'.

I have lived in Israel for almost 30 years and am constantly exposed on a day-to-day basis to the words. Words, words, words. I know the words. Not all of the words, but lots and lots of them. And the words all 'mean' something. And here is the crux, words are words and we can change a word from one language to another. But it is the meaning that is important, not whether I know the English word and the Hebrew word. It is what the words represent (Hinkel, 1999). Sometimes words mean more than one thing.

Meaning through negotiation has been long discussed and researched (Hymes, 1972) but I am not sure that meaning is negotiated in the beginning. It is implicit, implied, as well as literal. And it seeps out as the words fall out of people's mouths in patterns. And different patterns have different meanings. Creating meaning is about understanding the pattern.

However, in the first place you have to have the lexical code, and over a period of time my brain cracked the Hebrew code. But only in the sense that when I hear the word 'shulchan' I know immediately the word is 'table'. But does 'table' mean 'shulhan', or does 'shulhan' mean 'table'? Does it matter? The letters just sound, and an image or situation or feeling is created. But what is important is the meaning. Is my appreciation the same as yours, is my table the same as yours? Do I understand 'table' like you do? Do speakers make assumptions about these things and then misinterpret and misunderstand?

When strings of words are used together, meanings are crucially related to these patterns. So separately the word 'rosh' in Hebrew means head and the word 'gadol' means big. And in English when you put them together, a 'big head' is a show off, a person with a desire or need to impress, whereas in Hebrew a 'big head' signifies an ability to be able to look at a situation in an open-minded way. The phrase – 'be a big head' in Hebrew is a plea to a person to be broad-minded and people with 'big heads' can feel proud of their flexibility and willingness to give in a bit if necessary. A small head in Hebrew, on the other hand, refers to a person who is closed minded and inflexible. It is insulting and derogatory and is comparable to the word 'small-minded' in English. So, in order to understand, we need more than just lexical knowledge. We need cultural knowledge, and then context is of major importance as it relates to meaning.

Words put together one way might have one meaning and words put together in another way have another meaning. Another observation is the adoption of English words into Hebrew that have a local and cultural meaning which is slightly different to the accepted English meaning. The word 'large' has been incorporated into Hebrew but when people use the word it indicates flexibility relating to ideas and attitudes as opposed to physical size. The word 'nervous' has nothing to do with fear but much more to do with bad temper or irritability.

Added to this are the sounds of discourse - the intonation, the sarcasm, the silences, the laughs, and coughs and other noises and omissions. There is also the tricky business of body language. The raised eyebrow, the shaking of the head, all the things lips can do, and leg positions, and all the secrets of eye movement and direction. A tongue 'tut' and throwing back of the head and bringing it back into place indicates firm disagreement in Israel. Not so in English. As Sigmund Freud wrote: 'If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore' (Zuckerman and Driver, 1985, p. 129). ‏

I think of phrases that were spoken by the participants, 'I am not prejudiced or 'I don't want to sound prejudiced but…. '; I don't want to be racist, but you know what I mean, don't you?' And these words, as part of a more holistic picture, imply a deep discomfort.

But what do they mean? Contextually, the racial tensions in Israel are not deeply hidden away in the archives of history. They are fully present and active and part of the day-to-day. Being branded as racist is not acceptable, so is the meaning here – ok, we know racism is unacceptable; it is political and complicated and it is really uncomfortable for me to say these things, but I am going to say them anyway because I am racist?

Then there is the business of truth, and whether there is an issue of what a participant wants me to understand as opposed to what she really knows or feels. Does the participant have control over the message or can I find a crack in the wall of words which exposes the 'real' meaning – whatever that might be? Am I indeed fit to judge, and if not me, then who is? Do the speakers know themselves what they mean? Are there layers of meaning? And if we peel back the layers, where do we end up? Perhaps this is negotiating meaning, where I respond by way of a paraphrase, and the participant responds, with something more. But, is this digging, a fresh creation of new knowledge, or are we sorting out a bit of a mess and putting some order to existing knowledge?

Perhaps order is the key to finding the meaning we need. After all, how can I understand a set of instructions, say, if they don’t appear in a systematic and comfortable way for me to make sense of?

Is anyone really astute enough to get the real message, read in, around, and between the lines of speech, hear the words and understand? At this moment, I am not sure, but I can say that during the process of research interviewing, I am not only acutely aware of the challenges. Not the challenge of whether we are using Hebrew words, or Arabic words or English words, but what lies behind the words and if this subjective negotiated contextual meaning is the closest to the very temporary 'truth' we can hope to find.

## Validity in Qualitative Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985), attempted to create criteria which enable researchers to relate to the concept of rigour in connection to their research data. Concerning questions about truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality they suggested that the word 'trustworthiness' (p.77) was most holistically appropriate to encompass the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

The procedures they indicate as important to address the trustworthiness of data include; prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member checks. This research makes assumptions regarding the nature of reality, and the inquirer/participant relationship which support the importance of being able to validate data in a way which is justifiable. The issue of trustworthiness in the context of this study is further discussed in section 3.11.

By the year 2000, Creswell and Miller continued to maintain that establishing validity criteria is important and should not be underestimated. Whittemore et al. (2001) were correct when they warned that this was not straightforward as years later, Creswell (2012) and Eisner (2017) still contemplated the issue of validity – what it means, why it is important and how it manifests itself in qualitative research.

The need for integrity, trustworthiness, rigour, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity are commonly cited as being significant (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Whittemore et al., 2001; Padgett, 2008; Bengtsson, 2016; Cypress, 2017).

As researchers are more interested in finding depth and different perspectives of an issue rather than trying to find a single and generalizable truth (Golafshani, 2003), in order to integrate the above-mentioned terms (which are not intended to be exhaustive) into a practice that ensures credibility or legitimizes data, and is able to truthfully and most accurately represent a participant's reality, can also depend on the type or approach of the research within the qualitative paradigm. It is also important to bear in mind the lens through which quality is established and this includes the views of the inquirers, participants, and perhaps reviewers of the study.

As there is no one fixed way of doing research, a qualitative methodology involves making choices (Whittemore et al., 2001). Therefore, with the intention of attempting to ensure transparency and create a study which meets some of the above-mentioned criteria, a selection of the following practical techniques can be implemented during the research process. These include self-reflection on the part of the researcher/inquirer, member checking (Bengtsson, 2016), thick description, peer reviews (Creswell and Miller, 2000), systematic and organized coding (Silverman, 2016), audit trails (Sandelowski, 1986), and collaboration (Long and Johnson 2000).

The worth – and hence the credibility of qualitative research is not only dependent on design. It is also dependent on the ability of the researcher to develop the level of skill 'appropriate for a human instrument, or the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted' (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 50). As an inexperienced interviewer, if the quality of data to an extent is dependent on the capability or skill of the interviewer, then this could be a limitation regarding the quality of the work. I also refer to this in Methods of Data Collection - Section 3.7 and in The Pilot Study, Section 3.7.1.

This research study which used interviews to collect data allowed me to get response validation or to 'member check' my understanding of participants' words and ideas. During the interviews, I tried to constantly clarify any potential areas of misunderstandings by paraphrasing and asking the participants to restate ideas and hence talk in greater detail about their thoughts.

Williams and Chesterman (2014) emphasised the issue of culture-specific items and the translation of humour as important for translators. This I felt I could adequately represent, having been immersed in life in Israel for many years. In addition, Flick (2002) endorsed contextual experience and my 25 years of involvement in the higher education field in Israel enabled me to relate to the participants' accounts with sensitivity, appreciation, and quite an experienced understanding of issues they brought into a dialogue. Regarding the criteria of careful data organization and the trustworthiness of analytic process, I offer an account in Section 3.11.3, which attempts to address this.

## Participants in the Research

According to official college records, the overall breakdown between the different ethnic groups for the 2016-2017 academic year was as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Breakdown of Different Ethnic Groups

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| GROUP | TOTAL | MALE | FEMALE |
| Bedouin | 15 | 8 | 7 |
| Druze | 196 | 64 | 132 |
| Jewish | 2909 | 948 | 1961 |
| Muslim | 240 | 80 | 160 |
| Christian | 102 | 27 | 75 |
| Arab no religion specified | 97 | 28 | 69 |
| Circassian | 18 | 7 | 11 |
|  | 3577 | 1162 | 2415 |

The percentage of Christians studying at the college was almost identical to the percentage of Christians in the country. However, the other groups together reflected a lower relative percentage, as the number of Jews studying represented approximately 81% compared with their 75% overall population percentage.

Practically it was possible for me to objectively access a purposive sample through official administration departments, which have relevant demographic information regarding the current student body. There were 102 Christian students of both genders in the academic year of 2016/7 indicating up to perhaps 75 possible female participants.

The sample was comprised of twelve Christian Arab women. All participants had successfully completed at least one year of academic study. They did not have diagnostic statements of learning difficulty, and all attended the same education college in northern Israel. There were equal numbers of students studying science and students studying humanities.

I did not choose participants according to the geographical location of their homes (although all had family homes in the north of Israel) or their socio-economic status, and some of the participants came from a large village environment and some came from towns. However, all of the participants' family homes were located in a mixed environment of different Arab groups and proximity to Jewish residences.

I randomly assigned each participant an anonymous name to safeguard confidentiality and respect privacy.

**Table 3. Research Participants**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NAME | INTERVIEW | LENGTH | SCHOOL | UNDER OR POST GRAD | MAJOR |
| Aseel | Group Discussion | 1 hr 20 min | Private | U | Human Resources |
| Nasreen | Group Discussion | .. | Private | U | Psychology |
| Donia | Group Discussion | .. | Private | U | Biotechnology |
| Sanaa’ | Group Discussion | .. | State | U | Food Science |
| Shaden | Personal | 34 min | State | U | Science |
| Nahida | Personal | 25 min | State | U | General Studies |
| Hiba | Personal | 40 min | Private | U | Economics |
| Lara | Personal | 32 min | Private | U | Food Science |
| Woorood | Personal | 1 hr 5 min | Private – mixed | U | Psychology |
| Maha | Personal | 26 min | Private | U | Psychology |
| Maria | Personal | 20 min | Private | PG | Social Work |
| Mervat | Personal | 40 min | Private | PG | Social Work |

Woorood attended a small and poorer Christian private school which also incorporated Muslim students. This was the only school option available to her. Shaden, Sanaa' and Nahida attended state schools. The participants in the group discussion were Aseel, Nasreen, Sanaa' and Donia. All of the students had different family backgrounds, but retained a uniting thread of being women, Arabs, Christians, students in the north, and living in Israel.

All of the women were in their twenties, except for Maria and Maha who were in their thirties. These more mature participants had completed a first degree and were in their first year of an advanced degree programme at the college. I did not separate these participants from the others in the analysis specifically, but was able to incorporate any differences or similarities which appeared to be relevant to the study because of the difference in age and experience. I talk about this in Section 3.11.4.

### Ethical Considerations

In 2012, Miller, Birch, Mauthner and Jessop described a changing 'research landscape' incorporating a 'rapid increase in research ethics regulation and governance' (p. 2). Flick (2014) claimed that the subject of ethics has become a prominent consideration in research design, as questions relating to the well-being and protection of participants are understood to be of utmost importance.

Silverman (2016) categorized the most frequently discussed areas related to ethics as codes and consent, confidentiality, and trust. The notion of informed consent is based on an assumption that researchers are capable of anticipating events which may happen during data collection (Eisner, 2017). This, he contended, is impossible, as interviewers characteristically follow unexpected leads and therefore are not in a position to inform those participating in research what to actually expect. This seems to me a most relevant and important point which can easily be overlooked by researchers who believe that explaining about the research is enough to ensure they are covering all bases and behaving in an ethically responsible way.

My pilot interview (Section 3.7.1) was an emotional experience not only for the participant. It left me feeling shocked at the amount of pain that surfaced as a result of our conversation. I felt intensely connected, guilty, and responsible, which was so far from anything I had anticipated or wanted.

When we talked about the interview afterwards, the participant also expressed surprise and shock at the amount of emotion she felt during disclosures of her past and family, and said that it was one thing to acknowledge a situation but to actually articulate, describe, remember, and have to think about what this meant to her as an adult was a different experience entirely. She said it had been painful but empowering. This highlights the serious need for researchers to bear in mind the words of Eisner (2017) regarding the probable inability of even the most experienced researchers to anticipate the nature of the content, directions, and outcomes of an interview.

Although emotionally difficult and ethically confusing, this interview enabled me to appreciate the strength rather than the weakness of the interview, as it enabled the participants a platform to legitimize topics that might otherwise be left dormant and festering. This is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2013) suggestion that interviews in general might raise sensitive issues, cause distress, and leave participants feeling disempowered. An anonymous questionnaire might be initially more comfortable, but could also leave participants frustrated by its structural limitations.

The phrase a 'vulnerable observer' was coined by Ruth Behar (1996) in her book of the same name. She created a platform for not only debating issues of ethnographic research and its place in the research spectrum, but also for contemplating the divide between the job of researching and the artificial and sometimes painful disconnection and difficult desk job of writing up the research. Her self-involvement and importance as a researcher may not be agreeable to all ethnographers, but her willingness to struggle with how researchers are situated in their work in relation to the data they become guardians of is noteworthy.

I do not call my research 'ethnographic' because it does not meet criteria of ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, the spoken word is an important means of collecting data across qualitative approaches in general. In that sense, the perceptions, questions and insights of Behar (1996) are significant for all qualitative researchers.

According to Silverman (2016), confidentiality means researchers are 'obliged to protect a participant's identity, places, and location of the research' (p. 33). Confounding this might be instances where the location and identities will add to the body of knowledge in the field, other researchers may be compromised seeing unethical behaviours on the part of the participants, and there may be also instances where participants do not actually want anonymity. These examples merely reiterate potential hurdles for researchers who may need advice if outside the conventional spectrum.

Confidentiality is related to trust and participants gain security in believing they are in professionally ethical hands with researchers. This relates to codes and conduct and is overarching in the sense that ethical behaviours on the part of researchers stem from the belief of being able to research in not only a professional but honourable manner. I gave each participant an anonymous name. I chose names from a list of common Christian Arab women's names given to me by a Christian Arab colleague. I assigned them randomly and then checked that there were no coincidental matches between the participants' real names and their anonymous ones. I made no reference in my work of the towns or villages the participants originated from, nor did I give names of families, schools, siblings, or any other identifying factors. No one knows the identity of the women who participated in the research except me, and there is no digital record of any names or addresses. After having scrutinized the final copy of this document, I do not believe there is any information included which would enable identification of the women.

In addition to reading a preliminary explanation of the nature of the research, each participant read a thorough overview of the study with me before the interviews began, where I talked about the nature and the unpredictability of semi-structured interviews. The participants understood that their participation was voluntary, and they were at liberty to stop participating at any time without need for explanation.

I also explained that the study had been approved according to the guidelines of the ethics committee of the University of Sheffield. In addition, I showed that I had sent a detailed report and received approval from the ethics committee of the college which the students were affiliated to.

The concept of power is also related to ethics. Interviewers may be in a position of having more or less and awareness is necessary in order to neutralize any discomfort which might result from a meeting. When participants came to my office for their interviews, as a teacher at the college I understood I was in a position of more power and also that I represented the structures that were partly responsible for the learning environment within which the participants found themselves. In order to distance myself from any representative position, I explained my feelings about the importance of the research and at some point shared my own status as an individual who did not represent the more powerful and majority culture. I tried to offset the difference in our status and invoke an atmosphere that was as comfortable as possible and one that enabled an establishment of rapport.

Regarding the group discussion (see Section 3.7.2), I was aware more acutely of a balance of power. This was mainly because I was on the territory of the participants, and they had group strength, and I was alone. Sometimes researchers are disempowered in group situations (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 89), but I did not feel any discomfort.

## Analysis

According to Saldaña (2015), 'the more well-versed you are in the field’s eclectic methods of investigation, the better your ability to understand the diverse patterns and complex meanings of social life' (pp. 177-178). Bearing that in mind, in the beginning I assumed that my inexperience in qualitative data analysis would constitute a limitation. As it turned out, however, coming into the field with no preconceptions and with no established confidence offered me an opportunity to take advantage of some of the materials and information available, as well as engage in discussions with more experienced researchers.

I took time to read and think in order to give myself a foundation that was grounded in the experiences and approaches of a number of experts and this was important and insightful. First it enabled me to become more acquainted with different approaches and methods. In addition, it underlined the message that qualitative data analysis is a personal response in capturing or representing the essence or meaning of a text (Vogt et al., 2014). Smith (2004) also claimed that good qualitative research cannot be undertaken by just following a set of rules, but is rather the vision and individual response of the researcher as s/he progresses through the data and analytical frameworks that determine the quality of the work.

Creswell (2013) defined analysis as the interpretative technique of making sense and creating meaning from raw data. He specified that analysing qualitative data proceeds on two interrelated levels. First, there is the approach that underpins and drives the analysis related to the larger methodology. Then there is the data's more practical content analysis, categorization, organization, and interpretation. This indicates a need for different skills from the analyst. On the one hand, there is a need for theoretical sensitivity and knowledge, while on the other hand, categorizing and developing themes require the talents of practicality, creativity, resourcefulness, and introspection.

It is not unreasonable that there are commonalities between methods and approaches to analysis, as they share an overarching epistemology. Their differences are methodological and theoretical and related to the essence and emphases of the inquiry. Saldaña (2015) also noted that different preferences and allegiances on the part of researchers imply the probability of variation in working styles. Flick (2014) noted that although there are prescriptive accounts surrounding qualitative data analysis, there is a lack of an explicit, general theory of how qualitative researchers analyse data. Therefore, what is important is lucidity regarding the dissemination of procedures related to the approach and transparency of reflexivity on the part of the writer as s/he explains how the analysis develops.

Smith (2004) suggested that greater accountability is preferable as qualitative research becomes more accepted and established. It is important to open up examination regarding different approaches and analyses, their corresponding epistemological underpinnings, and theoretical and methodological emphases – not with the aim of finding universals, but rather in order to provide a platform for ongoing clarification, explanation and debate.

### Summary of a Theoretical, Philosophical, and Practical Approach to Analysis

I collected data by way of semi-structured interviews and analysed the content by way of coding and themes. The development of data analysis seemed embedded in the research process, and it was difficult not be thinking about analysis during the process of the interviews and afterwards.

The importance of meaning is clear, especially as we were working in a lingua franca situation. I believe that with complex and difficult areas of race, politics, culture, and religion, all of which need airing space in this research, it is essential to be alert to implications and insinuations that arise during the interviews. The idea that observer bias affects data interpretation is not limited to any one approach as Bogdan and Taylor (1975) and Thomas (2006) contended, so a candid mind as well as an open mind is important.

I describe my analysis as 'thematic', which suits a blended approach noted in Section 3.4.4. Thematic analysis enables researchers to systematically identify, report, and analyse themes. It does not provide specific procedures regarding data collection methods, and is neutral regarding theoretical position or framework (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis is not a new method and appears similar to a general inductive approach as described by Thomas (2006). The advantage of thematic analysis is its flexibility regarding data type, and its adaptability to different approaches. It can be used to detail descriptive accounts of a phenomenon, or construct theory from top down, or bottom up (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

### A Personal Response

After each interview I wrote a 'personal response'. I decided to capture the moment as best I could by recording impressions of the interview. This was not meant to be analytical, but rather a response to the moment. The writing method was unstructured in the sense I had no framework or checklist to organize or limit me. I did not restrict myself regarding length or style and felt uninhibited during the process.

The reason I began this 'response' was to help me acknowledge my feelings. As an ethical researcher, I was not able to share the experience of the interview and I found writing my own thoughts a way of keeping in touch with the moment which I knew I could then revisit. The pages are not meant to fall into a category of a research journal 'proper', nor are they an attempt to impersonate field notes. My reflections were a response to an interview and I wrote spontaneously. This is more than a nod to researcher bias; it provides documentation that reflects my personal observations and reaction. This was not in the original research design. My decision to write was spur-of-the-moment. I did not officially include these responses into the Findings but when I was looking at the data, I was able to reflect on my thoughts to words to regain an impression of how I felt and remember aspects about the interviews I may have overlooked.

### Organization and Representation of Data

Different approaches offer similar guidelines regarding analysis, which include multiple readings of the transcribed data, careful attention of other data sources, note taking, coding, and creating themes from the data while moving towards data representation and interpretation (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this is to categorize and organize, but I acknowledge this is not a precise art, due to the personal element of interpretation and the unpredictable nature of the human condition.

Creswell (2013) suggested a hierarchical approach (p. 197), moving from the specific to the general, bottom to the top, but advised researchers to be attentive, as the procedure is interactive and interrelated and elements can proceed simultaneously and bi-directionally. Schulz (2012) used a similar pattern, beginning with observations, coding, and theming and moving toward broader generalizations and then to tentative theory.

In order to present a truthful representation of the data I involved an experienced researcher from one of the major universities in Israel to independently code a number of different sections of the transcripts. Afterwards we discussed the codes we decided upon, why we chose them, and how they related to potential themes. This researcher is a professor of education with many years of research experience, a fluent English speaker, was born in Israel, and works in higher education. I therefore felt her expertise and contextual knowledge and collaboration were helpful. We worked for approximately a day together in order to achieve an element of inter-coder agreement and understanding as we worked separately and together on the raw data.

After coding, I graphically organized the data in a table format in order to show relationships between the codes and concepts. The participants were numbered across the top of the page and I recorded the codes from each participant in a column. Then I was able to cross reference. I did this by way of colours, using the same colour for the same codes across the table of participants. Next, I established and combined these into themes. I felt this process of moving from the finer details and nuances of the dialogue towards a more abstract categorization was important in order to be able to track progress and follow the development of the analysis. In some cases, themes overlap, and it was important to be able to see that graphically. This made the final themes more justifiable, as the decisions were based on developmental evidence related to the initial data. I also believe it kept me grounded in the data and close to the dialogue.

This way of working meant the overall analysis cut across the participants, as well as enabling me to work on an individual basis. The advantage of this was that I was able to avoid some repetition and I did not have to work only in a linear manner. Working horizontally across a data set also enabled me to be involved with a wide and constantly growing pattern of data, which seemed efficient as well as logical. It also enabled me to closely monitor each participant's words, which was important with a heterogeneous group. For example, I was able to note anything that resonated from the older students which was relevant, relating to themes emerging from the overall data set. After this, I created graphical interpretations (maps) of the analysis in order to present the findings in a visually comfortable and organized way.

Bryman (2008) divided analysis into distinct stages in a more specific way than Creswell (2013) and Schulz (2012). His work is also hierarchical, although more specifically two-directional, as it suggests a movement backwards to rereading after the first theming and categorizing.

The data I had at my disposal were transcripts of eight in-depth interviews, a transcript of a group discussion, and my personal responses. Bearing in mind the importance of the oral narrative genre, I worked within a framework that contained aspects of Bryman (2008), Creswell (2013), and Shulz (2012). I provide an account of the analytic process in order to offer as much transparency as possible.

### An Account of the Analytic Process

1. I put columns to the side of the transcript in order to isolate notes for codes and potential categories. These are mostly descriptive comments. In addition, I included room for linguistic comments – including tone and emphasis, and any other points of interest, like gestures which I may have noted in the personal response.
2. I listened to and read the whole script.
3. I read and listened to the text again with note taking and initial coding.
4. I isolated major research question areas. I then created charts with the participants (p1, p2, etc.) across the top of the page and wrote codes, summary, and/or quotes at the bottom of each column.
5. I cross-checked and compared with coloured markers. By doing this, I was able to pay attention to emerging themes as well as individual responses.
6. I went back to the texts, reread them, and using the colour-coded charts, I looked for any more codes and potentially emerging themes.
7. I developed, drafted, and created graphical interpretations based on the data and the chart with the intention of linking and relating codes and themes.
8. I read the Personal Response scripts, marked any response related to a particular research question or theme, and related this to the overall picture.
9. I considered relationships of theory and data.
10. I gave thought to interpretation by asking what meaning can be attributed to the patterns emerging from the data analysis.

The heart of this analysis is that it was created multi-directionally, from the interviews, including the words plus any non-verbal or other noted information gathered at the time. In addition, I moved data into chart form for organizational purposes and to see a more complete picture of the whole data set. The process emphasised cross checking. As I created the graphical summaries, I paid attention to the themes that recurred, being open to the larger picture of interweaving themes, and their emergence during other parts of the interview.

## Limitations of Research Design

Even though good research need not be defined by sample size, I believe this research would have been stronger with more participants involved. As my intention was to hear the voices of Christian Arab women, it would have been better to have been able to hear more. I addressed this problem in Section 3.7 (Methods of Data Collection) and I outlined the intensive workload of students as one possible reason for not achieving a higher response rate.

Even though there is evidence that offering respondents money increases the response rate (Thompson, 1996), I felt it was important to interview students who chose to be involved in the study for intrinsic, as opposed to financial reasons. As I addressed issues of power in this research (in Section 2.3.1 – Women and Higher Education and Section 3.6 - Feminism), had I introduced a financial incentive there might have been an undesirable shift in the balance of power. Rather than coming to help with an important research study as women with something to contribute, the relationship between the participants and researcher might have changed to that of something like employer and employee. As it is, the participants represented a group that is small, to an extent marginalized, and with less power than other groups in Israel and I did not want to complicate that. In addition, I did not want to negotiate the tricky subject of pride by paying them for their time. As a feminist researcher, I chose to interview those who 'wanted' to be part of the research in order to retain the most honest field between us I thought I was able to achieve.

I am aware that it is possible to argue that payment actually equalises power relations (Thompson, 1996), especially if research topics and questions are related directly to particular types of exploitation and powerlessness. In the case of my research, I believed it might have contributed to bias, and felt it would not have been appropriate. I wanted to feel as sure as possible that the data were not going to be compromised by payment.

In order to circumvent this problem, I could have extended the research to include a number of colleges in the north of Israel. However, I decided to remain in one establishment as I was interested in a more focused and specific response to the college environment and did not want to generalize across different colleges, which might have weakened conclusions.

It might be possible to argue that a further limitation of the design was the use of Hebrew to conduct the interviews. However, as I have already argued in Section 3.7, Hebrew was neutral in the sense it did not affect power relations. We were equal as second-language speakers of Hebrew. Conducting interviews in Arabic by way of a Christian Arab interpreter may have created a 'same team' scenario, which may have been limiting in itself or introduced bias.

I was very careful when trying to put individual names to the text of the group discussion and found this a difficult job. Much of what they said was said as a group and their agreements and responses were often as a chorus. In retrospect I should have done the transcription immediately and gone back to one of the group with the text, but the interview had been long, tiring and late in the day and the girls had broken for summer break after the session so I did not. They were individuals and had their own stories, but they also put on a very united front regarding their feelings and there was no disagreement in terms of what they said.

## Summary

This chapter began with the notion of methodology as a way of linking methods to outcomes in a manner that is philosophically and practically sensitive to the nature of the inquiry. My purpose was to investigate how to construct and develop 'knowledge' which is honest, real, and subjective. This theoretically embraced an integration of approaches which I felt appropriate for this research. I outlined the relevance of adopting a feminist position and related aspects of the data collection to this. In addition, I provided an account of the steps of analysis in order to show the order of work.

Interwoven into this chapter are personal statements and reflections about the nature of language as the means to collect data and my own personal history in a country which I was not born in but have become part of during my almost 30 years of residence. As well as including this for the purposes of transparency, it was a way of acknowledging myself as part of the research from a methodological perspective.

# FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

## Introduction

This thesis investigated the experiences of a group of Christian Arab women students studying in an academic college in Israel. I present the research question again.

In the linguistically, culturally, religiously, and politically divided society of Israel, how are Christian Arab women meeting the challenge of higher education programmes?

It is further divided into the following sub-questions.

1. Why are Christian Arab women choosing higher education programmes?
2. Which elements of a higher education system most help and hinder potential learning outcomes and which personal characteristics and practical strategies are important for enabling and maintaining success?
3. How do Christian Arab women students manage changing linguistic, social, and cultural domains, and how does this affect their sense of identity?

The aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of how they manage the higher education experience, which constitutes a diverse linguistic, cultural, and social environment.

The research question pertained to how these women met the challenge of higher education, by relating to different aspects of the experience. In addition, it sought to reveal the participants' incentives for higher education as a life choice.

The aspects included:

* The elements of the education system which most helped and hindered potential learning outcomes.
* The personal characteristics and practical tools or strategies deemed important for enabling and maintaining the implementation of studies.
* The ways in which participants managed changing linguistic and cultural domains, and how these affected their sense of identity.

Research is dialogic in the sense that it develops through the communication between the researcher and participants (Mayan, 2016). Choosing semi-structured interviews enabled me to approach the research in the knowledge that the participants would have the opportunity to initiate and make decisions regarding the dialogue. I offered them an environment which I understood to be non-judgmental and comfortable, and gave them as much time as they wanted for exploring their motivations, challenges, and feelings.

During the analysis, the three overarching domains linking the findings related to:

1. **historical narratives** regarding educational experiences and life before academia and their retrospective impact on the participants' perceived readiness for the academic experience;
2. **experiences** within academia;
3. **individual perceptions of self** as associated with the participants' perceived positions as members of a different community and culture.

As the domains are related and there was no predetermined effort to demarcate them, there was inevitably some overlap in the responses of the participants and how those responses related to the domains.

Language, for example, became a central concern across all domains. It was practically significant in terms of how well the participants felt prepared for the higher educational experience, but also in how it affected their day-to-day experiences. Higher education students need the language to participate in class activities and to write assignments. In addition, language impacted on participants' self-perceptions and how they saw themselves as cultural beings within the communities they inhabited.

Another example is the role of the family. First of all, it was an important factor with regard to the participants' readiness for academia. In addition, it was critical regarding the ongoing continuation of higher education, and finally, it was related to the participants' considerations regarding their cultural allegiances and historical reflections affecting their perception of 'self'.

The participants' reflections about themselves included not only how they coped with challenges of higher education, but also if and how they were to make the experience worthwhile from an intrinsic perspective rather than – or as well as – an instrumental one. In other words, was the value of the degree and educational experience related solely to getting a job or a better job, or did it involve more abstract aspects of education, such as the acquisition of different knowledge, learning to think differently, or look at the world from others' perspectives?

Challenging experiences within the higher academic environment were broad and included social and cultural, as well as the previously-mentioned linguistic issues. The implications of these challenges meant investigating difficult subjects, such as racism and stereotyping, which invoked feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and prejudice among some of the participants.

Because of this overlapping, I combined the two previously mentioned domains of 'experiences within academia' and 'individual perceptions of self'; as it would have been artificial to try and create different sections just for the sake of neatness.

As mentioned in Section 3.11.4, during the process of coding, categorizing and writing, I created graphical interpretations of the data. In addition to helping me appreciate and see connections and relationships, it enabled me to incorporate the intersections and overlapping of the codes the data presented. Once I had done this, I was able to more clearly focus on the emerging themes.

The themes I proposed were (a) readiness for academia, and (b) an educational experience – challenges and perceptions of self.

I understand these as central organizing concepts around which I can most clearly understand and present the data. I list my subthemes before briefly explaining the context. During the process of analysis, these issues emerged as being significant aspects of each main theme. This development was never linear, and I found myself rethinking and going back to the data during the process of thinking about each theme and subtheme.

Table 3. Main Themes and Subthemes of the research

|  |
| --- |
| READINESS FOR ACADEMIA  Factors affecting choice: *Reasons for embarking on the journey.*  Motivation and capability: *Ready, willing and able?*  The role of the family: *A family concern* |
| AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE: Challenges and Perceptions of Self.  Language issues. *'Rules of language use without which the rules of grammar are useless'.1*  A religious symbol. *Biting the bullet – a cross to bear.*  Distant. *'Far from both and close to none'.2*  Crossing cultures. |

1. Henry Widdowson. 1978, p. 2.
2. Woorood. Participant in the research study, 2016.

The names of the subthemes are intended to provide meaningful titles for the discussion that follows. Henry Widdowson's quotation has discrete meaning and is appropriate to the methodology and the nature of the findings. This is connected to the assertion that in order to understand, people need more than just lexical knowledge; they need cultural knowledge and context is paramount. It is also related to the concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1966). This shows that it is not enough to have a knowledge of phonology, lexis, and syntax in order to communicate, and that a wider knowledge of culture and society, including conventions of language use, are necessary. In addition, 'a family concern' is appropriate, bearing in mind the central role of family in the lives of the participants from a practical and emotional standpoint.

'Ready willing and able' is idiomatic, but by adding the question mark in the subtitle, I mean to query not the inability of the participants, but rather the partially disabling effect of a separate school education system as it stands at the moment in Israel. 'Biting the bullet – a cross to bear' is significant on a number of levels, especially regarding the suggestion by a number of the participants that some people have the attitude that every Arab is a terrorist and every terrorist activity is the responsibility of all Arabs. This is an uncomfortable title and intends to reflect the discomfort some of the participants had with their socio-political status. It implies a fighting spirit with sufferance and is related to the subtitle 'Far from both and close to none", reflecting how the participants struggled to explain their isolation and thought carefully in order to establish a sense of order in the uncertain and unclear society in which they live and learn.

Using graphical interpretation lends itself to the philosophy of qualitative research. Maps are interpretations of the creator. However, as they are based on data, they must stand up to the test of justification and explanation. They are also flexible. If a hierarchical pattern is not appropriate, then a different type of graphic can be created in order to represent the words. Graphical interpretations are steered by the words, not the other way round; as the words of the participants are so important in order to construct knowledge and capture meaning, this means of presenting data for discussion is significant.

## Readiness for Academia

### Factors Affecting the Choice of Higher Education in Israel for Christian Arab Women Students

When I asked participants why they chose higher education, there was variation and overlap in their responses. Al-Haj (2003) indicated that within the Arab community in Israel, higher education is understood as a means to change the status quo and empower young people to effect change in what many understand to be a society that favours the Jews. Therefore, it was not surprising to find in all the responses a declaration linking higher education to empowerment and social and economic change. The words of participants equating education with power and liberation resonate with Abu-Lughod (1990), in the sense that power offers creative opportunities for self-development and production.

Figure 1 is hierarchical. I placed the word 'family' at the top, as everything else is in some way subsumed by this concept. The next 'line' of the map demarcates the broad reasons given for choosing higher education and the information given under each broad reason offers more specific and related examples.

**FAMILY**

FINANCES

PERSONAL

EMOTIONAL

LIFE

**VALUES**

**PRACTICAL**

INSPIRATIONAL

FULFILL A DREAM

MOTHER

BELIEFS

NO OTHER CHOICE

NATURAL MOVE FORWARD

INDEPENDENCE

EXPECTED AND UNDERSTOOD PATHWAY

AVOID DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITY

MOTHER INSPIRES

PROVE A POINT

EARN RESPECT

TO DO SOMETHING WITH MYSELF

INDEPENDENCE-POWER

SOMETHING NEW

CAREER MOVE

GET A DEGREE

TUITION FEES

Figure 1. Factors Affecting the Choice of Higher Education in Israel for Christian Arab Women Students

Although Nasreen said one of the reasons she studied is because 'there is nothing else for us – what am I going to do, sit at home?' all of the others were certain that higher education would enable them to pursue career opportunities. Their voices echoed the same belief mentioned in Pessart-Shubert (2003), Pardhan (2005), Froerer (2012), Ames (2013), and Cinamon et al. (2016) that education would positively influence independence and offer better prospects.

'My story is a big one, I want to be a lawyer'. (Aseel')

'I want a degree – I want a job'. (Sanaa)

'First I decided on the career, and then I chose the best course I could'. (Donia)

'Every piece of certification in your hand helps you along in life – from the employment point of view, personal point of view, ways of thinking about things'. (Nahida)

Nahida's words relate to the different types of motivation mentioned earlier. In one sentence, she differentiated between the practical and philosophical, implying a wider and more abstract response to why she was studying. The fact that she moved from the rather concrete employment opportunities to ways of thinking indicates an acknowledgement that the world is a bigger place than her school education and one which offers an opportunity for personal development.

The subject of power as a result of a successful higher education experience emerged as the concept directly responsible for driving independence. In the following quotation, Shaden summarized her feelings in relation to the notion of power. Involving a man in her response indicates the accepted future presence of a husband, but also the perceived necessity of a personal independence.

Money is an issue and financial independence or the acquisition of economic capital indicates a state that enables women more freedom. By naming herself as she spoke, she further emphasised the importance of making herself visible and separate, underlining the importance of identity as a state of affairs strengthening independence and hence power.

If I study, I am getting a lot of life knowledge, and knowledge in biology, chemistry, and everything and when I finish, say when I am 26, this is going to be my power [*short pause*] POWER! [*emphasised and louder with determination and frustration*] I do not want a man who says 'you don't know anything you didn't study', no [*emphasised*] I studied and my name is Shaden …. I have a desire to get somewhere at the end of the day, I don't want someone to say, 'you didn't learn, you didn't do anything'. I will have learnt. I will have my salary. (Shaden)

Her words echo findings of Cinamon et al. (2016), where a participant talking about work and higher education amongst Israeli Arab women described her higher academic studies as her 'weapon'. These strong metaphors emphasised the significance of a difficult independence and how higher education is an important tool which offers women a chance of greater status and influence.

Maha spoke more specifically about language and expressed difficulty sometimes with finding the right word to say or use in Hebrew. She said: 'even with Google Translate, it is hard', then suddenly and quite intensively: 'anyway it is my weapon'. I asked what she was referring to and she said 'the language, my degree everything!'. Her words seem to indicate how she was arming herself with Hebrew in order to be stronger in a world where having good Hebrew language skills is essential for success, impact and liberation. It is possible to note the similarity between her choice of words and those of the participant in Cinamon’s (2016) study cited above. The indication that life is a combat zone and weapons are needed to win might enable Maha to realize potential otherwise out of her reach (Pessart-Shubert, 2003; Pardhan, 2005; Froerer, 2012; Ames, 2013).

The concrete implications of higher education are aligned with the more abstract and emotional reasons the participants gave for studying. The practical possibility and ability to pursue certain professions meant realizing more abstract ambitions, and several of the participants mentioned the words 'following' or 'fulfilling a dream'. More philosophically, Maha said one reason she was studying was in order to learn 'how to look at people differently'. This less immediately and personally gratifying attitude may indicate a willingness to open her mind to differences or even to use that knowledge to better interact and move forward. Even though no one mentioned discrimination relating to gender within their family or social environments, there were implications that women are not entirely of equal status.

Maha, for example, talked about the respect an educated individual is able to command in society. If she understands that a higher community status comes hand in hand with success in higher education, it could also relate to her potential feelings of empowerment as an active and esteemed member of the group. Nahida began to talk about competition even though I asked her if she understood her degree would offer greater employment opportunities.

Of course, yes. Everything you learn, well, there is always going to be competition between you and the man, there are always professions where they want men instead of women, and there are professions where they want women instead of men. It depends what you choose, but there will always be differences.

However, beliefs about the power of education and its potential result regarding work on the part of most of the participants did not necessarily go hand in hand with the reality. Abu-Rabia-Queder and Arar (2011) claimed the job market did not reflect the numbers of qualified Arab women available for work (Cinamon et al., 2016).

Sanaa' explained that she had changed a course because she understood that it would be too difficult for her find work in her original field. 'I started with bio-technology but they told me there is no work there. They prefer Jews over Arabs so I changed to food science'. This belief regarding job availability for Arabs in this particular field may or may not be true, but the perceptions of this participant were real enough for her to change a course of study because of it.

The family connection influenced choices for many participants as they mentioned higher education was not only expected by the family but in some instances, was non-negotiable, ­ not in a physically threatening way, but in the sense of there being no another choice. As Mervat explained: 'This was the expectation from the house, all my cousins, everyone studied at an academic level. So, it was clear to me that I would finish and I would study too'. Lara said: 'From where I come from, this is the understood pathway. It's clear for example, one finishes high school, you work maybe, then you continue with higher education'.

A family's belief in the importance of education seemed to be unrelated to its financial means. Nahida did not study in a private school but explained that her parents were very supportive of her wish to continue into higher education. Both she and a sister were currently involved in higher education programmes and had the full financial backing of the family.

In addition, family enthusiasm and support was not necessarily related to any particular academic ability of parents. Hiba emphasised the financial support her parents provided even though they were not able to be involved in the course content.

Yes, they help*, (pause)* as far as being able to help me with the work – no, because they never studied, I study alone and I learnt how to study alone, I went and signed up, and also, I was alone, no there is no help as far as learning or the college is concerned but from the point of view of finance – yes, they help me.

When I asked about emotional support, she was most emphatic that she had this.

Al-Haj (2003) noted opinions about the positive impact of higher education on future life opportunities for individuals within the Arab communities which show a belief regarding the importance of higher education that is cross-generational. Maria added: 'Because that was the thing to do, not suffice with secondary school. It is what I wanted, but also expected from the point of view of my parents'.

Woorood had an emotionally troubled relationship with her father, who supported her studies in the sense that he endorsed them but did not offer much emotional support. The nature of their relationship was complex and resulted in her wanting to show him it was possible to begin, continue, succeed, and shine at an academic project. Whether this was related to further needs for approval was unclear, but his influence over her was strong. She spoke at length about him, his identity, his disappointments, and his life. Her inspiration came from her mother, who had during the participant's childhood completed both first and second degrees. Her pride in her mother's academic and career-related achievements conflicted with the memories of extra chores she needed to do and responsibilities she carried as a child, and her departure from the community to pursue her own academic success was bittersweet. Her father had not been allowed to complete his studies in Israel and was embittered as his only options to finish abroad were not supported by his own family.

So, my father said no, because his mother did not want him to, so he stopped, and from that day, he became a person who starts something and never finishes, he never, ever (*emphasised*) finished something he started. And I kind of took his (*pause*) I don't know if it's failure – it's not, I don't like to say that, but it's a kind of failure, he started doing so many things where he knew he's going to end it and never finish it, like he's doing it deliberately … and I wanted to show him at a young age even though they (parents) are not there much, and not helping financially much, that is possible to start something and finish it, and with all the cleverness he has, he can say, I did something, I have a daughter with brains, she is succeeding. She did not throw it all to the side.

These findings indicate that family values and beliefs, way of life, and the relationships between parents and their daughters were important factors affecting the choice of participants to pursue higher education (Haj Yahia, 1995). In addition, there were the instrumental and intrinsic motivations mentioned at the beginning of the section, which spanned beliefs about future life opportunities and choices and the power and independence that would bring. Maha also talks more abstractly about a more personal education.

The education here is more important than the degree, the knowledge I get here every day. In sociology and psychology, it is contributing to my life knowledge, day by day, I have a different approach, I am more developed, I know how to look at people differently which is very important, and that is the influence.

These words contain beliefs about the benefits of being exposed to a greater population and being able to look at people differently in order to make natural and positive moves forward with their personal development. In addition, it may be inferred that a different approach as a result of a broader education enables students to more effectively participate in the development of communities and country.

### Motivation and Capability: *Ready, willing, and able?*

The title of this theme is an adaptation of the idiom 'Ready, willing, and able', which in its original form indicates not only a motivation, desire, and having a practical option to do something, but the ability to do it, as well. The word 'able' can be perceived as meaning capable from a personal and intellectual standpoint. It also means 'possible' with reference to any practical realization related to other influences.

As used here, the title reflects the strong desire to study and the practical, physical prospect of going to study; leaving home, paying tuition fees, taking on board responsibilities, and so on. However, the question mark is intended to highlight uncertainty regarding its practical realization.

The map presented in Figure 2 is also hierarchical. However, in addition to the concept of 'family', which was overarching in the previous one about factors influencing the choice to study, the type of schooling participants attended prior to embarking on higher education is equally important when considering the perceived readiness of the participants. I divided the type of school into either 'private' or 'state' and further detailed it from there.

FACILITIES

Labs materials

Books

FAMILY

TYPE OF SCHOOL

SUPPORT

STATE

PRIVATE

QUALITY OF HEBREW EDUCATION

SYLLABUS

Course content, emphasis, organization

Number of hours weekly on Hebrew

**BUDGET**

QUALITY AND LEVEL OF TEACHING

ATITUDE AND LEVEL OF TEACHING

FINANCIAL

Motivational

Educational

Figure 2. Ready, Willing, and Able

University visits

Relationships with teachers

Extra-curricular

Ability of teachers

Life Skills

One of the questions I asked was whether or not the participants felt their schools had prepared them for higher education. Almost all of the participants had much to say about this period in their lives, which, in retrospect, many felt had not adequately equipped them.

In much of the Christian Arab sector, private (fee-paying) schools are the preferred choice for families, as they are perceived as offering a higher quality of education than state schools. Because many families do choose private education, it tends to persuade others to do so for social reasons. Mervat summed up her understanding of the matter:

Actually, many Christian families send their children to private schools – related to church or a monastery – why, well I think that they think, and there is something right about that, that we get a better standard of education than in the public sector. And in the place where I live, there is a very clear divide between the schools. For example, the majority of private schools are Christian; there are other schools, mostly Muslim, and schools that are for Druze. So, there is a very clear division between the education environments. So, it is only the Christian families with no financial resources that send their children to government schools. So, most people who have the financial resources send their children to private schools.

Interviewer: So, the reasons people send their children to private schools is because of the quality of the school?

Mervat: Also because they want to be like everyone else. I would not want for example, that my children would be different from the majority of Christians. I would not want to send them to a government school, I would want them to be the same as everyone else, to have the same friends.

In the beginning, the participants who attended private schools unanimously praised them as being 'better' and quickly identified reasons such as budget, facilities, university trips, and good teachers as important criteria regarding their potential readiness for an academic environment.

The level of instruction there is higher than in the regular Arab schools. So, from an academic point of view, the level of teachers, professionalism of the teachers, level of studies, yes, it did prepare us, actually the one I learnt at was one of the best in the country – of all the Jewish and Arab schools. (Lara)

The school was very large and invested in many different subject fields like physics, psychology, sociology, yes and every subject had its own place and resources. (Maha)

The high school was Catholic and the level was very high. The education, the treatment, the standards, there were individual relationships between the teachers and the pupils. There was a very good environment. There was a feeling that the students would succeed and get to an academic standard. (Mervat)

This sense of pride as they began to speak about their high-school experiences in the private sector sharply contrasted with the frustration and at times irritation in the voices of those who had attended state schools.

Research has shown that there appear to be inequalities in budget allocation between the Jewish and Arab state education sectors (Khattab, 2003, Abu-Saad and Champagne 2006; Golan-Agnon, 2006; Jabareen, 2006; Arar, 2012; Hagar and Jabareen, 2016) and in the beginning, the participants in this research focused on facilities. Even though Woorood's school was defined as a private school, it was very small due to its rural position and facilities were limited. Both Muslim and Christian children attended.

Very old buildings, heaters, but no air conditioning. (Woorood)

There were no facilities. I learnt communications and there was just one hand camera to do a small film. (Nahida)

However, Shaden indicated that recently there had been more changes in the Arab education system.

Interviewer: What about the facilities of the school?

Shaden: There were not many when I was there, but now there is a library with a lot of books!

She went on to talk about wider changes within the system relating to intergroup contact.

Shaden: Yes, and there needs to be co-operation between Arabic schools and Jewish schools, so that students can get together, and have a conversation like they should.

Interviewer: And this never happened?

Shaden: No, never.

Interviewer: Do you know of any schools that do this?

Shaden: Yes, now, yes. There is a meeting with a school in XX, and they talk about the *(pause, hesitation)* you know, the Jews and the Arabs. The wars.

Interviewer: Do they talk about these things?

Shaden: Yes, they talk.

Interviewer: So things have changed then.

Shaden: In the last five years, yes. My sister is now in 12th grade and I know.

Participants who had attended state schools were less satisfied, compared with those who had attended private schools, with the quality and general level of education they had received. Shaden related to a lack of organization and only average quality of the teaching staff. She used the word 'ok' to describe her teachers.

'Ok' in Hebrew, is colloquially defined as average or in the middle, but can convey different messages. Both the context of the message and the tone and body language of the speaker are very important in gauging whether ok means very good, good, average or less than average. When Shaden said 'they (*her teachers*) were ok', her tone and facial expression indicated they were barely good enough. I felt she was using the word deliberately to avoid having to actually say they were not good enough.

As the interviews progressed, it became clearer that at a deeper level, the women who had attended private schools also found things in common which were lacking within their schools. They ultimately perceived these as being absolutely fundamental in terms of their ability to integrate into higher education. This is methodologically significant, because in the first instance and at perhaps the shallowest level, the responses of all the participants who attended private schools were not only satisfied but enthusiastic about their privileged education. This could have been related to justifying the extra expense, but there was a definite change from satisfaction to exasperation with aspects of their education as the dialogue developed and perhaps as they became more confident in sharing their experiences.

One significant realization was related to the subject of independence. In the private sector, the teachers did much during the day-to-day of cushioning the harder realities of educational development. Lara described the experience as 'spoon feeding' and explained that everything was done for them, the result of which was high dependence on the teachers. She emphasised the implications when she said, 'within a year, I moved from a situation where I needed permission from the teacher to go to the toilet, to here!' The 'here' she referred to was a life she explained with 'no breaks', one where 'you don’t finish a piece of work on time – you don't hand it in'.

Aseel agreed as she emphatically described her feelings about a lack of independence.

They did not teach us independence. Everything we did, there was always someone to do it for us. They did not prepare us for having to do something on our own. Not only that, they did not talk to us about academic learning. There are schools that do that, they take students to colleges and universities, but for me personally, I was not prepared at all. When I started my studies, I was shocked. I did not know what a semester was. I knew nothing of academic studies.

The participants' lack of preparation regarding the different demands of an academic lifestyle was compounded once the language of instruction came into the overall picture. The law in Israel enables all Arabic native speakers of school age to learn in Arabic as the language of instruction (Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999) and Hebrew and English are taught as second and foreign languages, respectively.

All the participants were acutely aware of the importance of having good Hebrew language and literacy skills. They expressed varying degrees of surprise and frustration at having been not adequately prepared by their high schools, especially those who were paying for a 'better' education.

When we studied Hebrew, we studied it in Arabic; most of the time we talked with the teacher in Arabic, and I don't think they ever focused on OK, now we are going to interact with the outside world … they didn't think about it, they just went with the flow. (Aseel)

Teachers said 'you will just have to deal with Hebrew when it comes along'. (Nahida)

Was it important – no, not at all, like the only things important were, mathematics, Arabic, and English. And that was it. Hebrew was not something important that was given significance or importance for learning. (Shaden)

Regarding a mandatory Hebrew foundation course some students need to take in college, Donia complained, 'Well we wouldn't have to do it if we had learned Hebrew properly at school'.

However, the linguistic issue is not a straightforward one. It is related to language policy and therefore political in the sense that decisions regarding language use and language teaching reflect the philosophy, ambitions, and perceived needs of the government. Language knowledge or the lack of it is closely related to power (Amara, 2007) and Schmid (2001) described it as 'an important variable in power relations between dominant and subordinate groups' (p. 9).

There is an irony of the government offering native language school instruction to Arab inhabitants of Israel. On the one hand, supporting cultural and historic rights (Amara et al., 2009) is not empowering when the students arrive at the threshold of higher education with less than good enough Hebrew (Arar, 2012). On the other hand, language helps people maintain their identity (Jabareen, 2005), and it is also a means by which individuals can self-define and personally transform themselves (Nunan and Choi, 2010). So the policy of minority language school education – which can be seen as one supportive of cultural pluralism, creates a fairly chaotic chasm between those that can and those that can't, implying a whole higher education learning experience which is difficult for anyone without Hebrew literacy. The result is a population of students with quite different linguistic abilities and this imbalance of linguistic capability may not be unrelated to creating conditions for social diversity.

In the Facts and Figures (2013) manual, there are Education Ministry guidelines (Retrieved from; http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/minhalcalcala/facts.pdf), but I did not notice any particular uniformity regarding the number of study hours allocated to Hebrew study between the government or private school systems according to the data provided by the participants.).The lack of importance given in the government schools to Hebrew relative to other core curriculum subjects was mentioned by the participants. Relating to the amount of time her school devoted to Hebrew, Aseel explained:

Well, twice a week. Not a lot. There wasn't exactly organization at the school. I thought it was irrelevant, what? Grammar, literature, just so I will know how to say things parrot fashion. I never thought I would use the words on a daily basis. And the grammar, it wasn't serious, it wasn't anything significant.

45 minutes a day, well it's not enough. (Donia)

Arabic is a complex language with different written and spoken forms and schools must spend considerable time and effort to ensure students achieve required standards of native language literacy. Diglossia is challenging for the Arab learner as standard Arabic is a different language, with syntax, morphology, and lexicon all significantly different from the spoken language. Given the number of hours set down in the curriculum guidelines for native-, second-, and foreign-language learning, it is hardly surprising there are differences between how schools cope, and decide upon policy for language teaching. It is also unsurprising that most participants felt that they were inadequately prepared for higher education in Hebrew.

Before students attempt university entrance exams, they must matriculate from school and pass the external *Bagrut* (matriculation) exams, putting further pressure on schools to align themselves with requirements on paper rather than requirements in practice**.** In order to matriculate, students need to pass Arabic, Hebrew, English and mathematics.

There is no doubt that Arabic speakers living in Israel need Hebrew for pragmatic and instrumental reasons (Amara, 2007). The question is whether curriculum requirements enable the students to realize the need and whether teachers and school managers are able to equip the students with the language.

Mervat, for example, had given some thought to the necessity of good Hebrew language skills and went out to work 'for two years … at an Internet technical service station, a telephone service, and 'I was with earphones all day long, and all day long I spoke, so I really acquired the Hebrew language'. The reason for this was, 'When I was at school, it really was something I thought about. How will I ever succeed at university? It is a different language.'

When she began her higher education studies, she noted that she 'had already broken the language barrier', because, she reminded us, 'at school, you do not learn the language fluently'. This, she told me, gave her an advantage over other native Arabic speakers. These statements echo Amara's (2007) findings that Hebrew remains vital for professional and academic advancement in Israel, thus inhibiting progress for Arab learners in higher education.

### The Role of the Family: *A Family Concern*

Muhammad Haj Yahia (1995) emphasised the importance of family and family life within an Arab culture as well as the importance of a strong support network. All participants in this study stressed the importance and influential role of their family regarding their readiness for academic life. In order to best enable their children to cope with the higher education experience, each family provided support throughout the learning process.

Figure 3 illustrates the central role of the family as related to the higher education process. Help was concrete and abstract as the day-to-day needs of finance were provided as well as the emotional support participants received.

Nasreen, for example, emphasised practical help.

My Dad, he never gives up on me. For example, every Saturday, even though it is his day off, every Saturday, he drives me from my home to college and drives back alone. And that really, really helps me. Without that it would be very difficult. To come and go with so many things, clothes … and we bring food.

The other girls in the group discussion nodded their heads in agreement. By saying that he 'never gives up on her', there is the understanding that Nasreen’s father believes in her, which he demonstrates in his reliability and availability.

All but one of the participants said they had their parents' 100% blessing to study. As Maha explained, the financial and emotional support were both appreciated and acknowledged.

They pay everything, the fees, the apartment, spending money also; they completely support me, and they were the ones who said you need to go and study. They told me I need to complete my first degree, and then go on to a second degree, they also gave me the motivation to be here, and they always supported me in everything I wanted. Also, the subjects I chose, they supported me and said fine, keep going, you [are able]. They are there not only financially, but also emotionally.

This is not necessarily the case for native Hebrew-speaking students. The reasons for this are that a very high proportion of native Hebrew speakers serve in the Israeli Defence Forces to complete mandatory national service after leaving school. National service is 3 years for men and 2 for women. This period is often testing, and many families support their children financially, emotionally, and practically, as wages for soldiers in national service are very low, and conditions can be physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE LIVES OF THE STUDENTS

COMPLETE SUPPORT

PERMISSION

TOLD ME TO STUDY

PUSHED ME FORWARD

PERSONAL

MOTIVATION

NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING AGAINST JEWS

EMOTIONAL

PRACTICAL

FINANCE

EASE DAY TO DAY

* pay fees
* interest
* difficult to be away
* supportive in times of difficulty
* send food
* telephone regularly
* child care
* calm environment
* lifts – regular – bought a car for student child

Figure 3. Role of The Family in The Lives of the Participants

After leaving the armed forces, many young men and women work, then travel, and only enter higher education in their mid- to late twenties, when they are mostly used to standing on their own financial feet. The fact that the Arabic-speaking students (with the exceptions of Druze and Bedouin males, who may choose to serve in the armed forces) are younger, with less experience of the world, may also be a factor affecting their perceived readiness.

Nahida's father bought her car, Maria's mother looked after her children, Lara's family were in very regular telephone contact, sent food, and showed an interest in her course content, and Mervat's parents provided a calm study environment at home. Maha said her parents motivated her and supported her course choices. In addition to this, the majority of the parents paid all tuition and dormitory fees and gave their daughters spending money in order to help them with the financial load of being a student. Those who did not get financial support were able to support themselves.

This ties in with Haj Yahia's (1995) claims regarding the shared responsibilities in place within the Arab community. As the process of leaving home and living independently would be perceived as particularly challenging for many Arabs, the involvement of the family and provision of much help would be expected.

As well as the practical involvement by their families, most participants also reflected on the importance of emotional support. This is also referred to by Haj Yahia (1995) and Zoabi and Savaya (2017), as they relate to the central position of support within the larger family and the emotional well-being of the individual.

Sanaa' mentioned, 'Even if we are strong, we still need support. These are hard studies and it is not possible all alone'. Nahida mentioned how she could talk over problems with her family and Lara told the story of failing a course, 'I was so disappointed I failed a course and I went home and cried and cried, and they said "never mind, what is the matter? It will be ok"'.

Almost half of the twelve participants mentioned the stress of living away from home at certain times and the importance of the anchor their home base provided, even if they didn't live there during the week. Almost all felt a physical bond with their homes as a result of it being their family centre. Shaden used the words 'now I am alone' repeatedly to describe how she felt being away from her family, even though she was fully committed to completing her degree.

The Arab population of Israel has been undergoing a process of rapid social change (Weinstock et al., 2015) which is affecting the values of societies in transition. While their research (which particularly dealt with an Arab population in Israel) claimed to identify moves towards a more independent third generation and less of an interdependent generation, Manago's (2011)study helps explain my slightly different findings.

My study indicated a close connection between the different generations and noted more of an interdependent relationship between them as opposed to an independent one, but it is important to remember that the participants were living self-reliantly during the week in a challenging environment and in more of an unrestricted environment than their parents had done. The young women were realizing changing beliefs in practice, and their parents acknowledged and confirmed this by way of their role of emotionally and financially supporting their daughters. This links to O’Connor’s (1997) findings regarding an expectation and determination relating to academic success while acknowledging subjugation. Whereas in the past, fewer opportunities indicated a greater likelihood of staying in the same socioeconomic place, the changing beliefs of parents enabled their children to acquire more economic and cultural capital in order to create new norms and changes within communities.

In her investigation of changing values within a group of Mayan university students, Manago (2011) emphasised that change is not only gradual but needs to be made carefully, 'negotiating a pathway through old and new values' (p. 664). She went on to point out that the students attempt to blend new values of independence, self-fulfilment, and gender equality with more traditional ones. This is supported by the work of Nasrin Haj-Yahia and Lavee (2017), which also acknowledged the transformation within Arab society in Israel and the more egalitarian lifestyle of the younger generations. When Hiba spoke about the help she received, she recognized a necessary independence regarding course work, as her parents were uneducated, but acknowledged their belief in what she is doing, as they willingly funded her studies.

The journey of change, as Manago (2011) pointed out, is one that has to be trodden carefully, and negotiated through its various stages. When I asked about changing attitudes, some of the participants spoke about their own rather dynamic and shifting attitudes regarding their own lives and future children's lifestyles. From their descriptions, it is possible on the one hand to make a tentative prediction that this path of change linked to different degrees of interdependency will continue (Barakat, 2005; Haj Yahia and Lavee, 2017). However, on the other hand, any real execution of change still requires community support and community change and the participants suggested that this might be slow coming (Haj Yahia, 1995).

Nahida, for example, explained that no change is automatic and supported Manago's (2011) findings regarding caution. In spite of changing attitudes and more exposure to the outside world, family opinion and approval were still hugely important.

Nahida: However, if in the future my daughter decided to marry a Muslim, I would really have no problem with that. But I would not do it because I would not cause my parents that level of suffering.

Interviewer: But maybe things will change; your experiences have been different to those of your parents.

Nahida: I don't think so. Only the minority have changed, and it is still entirely unacceptable in our society to intermarry.

Interviewer: But you would not mind if it was your daughter?

Nahida: Yes, but that is because I am persuaded in that respect, but I know it is I who is different. I am different from the majority.

Lara defined herself as being liberal, but in a similar way to Nahida, seemed aware of community opinion and implications for the family. She explained her dilemma.

Personally, if I think just about myself, it really doesn't matter, Muslim – no problem, Druze, or even a Jew. But, I know that socially this is the thing that is the most unacceptable in the world. If, for example, I were to tell my parents I wanted to marry a Muslim, that would be devastation (*emphasised*). All of the society would talk about it. Every single person in the town would talk about it. And they would all say what a 'bad' girl. [The word bad (*rah*) in Hebrew is more severe in meaning than bad in English. There are a number of different words and phrases to signify things being less than good in Hebrew and the word *rah* is a particularly negative one and not used carelessly.] And my parents would not accept it; it would destroy them. And because I know it would be so difficult for them I cannot even entertain the idea.

'Even a Jew' in Lara's text seemed to relegate them to the least desirable choice, even though marrying a Muslim would be 'devastation'. Potential condemnation by the whole society was emphasised as she mentioned that 'every single person would talk about it'. This seems to support Vardi-Saliternik, Friedlander, and Cohen's (2002) claim regarding the almost complete homogeneity regarding mixed marriage in Israel. It is also reinforced by the importance and strength of the family unit and community (Haj Yahia, 1995; Haj-Yahia and Lavee, 2017).

However, relating to the literature and small sample of this study, one participant of the group discussion told a very unusual story about a female family member who did marry a Jew. It sprung from dialogue surrounding the problem that some Christian women have in finding a partner from the standard ethnic pool. Her revelation caused a surprised reaction from the other participants, not a critical reaction but one of hearing a very unusual piece of information. The responses of the other women in the group discussion were to deny knowledge of any mixed marriage in their communities, as well as emphasizing the absolute prohibition of relationships between Christians and Muslims. This quite short quotation of Sanaa' includes a number of elements.

And it was way [*emphasised*] less of a problem than if he had been a Muslim. [The fact that this woman married a Jew]. But she was a bit fat and not pretty, and not one of the Arabs even looked at her. But he loved her and she loved him, so why not accept him? Much better than the 50,000 Arabs who wouldn't even look at her … and it is perfectly acceptable within the families, and they love him.

She presented the mixed marriage with a Jew as better than if it had been with a Muslim. However, by saying the situation was 'less of a problem' she indicated that any mixed marriage was not to be taken lightly. In addition, there is the suggestion that in the eyes of the community it might be better to be married, as opposed to not, thus making someone from outside the accepted standard ethnic pool more justifiable. Her personal condoning of the idea appeared to be related to her criticism of the Arabs. If one of them had agreed to marry her, she may not have had to marry a Jew.

The strong family ties and relationships between the generations indicate that Ogbu's (1998) classification of descendants as a separate but related group is significant. The participants were in a different situation to their forebears, as well as being affected by 'community forces'. What is also important is the influential two-way relationship between the Jews and Arabs as perceived by the younger generation, indicating a participatory and communal adjustment of beliefs. As the older generations' unique experiences affect the younger generation's attitudes, it is possible that the younger generations' unique experiences also impact on those of the older generation.

## An Educational Experience - Challenges Every Day in Every Way

There were a number of challenges related to the higher education experience which the participants spoke about during the interviews. This was a complex area, as not only were the challenges interconnected; they were also part of more abstract, independent topics, all of which in themselves were influenced by the social, cultural, historical, and political reality of present-day Israel.

On the basis of coding and the themes, I present the Figure 4, Challenges, as an overview and basis for discussion. The challenges shown in this figure are separated into four main domains: cultural differences, lifestyle, social behaviours, and Hebrew language. I further discuss each of the domains throughout the findings, under the sections Language Issues, A Religious Symbol, Far from Both and Close to Neither, and Crossing Cultures.

There are a number of subheadings and many examples under each section of the figure. In addition, there is a cause–effect element, as it includes the perceived feelings and situations which result from the different types of challenges. This indicates the complexity of life at college; some of the perceived outcomes were emotionally distressing and difficult for the participants to articulate. Through the figure, it is possible to grasp not only the complexity and the breadth of the challenges, but also how much energy and time is required to deal with them, both practically and emotionally.

The challenges of participating in higher education are broad, interrelated, and complex. They range from practicalities related to personal day-to-day survival, like transportation and being away from close family members, as well as challenges related to passing courses. Here even good knowledge of Hebrew was perceived as being not quite enough, and participants needed to work hard in order to deal with the high level of academic Hebrew literacy required to cope with the variety of work demands, as well as speaking the language in the social arena of the classroom.

CHALLENGES

LIFESTYLE

SOCIAL

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

JEW

CHRISTIAN

MUSLIM

HEBBREW LANGUAGE

LACK OF WORLD EXPERIENCE

LEAVING HOME

SEGREGATION

AURAL

WRITTEN

SPOKEN

DRESS CODE

VALUES

BEHAVIOURS

ARMY SERVICE

LIFE EXPERIENCE

AGE

LECTURE QUALITY

TRANSPORTATION

STUDY GROUPS

SEPARATE DURING BREAKS

PRESENTATIONS

TERM PAPERS

FAMILY SUPPORT

RESULTING IN

DISTRESS – ANXIETY - WORRY

PREJUDICE

UNFAIRNESS

LONELINESS – NEED FOR A COMMON THREAD

NOT CONNECTED – NOT RELATED

STEREOTYPING BOTH WAYS

Figure 4. Challenges

I also include Figure 5, Personal Qualities and Practical Solutions in order to illustrate some of the ways the participants approached the issues related to dealing with the challenges.

In spite of almost unanimous family support, all participants gave serious thought to themselves and how their personalities and individual characteristics influenced their ability to continue and succeed within the higher education environment. The qualities as shown in the figure indicate those that are potentially important for all students and are not meant to suggest they are only relevant for Christian Arab students. They include a strong character, self-discipline, persistence, determination, and a positive attitude. The participants spoke candidly and emphasised the importance of being aware of challenges. Personal qualities deemed important for coping are shown horizontally across the top of the page, as they have equal importance and are not meant to be hierarchically differentiated.

Practical solutions to dealing with the challenges suggested by the students varied. They included a number of concrete options, like working in a Hebrew-speaking group for the purpose of improving Hebrew, as well as acknowledgement of the importance of being able to be independent and work alone for longer hours than native Hebrew speakers. In addition, there was recognition of taking aboard attitudes such as open-mindedness and not giving up in the face of failure.

It is difficult to say that the learning challenges of being a student were more or less important than other types of challenges. Certainly, appreciating the inter-connected nature of issues was important, but as the initial purpose of being at college was mostly related to leaving with an academic qualification, this seemed to take priority at the beginning.

Shaden was emphatic about the importance of Hebrew in terms of her potential success.

I just have to have control of the language. Control of the language – from every which way. From the point of terminology, slang, everything. To control the language like I need to. Look, I learn here in Israel, in the Jewish sector, not the Arab sector, and it is imperative I master the language in order to succeed.

RELATED TO SELF

PERSISTENCE

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

SELF CONFIDENCE

SELF-BELIEF

DETERMINATION

SELF-DISCIPLINE

STRONG CHARACTER

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

CREATE AN INDEPENDENCE

*Not rely on other people*

*Work in mixed groups as much as possible to improve Hebrew*

*Give up pleasures*

*Study alone*

*Work hard*

NOT GIVE UP IN THE FACE OF FAILURE

*Sunday church. Family events*

*Bought specific software*

RELATED TO OTHERS

OPEN MINDED

WILLING TO COMMUNICATE

RECOGNITIONS - AWARENESS

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

MAKING MYSELF KNOWN (sitting in the second row)  
NOT OPENLY IDENTIFYING AS AN ARAB  
CRUXIFIX AS A SYMBOL OF A SHIELD  
STAND OUT  
OUTSIDE WORK FOR A QUALITY CV  
SETTING A BAR

Figure 5. Personal Qualities and Practical Solutions

Shaden also explained how she preferred to work in a mixed group. 'Because I learn from the Jews. How they speak, how they conduct a discussion with confidence. I will learn from them how to speak.'

Challenges also included those of a more abstract nature related to identity and racial enigmas, as participants considered their position somewhere between the mainstream Jewish and majority Arab Muslim cultures.

Maria spoke candidly about developing self-confidence, 'and being open, the ability to communicate with a lot of different and even strange people. And not to be closed and narrow minded.' Maha said, 'self-confidence, belief in myself, in what I am doing' were qualities she considered most important to her success.

A significant finding in this study indicates a need for a diversity of coping skills. At times, the participants seemed overwhelmed at the mental, emotional, and physical strength required to succeed. The personal qualities listed in Figure 5 do much to sum up the overall picture presented by the participants, although it was difficult to explain in words the day-to-day inner strength they needed. Another finding was the perceived importance of other Christian women in each other's lives, and the mutual group support they were able to give each other.

The college in which the students studied has support systems in place for helping all Arab students with social and language issues and they are granted 25% extra time in examinations (apart from English). In addition to the Centre for Peace and Democracy, which has systems in place for social, practical, and educational support, and an Arabic speakers' Student Union, all students are able to benefit from a support centre for students with learning difficulties and special needs. Moreover, there is a centre for students with physical problems which provides access to practical in-class support as well as counselling.

Less than half of the participants took advantage of the facilities available. Hiba said that special treatment for Arabs was divisive and only further alienated them from the mainstream student population. Maha made the following comment: 'It really did not help me. I think it is nonsense. It did not help at all.' She was unwilling to be drawn further and seemed almost annoyed at being part of a group that was in some way disadvantaged.

As well as looking at challenges in general, it is important to acknowledge how the different types of challenges affected different aspects of the overall higher education experience for the participants, and how they saw themselves as part of a bigger picture. Although the main focus of challenges was related to participants' language and social and cultural situations, there was one particular problem which was related to physically getting to and from the campus, which was no trivial matter.

In Israel, hitching lifts is very common (except for soldiers in uniform, for whom it is forbidden) and many drivers stop and give lifts. However, hitching is not acceptable within the Christian Arab culture. For Christian Arab female students, the business of getting on campus to actually start the day presents quite a practical challenge. There is some public transportation, but not regularly throughout the academic day. Shaden said she just walked, 'I would never take a ride with a stranger', and then she bought a bike. Extreme Middle Eastern weather, up to 40 degrees in the summer and rains in the winter, do not make this an easy option. Aseel said:

I lived in a town and I did not know what it was to hitch, I just could not take a lift, unless I knew someone and it was really difficult. To this day, I can't get used to taking a lift. Even on the bus. I had never been on a bus before!

She summed up this challenge by saying 'I can manage all the 'extreme' situations but this was a challenge! My greatest challenge is transport to and from college'. However, over the last year there has been a considerable change in transport options to the college.

### Language Issues: 'Rules of Language Use Without Which the Rules of Grammar are Useless' (Widdowson, 1978, p.2)

Figure 6 presents the main areas of interest and importance related to the challenge of language issues in higher education. The information is organized in a circular fashion, which highlights the ongoing complexity of languages with respect to communication and identity. However, in spite of acknowledgments regarding language as a more abstract concept, the participants related to the very practical relevance of Hebrew in contrast to the perceived irrelevance and hence unimportance of Arabic.

* language control is equated with success
* a weapon
* Hebrew is the language here - needed
* totally relevant
* confers a lower status
* nothing special about Arabic
* no one cares about grades in Arabic
* Arabic does not contribute to anything
* discomfort in mixed group
* language weakness causing fear, and stress, discomfort
* difficulty in articulation
* sensitive to criticism
* participation a problem
* difficulty of public speaking, presentations
* problems not insurmountable
* confusion and language mixing
* solutions - group work with Hebrew speakers - don't give up
* review and learn vocab and phrases - vocab deficit
* need support with writing

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF HEBREW

PERCEIVED UNIMPORTANCE OF ARABIC

PERCEIVED AWARENESS OF LIMITATIONS WHEN USING HEBREW AND SOLUTIONS

ISSUES OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

* language plays an important social role
* more extreme opinions in native language
* do not want to study in an Arabic-speaking college – affects Hebrew competence and majority Muslim population
* SLA student 'a real Jew'
* importance of native language to express feeling

Figure 6. Language Issues in Higher Education

This sub-theme is intended to expose the intricacy of the language situation for native Arabic-speaking students. As the Hebrew language is the means of communication in most higher education establishments in Israel, this section highlights the importance of the language as a means to write assignments, understand lectures, make and deliver presentations, and speak with lecturers and other students. It is also the means of social contact and communication between the two groups of Arabs and Jews, as the majority of native Hebrew and other language speakers do not have the option of Arabic as a communication tool.

In spite of the paradoxical situation regarding an education system in Arabic for Arab citizens of Israel (Karayanni, 2007; Amara et al., 2009; Arar, 2012), all citizens, regardless of their ethnic status, are entitled to higher education. Naturally there are conditions of acceptance, and these include a certain proficiency level in Hebrew, a university entrance exam, and high-school matriculation.

Shohamy and Kanza (2009) contended that higher education is a channel through which greater social mobility is attained. In addition, it offers access to opportunities otherwise unavailable to students regarding future life choices (Pessart-Shubert, 2003; Pardhan, 2005; Froerer, 2012; Ames, 2013).

Fluency in Hebrew, as part of the package deal regarding admission to higher education in Israel was accepted as having significant importance and relevance regarding the participants' perceived opportunities for successfully completing their college courses and for finding work.

The 'Catch 22' situation seemed very clear. If a student were to choose to study in an Arabic-speaking college, there would be serious limited job opportunities in Israel. The central role of family in the lives of participants (Haj Yahia, 1995) does not make work outside Israel a realistic option for most. Therefore, it was unsurprising that not one participant saw any real advantage in pursuing a degree with Arabic as the medium of instruction, and that all had chosen to deal with Hebrew in order to reap the longer-term potential work related benefits.

After not getting high enough grades to study dentistry in Israel, Donia was accepted by the Arab American University of Jenin (West Bank) but chose not to take up the place for language and cultural reasons. She summed this up:

I need the language because all the places I might work after my degree, I must have the language, if I am going to move on here, I need the language, the way to speak. What would I learn there? Come back here and not know how to talk, that's no good.

Nasreen commented on a friend who was learning there: 'you cut yourself off from life in order to get a certificate – and you don't learn in Hebrew!' This seems to indicate that learning in Hebrew, despite the heartache, was the ticket to a better life.

Three students felt their Hebrew was really good enough for study purposes and, in spite of acknowledging it was not on par with Arabic, said they were able to manage in the academic environment. However, further reflection as the conversations continued triggered a different opinion, as they grappled with the consequences of not being quite as grammatically able as native Hebrew speakers.

Today, before I came here, I presented, and it was about stereotypes, and how they affect people – not only Arabs – and I was standing there and talking about it, and I was the only Arab in class and talking in front of everyone, and I was thinking, everyone is looking at me and maybe I got that word wrong, and I am stuck, and some girl corrected me and I am – shit – like it was hard – very *very* hard. I have done these presentations before and I was with another person and it was easier – but today, all the class was Jews, and I was the Arab one and I had to speak up, so oh my God, and I am talking about stereotypes and they are looking at me, I am Arab, I am 20 years old, and everything they know, and I have come to show some self-confidence, and I can talk fluently but I *didn’t* and it was hard because I am thinking, how are they looking at me? (Woorood)

Eventually she began to determine, and with some passion, that even with good Hebrew, she was disadvantaged. The above example referred to an oral presentation she made in front of the class. It shows that even a fluent Hebrew speaker (and she described herself thus emphatically in her interview on a number of occasions), is still challenged and unequal linguistically to her peers. It also incorporates a number of different and complex issues related to language, identity, and society. In this quite short statement, Woorood described herself as an Arab three times. This perhaps emphasises her perception of the divide between herself and 'the Jews' and indicates the importance of language not only as a means of communication, but also as purveyor of culture and ethnicity. She appeared to relate how 'they' (the Jews) looked at her, and her difficulty in speaking Hebrew, and this seems to be also connected to her choice of a presentation which is ironically related to stereotypes.

This resonates with Norton and Toohey (2011), as they illustrated the relationship between language aptitude and identity as perceived by interlocutors. In Section 2.5.2, the vignette illustrated is extreme in comparison to Woorood's response to an uncomfortable linguistic situation, but it is relevant nevertheless regarding the barrier created by linguistic challenges and the perceptions between interlocutors.

Hiba, related to difficulties relating to whole message fluency and communicative competence as she spoke about using Hebrew.

You want to say something, and suddenly you say something different, you just don't have the ability to say exactly what you wanted to say, something else comes out, something else, everything related to emotions – feelings that's even worse – you can't say everything you want, it is difficult sometimes.

Previously she had said '[now] I can speak Hebrew', but again, once we began to speak more about the language, she indicated an awareness of the different levels of 'knowing' a language and recounted her limitations of not being able to say exactly what she wants. In addition, she brought in the more abstract notion of feelings and the difficulty of being able to express them accurately (Koven, 2006). This example indicates not only that language has a role in the way people relate to one another (Riley, 2007), but also the frustration once a speaker becomes aware of how an inability to speak fluently might affect potential relationships through the judgements of others.

During the interview with the group, all the participants responded ardently about the oral presentations required in their studies. It was simply 'double the amount of work', which left them less time for other projects and assignments. In addition, there was the pressure of knowing they were standing and speaking to a population which was older and had more life experience, which they felt put them at a perceived disadvantage.

Sanaa' identified broader life experience and age as important aspects regarding communicative ability. This ties in with the explanation about national service, followed by extended travel (Section 4.2.3).

I think there is something else important: we finish school and start to study, as opposed to the Jews who have fun after they finish school, and they come to study at ages 24 or 25 years old and they have all the 'know-how', and you sit in class, and they have so much knowledge, and we don't. And from the point of view of language, you can't participate. We have nothing to say to them.

Having 'nothing to say' puts the focus on the matter of conversation as opposed to linguistic ability. However, this is important, as it indicates that an experiential gap in addition to the cultural and linguistic gaps between the different populations further complicates relationship building.

The three participants who felt their Hebrew was good had either worked in a Hebrew-speaking environment or had other reasons for greater exposure to Hebrew before they began higher education. This strategy allowed the participants a means of partially dealing with the extra challenge of learning in a second language. It also indicates they were alert to the challenges and importance of learning in Hebrew and were able to tackle the problem before they began a higher education experience.

Freire's (1970) claim of operating systems in practice doing much to internalize weakness within vulnerable groups is relevant. On the one hand, it is an indication that 'systems' can be circumvented to an extent, in the sense that individuals can arm themselves and become stronger, as in the case of participants who worked before entering college. However, I note that not one of the participants felt entirely linguistically equal to their native Hebrew-speaking peers, in spite of their efforts to improve their Hebrew language skills.

Options are increasing for everyone to gain more skills due to the Internet and other technologies. However, the fact that not all the participants had been able to follow a path of preparation, training, and groundwork by working in a Hebrew-speaking environment or learning independently before they tackled higher education, indicates that the 'systems' in place are still able to disadvantage students and that circumvention strategies may not be easily accessible.

Participants who had not improved their Hebrew enough before entering higher education also experienced different types of challenges and ensuing anxieties related to the language once at college. However, in each case, they all had something to say about coping.

Nahida related a story about an assignment she handed in. 'I had to write in Hebrew. I worked hard, I really worked hard'. After she received a grade of 66, she wrote to the lecturer and begged for a better grade on the strength of not being a native speaker…. The reply from the lecturer was to the point, 'you have to cope, this is not my problem'.

Despite raising issues of racism, my intention here is not to discuss this example, but rather see where it leads. As the interview with this participant progressed, she later acknowledged the problem and decided upon a coping strategy.

I prefer to work with Hebrew speakers, because … (*hesitation*) well, because of that teacher, when she said I have to deal with the Hebrew, I have to deal with it, so when I have to work with groups … I would choose to work with a Jewish group.

She continued however, also relating to how she was 'seen' by the others in the class and the impact that might have on smaller group activity:

When I speak in front of everyone, or someone asks me a question, they look at me in a strange way, maybe the way I speak, sometimes I am indecisive, I don't say the words right, they look at me, you know – why are you asking? Be quiet.

Lara spoke of her problems with Hebrew in her first year as 'not something that was impossible to overcome' but qualified it with:

but until this day it is not my native language … and I don't give up. I had to repeat a course last year, and from 25% I got to 96%. I said I will sit on this hard, I will learn it. I had a lot of difficulties, mainly with the language in the first year. But you know what - it passes. Every student who does not have Hebrew as a native language has the same difficulties.

In lectures, students of other languages than Hebrew either have to simultaneously translate and write in their native language or write in Hebrew. Shaden who tried to borrow notes from other students to go through the lecture afterwards found this a way to catch up. When I asked about her language skills as the time had gone on, she said she now wrote lecture notes in Hebrew and that her spoken Hebrew was improving all the time 'All the time I am learning more, the slang, how the Jews talk'. She continued and laughed, 'and now, when I speak in Arabic, most of the words come out in Hebrew'.

As Shaden recounted her relationship with a Lebanese Christian refugee who came to the country when Israel withdrew from South Lebanon in 2000, she equated 'being a Jew' with having fluency in the Hebrew language. This is in spite of the fact that the individual in question was an Arab with an Arabic heritage. After Israel withdrew from South Lebanon, some families of the South Lebanese Armed Forces (S.L.A) who had supported Israel against the Hezbollah fled over the border and were resettled in Israel. Their children were raised in a predominately Hebrew-speaking environment. Shaden was helping a young woman with Arabic writing, as she had never learned to write Arabic properly. 'She knows how to write in Hebrew. Even her accent, you would never know she was Lebanese. She is a real Jew!'

Whether this statement was meant to be insulting, provocative, or a simplistic interpretation of identity equalling language is not entirely clear. However, the tone of Shaden's voice and the fact that she was giving up free time to help another did not seem to indicate anything negative. If anything, there was a bit of envy, that an Arab woman was actually 'equal' to the Jews when it came to linguistic ability.

Aseel acknowledged the power and problems of the spoken word when she jokingly (and the others in the discussion group found this very funny) mentioned that 'even if [Hebrew-speaking teachers] say "Shalom" (which contextually will be translated either as - hello, goodbye, or peace) you won't understand!' Translating contextually, the word 'Shalom' is hardly a difficult task, and Aseel appeared to use this example to emphasise the importance and difficulty of grasping meaning even when the words individually are easy (Hymes, 1966). She appeared to relate to the frustration of knowing yet not knowing – knowing the word but struggling with meaning in context and never being sure of the complete message.

In spite of the frustration most of the participants had experienced with Hebrew within the learning environment, they were determined not to let it be an obstacle to success. In spite of Ogbu's (1990) claim that involuntary minorities have an oppositional approach to learning, the participants seemed intent on doing whatever it took to break the language barrier in order to move on with their lives in a way that was most beneficial to themselves and their families. In the discussion group, Aseel was very clear about her reasons and hopes. 'Desire, desire, that's what keeps me here. I want this and I will not give up on this'.

In contrast to the acknowledged importance of Hebrew was the understanding that Arabic had a subservient role within the community. In Israel, Arabic does not have equal status to Hebrew even though it is an official language (Amara et al., 2009) and this appears to be reflected within the college environment. The impact of this is significant. If the means to creating identity is language (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), then the relative unimportance of Arabic might indicate a reduced perception of self-worth, as channels for communication and self-investigation are limited.

Some participants mentioned that their Arabic school matriculation grades were not considered as important as their Hebrew and English grades. Hiba said:

If I learn here and I write in Hebrew and I work at the end of the day in Hebrew, and I hand in papers in Hebrew, and I live in a town which is both – at the end of the day – all the people here are Jews, how does it help? Better for me to work in the Hebrew language, this is what will help me get on, to finish my studies, we are in the environment where we need the language, to get on, we must, and because of that there is nothing special about Arabic.

Maha said: 'Arabic does not contribute to anything'. She said this in a very unemotional way. However, that does not mean she was not concerned. My interpretation is based on her tone of voice, and I did not pursue questioning about this, although in retrospect it would have been prudent to have done so. I am not sure if she intended to imply that Arabic was not important regarding her identity, but I think her response was focused on the practicalities of the language in terms of living in a country where Hebrew is the language of work and opportunity in the majority of the country. She qualified her original statement above by saying that, 'no one uses Arabic abroad and in my opinion Arabic has no use'. Taken with her earlier statement, which scoffed at accepting any special help Arabs were entitled to, she seemed to be frustrated at having a native language which was not useful and did not infer status.

Some participants expressed discomfort about using Arabic in a mixed environment, and only one referred to knowing Arabic as actually beneficial. These participants explained that Arabic had no place in their academic lifestyles and no importance in their student lives. Woorood made a candid point about its unhelpfulness by saying it conferred 'lower status'.

Relating to a more personal and introspective exploration, Lara noted that 'there is nothing like your native language for talking about your feelings'. Mervat (who considered herself a very good Hebrew speaker) also mentioned this and gave the example of when she was considering counselling.

Let's say, I once thought about going for psychological treatment, and I thought shall I go to a Jewish psychologist or an Arab psychologist? I thought I will see an Arab because it is simply just easier to talk about my feelings in Arabic.

However, talking about emotions and feelings were differentiated by other participants who gave accounts of certain culturally risqué or taboo subjects that had to be discussed in Hebrew or English, even with another Arabic speaker. Woorood explained that if she spoke about sex and other intimate issues with her sister, they only spoke in Hebrew, and arguing with her boyfriend was also done in Hebrew. She understood that while profanity in Hebrew was acceptable, in Arabic it was not.

When me and my sister want to talk about really sensitive things, we only talk about them in English or in Hebrew. And when me and my boyfriend fight, sometimes we fight in English, or we fight in Hebrew, because it is like sending a text, it is easier, it is really easier. You are not 'you'. You are not allowed to curse someone in Arabic, but you can in English, and it is fine.

The words “you are not you,” were powerful here, as they appeared to equate the real person and identity with native language. What Woorood appeared to imply here was that culture and language are so intertwined, that unacceptable behaviours are possible as long as another language is used to demonstrate them. As the languages of more liberal societies, English and Hebrew might be used as communication strategies in order to exhibit more risqué or open-minded behaviours unacceptable to local culture (Koven, 2006; Pavlenko, 2006; Eastman, 2014).

Koven's (2006) findings which indicate that bi-linguals express emotions differently in different languages is clearly supported here in the sense that this participants second language (Hebrew) 'allowed' profanity in a much more forceful way than was acceptable in Arabic.

Pavlenko's (2006) study concluded that languages enable bilingual individuals to change character as they move between language domains and the preferred and careful language choice for relating to different emotional topics of discussion in this study indicates that this could indeed be the case.

### A Religious Symbol: *Biting the bullet. A Cross to Bear*

Figure 7 illustrates the location of Christian Arabs in Israel as part of its heterogeneous society. The minority status of Christians within the Arab population of Israel and as Arab Christians of a Jewish majority population was an issue which concerned all participants and confused some of them regarding identity and loyalty. The centre part of the figure shows the different groups that Christians are in contact with in Israel. The surrounding information and comments are categorized according to the particular points and perceptions the participants spoke about.

All the participants felt strongly connected to Christianity and most spoke in some depth about its central and defining place in their lives. The following quotation from Mervat included a number of interrelated aspects, such as the importance of family, community, and culture, and their connection to the socio-political and historical situation of Israel. She spoke in a plural voice and by using the word 'we', she adopted a confident position as if she was speaking out on behalf of all the Christians in Israel, which might have been to emphasise their unusual situation or reduce individual responsibility.

The reason I include this quote in its entirety is because it was an articulate and passionate speech considering it was unprepared, and by using powerful examples, Mervat was not only able to convincingly illustrate the void she felt herself to be in, but how her religion and its values provided her with a solid and reliable base from which she was able to identify herself, as well as differentiate herself from Muslims and Jews and live her life within the clearly defined framework of Christianity.

I will most describe myself as being a Christian, and not without good reason. The minority of Arabs in the Israeli majority, all the Arabs have an identity problem. We are not related to any place. We are not 100% part of the country of Israel. We do not serve in the army, we don't sing the national anthem, we do not travel far outside our villages and towns, we do not celebrate Independence Day, and on the other hand, we are not Palestinian. We do not live in the country Palestine. It is true we speak the Arabic language but we are not Palestinian. We may have been once, but we are not now. I do not identify with the Palestinian flag; I do not identify with their values and I do not behave like them. It is a different culture. It is not the culture that was here before 1948. We all have this problem of identification, this confusion, and so I see the thing that most describes me is my religion. And on this I was raised. And I really believe in the values, they are at the end of the day, values of peace, loving your neighbour, accepting people for what they are. These are universal values. There is nothing in them that is bad. And so this is what I am related to, and I feel complete. (Mervat)

This speech incorporated a number of points already made in Section 2.6.2 Identity, Language and Perceptions of Self. First we see how Mervat mentioned her Arabness in general, as well as emphatically disassociating herself from Islam and Judaism (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002). By not 'behaving like ‘them' and not accepting 'their' values, she implied a conflict (Mana, Sagy, Srour, and Mjally-Knani, 2012), as she indicated that any previous allegiances with Palestine and its highly symbolic flag were part of the past.

RACISM –

1. Eternal friction
2. Oversensitivity to discrimination
3. Outsiders
4. Every Arab is a terrorist mentality
5. How to ‘fit in’ frustration
6. Jews do not understand
7. Arabs are not treated as well as Jews

BUILDING BRIDGES

1. Mixed environment is a good thing
2. Need to start again from 0
3. Unusual but Jewish partners are almost acceptable

PSYCHOLOGICAL

1. Strong need to achieve – prove worth
2. Frustration – easier for Jews
3. ‘Helping each other’ coping strategy
4. Make more of being disadvantaged than necessary
5. Contrast between Islam and Christianity
6. Status of Moslems

HIGHER EDUCATION –

1. Understanding the paradox of studying in Israel
2. Segregation regarding social and learning domains
3. Services for Arabs only make for diversification rather than unity
4. Best thing for minority students – it raises a better next generation
5. Ignorance of groups toward each other
6. Enter as disadvantaged because of
7. less work – hence world experience
8. less travel experience – hence world experience
9. high school education

CONTRAST

1. Marriage partners unacceptable
2. Huge differences
3. Men do not respect women
4. No political representation
5. Israel keeps Christians safe.
6. Never thought to leave

DO NOT CONNECT WITH EITHER GROUP

1. Serve in the IDF. Israeli Defence Forces)
2. Open identification with state

1. Friendships very important

2. Cultural affinity and understanding

3. Common thread.

Figure 7. Perceptions Regarding Groups and Relationships

Another important aspect of Christianity is the church. Many of the participants mentioned the difficulties of coming to college on a Sunday for lectures (Sunday is a regular work day and the first day of the week for Jews). One participant in the group discussion said she regularly 'skipped' lectures on a Sunday in order to be with the family at church and made up the work later in the week. Shaden used to do this but now prioritized her studies.

Sometimes I would not come in on Sundays because I wanted to go to church. Since I was very young, all of us would go. So I would miss the lectures and come in later in the day. After this we would go for a trip, Sunday was family day. Anyway, I gave that up. I came here to study.

Some of the participants spoke openly of the importance of being different and differentiated from Muslims because of their understanding that for most non-Arabs there was little or no understanding of difference. This was a challenging part of the interview for all participants, as they began to think more deeply about the significance of defining themselves as Christian and what it meant to be neither Muslim nor Jew.

Sanaa' said that when they [Jews] ‘know we are Christians they do not look at us like we are Arabs’. In this quotation, she appears to have the opinion that there is a generalisation associating Arabs and Islam. Perhaps out of awkwardness she didn't want to condemn Islam, but by disassociating Christians from Muslims without actually mentioning the word, she managed to both separate Christianity from any default negative stereotyping and elevate it above Islam. This is also consistent with Azaryahu and Kook's (2002) ideas about Christians needing to maintain their uniqueness as a religious group, and implies the importance of making Christianity if not better than Islam, at least better in the eyes of the majority Jewish population.

It is very common in Israel for students to have part time jobs when they are studying in order to help cover fees and so on. Woorood had a job in charge of a programme which placed students in local community work projects funded by the government, in order to both provide employment and much needed help in local communities. She explained that she kept the fact she was an Arab a secret as she believed she had greater authority as a ‘Jew’ and she was wary of stereotyping.

But they did not identify me as an Arab; they did not know I was an Arab till I said I was, so it is bad to say but it was the way I got along. I am not a Muslim who they are going to stick on loads of labels and stereotypes, I am a Christian.

These again are powerful words. She assumed that for Jews, Arab means Muslim and also assumed that Muslim would be perceived as something less than good. She also mildly reprimanded herself by acknowledging her implied racism. She emphatically disassociated herself from Islam in the interview, but by pretending to be a Jew in the real world, she avoided having to articulate that distinction. In addition, her words, 'it was the way I got along' support the suggestion of Horenczyk and Munayer (2007) that the willingness of Christians in Israel to have social and cultural contact may relate to a desire to gain more access to resources such as education and work.

The importance of symbolism in identity representation (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002) is illustrated by the importance of the crucifix. Wearing a crucifix was a way for participants to expose themselves and make clear that they were a separate group in a manner, which because of its religious symbolism was entirely acceptable to all groups. However, during the interviews it was not the religious aspect of the crucifix which was more important, but rather its strength as a symbol in physically separating the different groups. In the following quotation, Donia explained about the power of the crucifix to sway opinion as related to terrorist attacks.

I am not wearing it now – but [Jews] always look at my crucifix – and they know. And they know we are Christians. They do not look at us like we are Arabs, when you feel it the most – and especially when there has been an incident – it's like they look at you with the expression – 'because of you'. When there is an attack or something you always feel it in their expressions of condemnation. But when they see I am a Christian – all their behaviour changes.

Developing the perception that in general, the word Arab was associated with Muslim, participants also made the assumption that many people equated Islam with terrorism. Woorood spoke passionately about 'this attitude that every Arab is a terrorist mentality', and Lara said:

There is always this feeling in this country that you always have to prove to them, hey I am a good person, I am not … I am really OK. Always you have this feeling that you have to prove to them or persuade them. At some point I think, just leave me alone, I do not need to prove anything to anyone.

Similar to some of the previous quotations, she avoided actually having to say exactly what she meant, but set up a contrast between 'her' and 'them'. And by saying she was a 'good person', there was an implication that members of the unmentioned group were not.

### Distant. Far from Both and Close to Neither

A perception of racism against Muslim Arabs on the part of Jews and its ramifications for Christians provoked a sense of uncertainty. How Christians fitted into the social climate was problematic as it became clear that the situation of being 'a minority within a minority' was challenging and all the participants had something to say about this regarding how it most personally affected them. Lara focused on the fact that she was actually not connected to either group because of cultural differences.

I am a minority within a minority; I am an Arab and I am also Christian. The culture of the Christians and the Muslims is different, and the culture between the Arabs and Jews is different. So for me personally, apart from the language, I do not feel connected, not to there, or there. Do you understand?

Although Maria said that she didn’t think about the difference between Muslims and Christians on a regular basis, she said 'it found her' in lectures and she felt no option but to speak out and try to widen the knowledge base of the class community.

[The other students] do not know there is a minority within a minority. And if they know, then they do not know it all. And when I speak, I notice everyone is interested, they start to ask questions, it raises a discussion and I like it.

Maria explained that she had had opportunities in class situations to teach the other students about the minority Christian situation in Israel and even Christianity to an extent. The fact she was openly enthusiastic about this also supports indications in previous research of the importance of Christians wanting to retain their group identity (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002; Horenczyk and Munayer, 2007).

The above quotation presents a comparison to what Woorood said about her stressful presentation about stereotypes in Section 4.3.1. However, whereas Woorood was in a more formal situation and being judged on her 'work', Maria was taking advantage of spontaneous opportunities to enlighten interested others.

Throughout this research project I was teaching on a regular basis and although anecdotal, I present the following personal experience. In one of my groups were two Arab women whom I had got to know during the semester. Because of their conservative style of dress, I made the assumption that they were Muslim. One day late in the semester, the students came to my office to discuss their final course project. I was surprised to see both women wearing a crucifix openly displayed on top of their blouses. I mentioned how beautiful the crucifixes were. Immediately I sensed discomfort on the part of the women. In the beginning, they said they were Muslims who believed in Jesus, which seemed a little unusual. Then they explained they were not Christians but wore the crucifix at college because it gave them higher status. When I spoke to a Christian Arab colleague about the incident, she said that she was aware of Muslim men wearing crucifixes in order to elevate their social capital.

However, symbols displayed on the body can also make wearers vulnerable. Maha wore her cross with pride at college, but related an incident that happened off campus and in the centre of the country when she had been physically attacked by an orthodox Jew who practically threw her off the bus, telling her she had no right to wear it around her neck. The incident shattered her self-confidence and she took off her crucifix for a period in fear: 'so I decided to take off my cross and not get into conflict with anyone'. This incident, while not representing the attitude of every Jew, was highly significant for this participant and indicates how one incident can potentially result in a more general mistrust and stereotyping.

In addition to the religious differences between Muslims and Christians, and the stereotyping on the part of Jews towards Arabs in general, there were perceived value differences between the two Arab groups which manifested in the interviews when they spoke about codes of dress and behaviours. In line with Halls' (1990) second position on identity, it is possible to see a change within the Christian community as a result of a process of ongoing liberalization (Barakat, 2005; Haj Yahia and Lavee, 2017).

Shaden recounted that her aunts were pioneers twenty years ago, when they began to wear knee-length skirts for the first time. But she also spoke of built-in 'limits' which it is important to understand. This more liberal attitude brought its own problems, as often, the conflicting approaches of Muslims and Christians in a mixed Arab town caused stressful situations for participants and women in general if they were unable to dress more liberally because of disapproval by a more conservative Muslim culture.

The cultural difference in dress code between Muslims and Christians also found its way into the college. Whereas some of the participants said they felt free to dress liberally at college because they did so at home, others mentioned discomfort and judgment from more conservative Muslim women as opposed to a non-judgmental attitude on the part of Jews. Dress codes were also a subject of curiosity and frustration, as Lara almost angrily retorted 'and people ask me stupid questions like, do your parents know you dress like that? I mean, where do we live? We are not living on camels anymore!'

Woorood, who came from a village, talked about the differences in cultural acceptance of dress codes and explained that conservative dress reflected a more conservative attitude.

I cannot walk in the village with these trousers. I will wear them, but I will not go to the family of my boyfriend, because [his parents] are a little older, and I don't want them to have an excuse to criticize me, they are more traditional.

Maha was from a town, but her words are not so different from Woorood's, as she talked about going home.

Yes, I need to change everything. Almost everything. Everything. I try not to go on the streets very much in order not to *see* [the Hebrew translation also implies a meeting or getting involved with] people, not to have to go through any harassment. Everything, I change. My parents know how I like to dress, I can wear shorter trousers with a cut off t-shirt and they do not have problems with that. But there is a limit. If I go into town it is not allowed to be like that. I need to change the way I dress, my speech everything. If I go into [town] dressed like this, every single person is going to jump on me. So if I want to avoid confrontations it is better to do what [the town people] want.

The preceding quotations from Woorood, Lara, and Maha illustrate a number of aspects of Arab family life. Rules regarding codes of dress have changed (Barakat, 2005), but on a larger community scale there are still implied rules in place which still need to be observed (Haj Yahia, 1995). This observance of a more conservative general culture reflects the acknowledgement of the importance of a family 'face' that is better kept intact and free from larger society judgement, despite changing attitudes within that family unit.

One reason that Donia did not go to the university in Jenin was because Islamic culture and values would have determined her behaviour, and she would have been under the auspices of a less flexible code of conduct. She related that her father was unwilling for her to go once he had experienced the initial visit. 'And I could not reconcile myself to the atmosphere, and my Dad said you are not learning there, no chance'.

The paradoxical situation of a Jewish society, which is potentially racist on the one hand but non-judgmental and developmentally liberating on the other, was one which seemed to confound the participants which was further compounded by the uneasy alliance with Muslim Arabs. Woorood tries to put this into words.

But here I can present myself as an Arab, I can see what other people think, and say and act, and I can choose what I want to be. If you go and learn in an Arab college, there will only be Arabs, most of them are not (*emphasised*) going to be Christians, and I'll have to act in a specific way, and I don't like it and I don't want to.

Lara explained it slightly differently, emphasizing the complications of being an outsider.

The complexity, the feeling of lack of connection, not to the Jews and not to the Arabs 100%. There is a complexity. On the one hand, there is the fact that here at college, you can learn and get on with your life, but there is an element of suffering involved.

Practical differences between Jews and Christian Arabs may have been related to age and different life experiences, rather than just culture alone. The fact that Christians are not involved in mandatory national service (see Section 4.2.3) means that participants tend to be younger than Jews, which indicates less life experience, less maturity and less independence which impacts confidence. This could then be a factor related to perceived social difference and isolation.

There was general agreement that socially, there was little or no mixing between the groups at break times and between lessons. However, mixed study groups were more common and if there was a mutual task to be completed then Jews and Arabs would and could work together co-operatively.

Related to this was a strong feeling that racism was an inevitable and integral part of college life and another of the challenges that had to be dealt with. Lara summed up the situation: 'It is not possible to say there is no racism. In Israel, it is present in every place. In some places more, in some places less, here it is fair to say it is in the middle.'

She recounted an extreme example of a college incident: 'and one of the students who learnt with us at the time, got up and said to the Arab woman, believe me, if I had a gun this minute I would get up and kill all the Arabs that are around here'.

Woorood spoke about a lecturer who made a joke at her expense. Nahida said:

There is racism here. They look upon us differently. That is what I want to say. They look upon us differently even if we are speaking the language of the Jews. We sit, and we are learning with them. But when it comes to it, they look upon us differently.

Woorood was philosophical and made the point that if individuals perceive themselves as victims than this is what they become.

Maybe it's me, I always say, maybe because I am thinking about it, perceiving every action they do as if it is an act of discrimination or something. . . . I remind myself, if I want to feel discriminated against I will feel discriminated against, and if I do not want to feel that then OK I won't. It does not always work, but sometimes it works for me.

(Freire, 1970) contended that domination and power exist as long as there is a group to oppress and that the oppressed by subconsciously accepting it perpetrate the cycle. According to Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed has two stages, the first of which is realising and acknowledging the oppression in order to choose an action of transformation.

Woorood's words are important because she not only chose to reject the status of the oppressed and claim responsibility for her freedom; she also acknowledged that this is not an easy thing to do. She understood that it is not just about knowing what to do, it was accepting that intention and aspiration were not always enough to fuel the desired outcome.

As well as perceived racism within the college on the part of Jews against Arabs, Nahida also acknowledged there was also a 'hatred' that some Arabs felt towards Jews, and Maha said that racism against Jews came from the homes of Arab students, indicating beliefs deeply inherent within the societies of which the younger generation were sensitive to and aware of.

But sometimes the ignorance of the Arabs to Jews, that is something that contributes to an atmosphere that isn't nice – they don't have enough information about what is going on here, they come with stereotypes – they stereotype from home … and it makes for a bad atmosphere.

Maha's use of the word 'ignorance' relating to the perceptions of Arabs to Jews indicates a potential to change attitudes and lifestyles through education. However, being ignorant of present possibilities relating to the future of Israel may be beyond the grasp and desire of some and the different insights and sensitivities related to past events provoke different responses (Sagy, Adwan, and Kaplan, 2002).

### Crossing Cultures

The uncertain place of Christians is reinforced due to their unclear relationship with Jews and the different historical, social, and cultural environments they inhabit. Figure 8 illustrates this uncertainty by presenting the data in connection to the words 'paradox' and 'dilemma'. The paradox relates to the perceived safety of home in a developmentally limiting environment in contrast to the world of higher education and part of the majority culture, which is developmentally liberating, but insecure and challenging.

Woorood tried to explain the sense of uncertainty as she lingered in the middle of two different cultures.

You are somewhere in the middle, you have what you get from one part of life and you have what you get from college, and college and home are two sides and you are in the middle. It's kind of logical, that whoever is there will find you liberal, and whoever is there will find you … they are so different, and no matter where you are, you are going to seem far from both. If you are there they are going to look at you as far away and if you are here they are going to look at you as far away, too.

Paradoxically, these words indicate that being in the middle of two cultures has the confounding effect of isolating an individual from both.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| IDENTITIES AND CULTURES | | |  |
| *'FAR FROM BOTH AND CLOSE TO NEITHER'* | | |  |
| ‘There is a complexity. The feeling of a lack of communication, with the Jews and with the Arabs 100%.  And apart from the language, I do not feel connected to there … or there’ (Lara) | | |  |
| CHRISTIAN |  | JEWISH |  | |
|  | PARADOX  DILEMMA |  |  | |
| DEVELOPMENTALLY LIMITING  *HOME* Undemanding and calm  PARENTAL VALUES AND BELIEFS  Women – no smoking  Dress codes  Behavioural norms  Taboo of talk about sex  Hitching is not allowed or acceptable  Only Christian partners | CHRISTIAN ARAB PARTICIPANT STUDENT ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS I *can* get beyond the limitations of my people Important to educate Jews about Christians in Israel Important to learn about the culture of the Jews Important to see the world from a broader perspective Easier to identify with the Jews sometimes Deep love of the Christian culture; feels foreign in class – discomfort affects self-confidence Deep introspection regarding the Christian values which define the person My behaviours are deeply rooted in me.  Feel culturally isolated at college Higher education is the best thing for minority students. It raises a better next generation.  Higher education equals development. | DEVELOPMENTALLY LIBERATING  Allows freedom of expression  YOU CAN LEARN AND GET ON WITH LIFE, but there is an element of suffering involved  Need to fight for happiness and justice  MANDATORY NATIONAL SERVICE  affects attitudes and experiences of ex- servicemen and women  NATIVE LANGUAGE CONFIDENCE IN STUDIES  VAST TRAVEL EXPERIENCE  creates a wide variety of life experiences and an older student population |  | |
|  | We will make Israel a better place |  |  | |

Figure 8. Identities and Cultures

The students made the transition from their home culture and language to that of the majority culture and language on a regular basis, but feelings about the transition varied. Participants from towns, who had already been exposed to a larger and more liberal society, made the transitions more easily than the participants from villages. However, not one of the participants complained about moving in and out of languages and across cultures. All felt it was part of a daily routine that had become part of their chosen lives. Making the transition seemed natural, acceptable, and feasible. Not all had actually thought about this before the interview, however, and some seemed surprised at their own responses. Maha said:

If you want to know which place I prefer, I prefer being at college. Of course, I feel there is a big difference between the cultures. Most of the time I prefer the culture that is here, but I am, you know, careful to keep the Christian in me safe, I am proud of it and I take it everywhere I go, but between here and home I prefer it here [at college] a thousand times.

As well as demonstrating a clear acknowledgement of the differences between the cultures, this short statement exemplifies a dilemma regarding Maha's feelings about them. By taking care of her Christianity, she protected her home culture from any new influences and experiences which may be different or unacceptable at home. In addition, this 'keeping' of her Christianity in another environment may have made the uncertainties and challenges of being in college easier to deal with.

Taking into consideration their bilingual and bicultural lives, defining feelings about individual personal identity was difficult for most of the participants. The participants in the discussion group worked together to build up a mutually acceptable identity. Together, they created a potentially different communal identity, which they may not have created as individuals. In addition, the group appeared to give them strength. They were separate but whole. They were individuals but individuals who had had similar experiences and childhoods. They had shared experiences and individual experiences and were daring enough to say things that they believed to be 'true'.

In response to the question, ‘How do you describe yourself?’ initially Aseel admitted she had never actually done that. This statement was followed by Nasreen, who said 'I am not Israeli, but an Arab woman living in Israel'. Sanaa' interjected at this point and without describing herself went on to say, 'But I am proud to live here'. This was a very daring statement, and a statement that represented a 'truth' for her, that had to be both negotiated and built, based on the sharing of opinions and feelings and being in a secure environment. It was as if a new identity was being cooperatively built through sharing of feelings. The others looked at Sanaa' initially in surprise – and the woman herself seemed surprised, but she qualified her words with passion and clarity.

Do you know what happens to Christians in other Arab countries they murder them! Do you realize that here in Israel we are safe. We can go to church on a Sunday and no one is going to kill us. We are safe and we are free to worship. In other countries, there might be churches but you can't get in; they are locked.

At this point, the others nodded their heads and agreed with this new possibility of being in a way - 'Israeli'. Here is an example of the power of words and negotiation, the real possibility of constructing meaning – new meaning with words and talking – in comparison with a less flexible method of data collection. This is connected to how I interpreted the story of 'The Blind Man and the Elephant' (Section 3.3) as recounted by Shapiro (1995) and Denzin (2009) by saying that a 'more complete truth' is the result of combined efforts and experience.

In addition, it is closely connected to Norton's (2009) assertions regarding a reorganizing of the sense of self occurring between interlocutors during the exchange of ideas and information (p. 410).

Some individual participants considered possibilities carefully and at some length. Maria, for example, considered the word Palestinian, but on second thoughts she dropped it in favour of just describing herself as Arab Christian, but Lara did decide to keep it as she finalized on 'Arab Palestinian citizen of Israel'. After reflecting, Maha decided to describe herself as 'woman, Christian, Arab, Israeli'. The last two, she emphasised, had to have the same weight. Shaden described herself by her name and as a woman and did not want to be drawn further on identity. It was uncomfortable for her to talk about and I did not press her further. Earlier in the interview (noted in Section 4.2.1) she had also described herself by name when she gave her reasons for studying.

Nahida was able to justify her answer of 'Arab, Christian' as related to how much she was connected. She explained she was not connected to Israel – because it was Jewish and she was not connected to Palestine as it was Muslim. Therefore, she was not Palestinian or Israeli.

Woorood grappled with possibilities of definition and identification but was not sure and this seemed to worry her. The issue of identity crops up early for young men and women in Israel, as they are issued with I.D. cards. Woorood explained how she had felt in the past when confronted with a box to check on a form.

When you are 16 and you have to go and get your I.D. card, and you have to put nationality, I put x on nationality because I don't know who I am, well I do know what I am but I don't want people to know and I was 16. Some people go and write Arab and it is over and some people, a lot of us don't. We just erase it.

In the college, students also have a form to fill in with a space for nationality. However, it is not obligatory to fill it in. By raising the question, all students have to stop and think about identity and how they define themselves. By writing an x and equating it with deletion, which Woorood had previously done, she began her denial of being an Arab in the official domain. By going on to hide her ethnicity in her work at college (Section 4.3.2), she further reinforced her isolation and uncertainty about who she was.

Woorood had difficulty describing herself and again found it stressful to think about it too much. She said:

Well Palestinian, I never included it and I never will, because even though I am an Arab, I am not a Palestinian Arab, I never was and never will be. It is hard but I am going to stick with the Christian first, I am Christian, I am Arab, I am a Christian woman who speaks Arabic and was born in Israel, even the Arab thing – I would not refer to myself as an Arab, because I was born here, does that make sense?

This is noteworthy in terms of the difficulties of self-identification as on a number of other occasions she had defined herself as an Arab (4.3.1).

Hiba, in comparison, actually found the question amusing and she was the only one quite definite in her answers 'woman, Arab, Christian, Israeli'. Christians in Israel have a group identity and a strong affiliation with the religion as a means to separate its members from other Arab groups. However, individuals within the group also grapple with a personal sense of self, not only from the point of view of an ethnic and unique minority, but also as individuals who reside and are part of a dynamic and changing existence of the state of Israel. The country offers opportunities for career direction and development linked to improved financial rewards, social status, and personal development (Horenczyk and Munayer, 2007). As students, the participants acknowledged this and were taking advantage of opportunities.

The participants in this research had chosen to study, and by doing so had voluntarily exposed themselves to a different and dynamic environment offering prospects and challenges. It is unsurprising that their perceptions were somewhat uncertain, as negotiations about who a person 'is' can also be related to what a person can do, what a person can achieve, and the political consequences of the identity a person constructs (West, 1992).

Towards the end of the interview, I asked the participants what had been the most important thing we had talked about. Initially, some of the participants spoke about the importance of higher education and its role of opening a door to a wider job market. Mervat’s powerful words related it to a wider realm and its role in transforming culture and the opportunities that it affords for students to make a difference in the future.

I think that higher education in itself is the best thing that can happen to minorities, because the more minorities can learn, and the more knowledge they have, the more they will succeed. They will get better positions within their society and be able to give more to their societies. They will raise a better next generation. Higher education contributes to development. We are more developed. We are not leaving college the same people we were when we arrived. Our characters have changed for the better and also our professional skills. And so therefore we are more developed and with bigger heads. (*meaning a wider, more mature, and more flexible way of looking at the world*). We are also exposed to lots of different people, we make connections with different people, from different places and cultures, so as I said, the reality of having higher education allows the growth of a better next generation which has more skills, have values, who can contribute, and they themselves can make a better world for minorities.

Several returned to the subject of language and the significance of gaining really good Hebrew language skills. Nahida felt simply that Arab students needed more consideration when it came to language.

However, the majority of the participants also made the point that the number of Arab students at the college was too few and the imbalance and inequality between cultures were significant. Lara felt strongly that the complexity of life amongst Christians in Israel and her lack of real connection to a general Arab culture and the Jewish culture was the most significant part of the interview. Maha saw the college situation as reflecting a more global picture and spoke of the lack of representation that affects the lives of Christian Arabs.

The thing I most suffer from, let's say, is that we have no representation. We are a real minority and we have no representation. Any political representation in the government – well they do not represent the Christians. They represent the majority Muslims. And us, the Christians, we are waiting on the margins. And that, you know, well it is troubling.

Several participants, however, focused on the realization of a dynamic Christian culture that was changing to suit the needs of a more liberal younger generation (Haj Yahia and Lavee, 2017). Maria felt strongly that young Christian women were bolder and more developed, in the sense that they had more confidence and awareness of possibilities. Opportunities were presenting themselves and life was bound to go on changing, hopefully for the better.

## Summary

The data presented in this section relate to some of the experiences of Arab women involved in a higher education programme in Israel. The terrain is broad and complex, and each of the components relating to life as higher education students offered many possibilities for discussion and reflection. In some cases, there were critical incidents which had been significant regarding how the participants saw themselves as residents of Israel.

Practically, the problem of not having fluent Hebrew was a serious challenge for the participants. Even though their literacy skills differed, they all understood that this was an obstacle in general for Arab students pursuing higher education courses.

Participants acknowledged they were part of a greater whole of Israel, which they understood to offer them opportunities and a way to move on with their lives and develop in a way different to that of their forebears. Their future anticipated success, and ensuing perceived opportunities were important.

At the same time, the participants were sensitive and respectful of the family and community forces, as it was necessary to receive support regarding their lifestyle choice to be students. In all cases, however, a path of higher education was one that was encouraged if not expected.

Being part of a more liberal mainly Jewish culture whilst at college presented difficulties and dilemmas, especially as generalisations have been made about all Arabs being terrorists, or all Arabs being Muslim. The participants did not feel they fitted into either category, and were sensitive regarding their Christianity, their triple minority status and how they presented themselves in a diverse population within which there are tendencies to stereotype. In addition, participating in different cultural lifestyles caught them in the middle of both, causing feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and loneliness.

# CONCLUSIONS

The setting of my research was the higher education environment in northern Israel. It is open to all its citizens regardless of racial or ethnic group. My research aims were to discover more about what lies behind the higher educational aspirations of Christian Arab women as representatives of a minority group in Israel, and to investigate their higher education experiences as they inhabit different cultural spaces, languages, and religions from the majority. The title of my research was 'Crossing the Chasm to Pick Up the Gauntlet: Higher Education and Christian Arab Women Students in Northern Israel'.

My research question was:

In the linguistically, culturally, religiously and politically divided society of Israel, how are Christian Arab women meeting the challenge of higher education programmes?

1. Why are Christian Arab women choosing higher education programmes?
2. Which elements of a higher education system most help and hinder potential learning outcomes and which personal characteristics and practical strategies are important for enabling and maintaining success?
3. How do Christian Arab women students manage changing linguistic, social and cultural domains, and how does this affect their sense of identity?

In the following subsections, I offer a summary of the challenges indicated in this research, and answer my research questions.

**5.1 Contribution to Knowledge**

Raising awareness of the challenges facing Christian Arab women studying in higher education in the north of Israel from the data collected in 2016 and 17 is a contribution to knowledge and the recommendations in Section 5.7 both acknowledge and offer practical suggestions for addressing the issues described in this study.

In addition, and in relation to managing different cultural domains I claim a fifth adaptation strategy in accordance with Berry (1997). The four strategies of assimilation, integration, marginalization and separation do not entirely represent a group which may love their heritage culture and desire connection with it, but disagree with the position of that heritage culture regarding integration. At the same time they are not encouraged to integrate by the majority culture. Although this research did not uncover conflicts between the individuals and the heritage and majority cultures, there were implied differences related to a more cohesive future. Therefore, I claim there could be another strategy driven by a philosophy which neither entirely segregates nor integrates. I name this strategy 'isolation'. This indicates an outcome where there is a desire to integrate by the individual which is not entirely supported by either the heritage or majority culture.

## The Challenges in Higher Education

This study indicated a number of complex and related challenges within the higher education domain.

As well as the challenge related to having to use Hebrew as the language of study, there were also challenges related to different cultural values and historic experiences of Arabs and Jews. In addition, there are differences between the Christian and Muslim Arab cultures (Srour et al., 2013), which some participants indicated were problematic.

Some participants mentioned changing the demographic picture, indicating how Muslims were becoming a larger majority nationwide, which they felt was neither to their advantage nor comfort. Articulating this, however, provoked a sense of confusion, embarrassment, and disloyalty. Being part of the Arab community but not part of a Muslim community is a sensitive issue to talk about, especially considering stereotyping related to the 'terrorist mentality' outsiders sometimes attribute to anyone of Arab origin.

Connected to this is the perceived generalisation and assumption that Arabs fall into one group and that the Muslim voice is the communal voice of all Arabs. The implications are indicated in this study, which shows conflicting feelings arising from being in some ways similar but also different. I reiterate a point made in the findings regarding this particular and important issue. Maha mentioned that Christians are now a minority in Nazareth and ended with the words 'So us, the Christians, we are no one in Nazareth now'.

Using the word 'us' was quite powerful in this quotation. It not only emphasised the divide between Christians and Muslims, but also a difference regarding power. Becoming 'no one' seemed to be the result of their disempowerment. When Nahida equated being an Arab with being ‘stam’ (a slang word in Hebrew commonly used to describe a situation, person, or thing of little value), she also alluded to this perceived invisibility.

Dealing with an amount of social segregation by the Jewish students, which could be related to different lifestyles, world experiences, age, and perceived racism, further complicated the overall college lives of the participants.

A mixture of feelings, including despondency, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, and perceptions of prejudice and unfairness, were evident, resulting from their daily experiences.

## The Reasons for Choosing Higher Education

In the following sub-sections, the original research questions raised in this thesis are directly juxtaposed with the findings.

What are the reasons for choosing higher education?

The strongest reason behind the participants' choice of higher education was the belief in the power of higher education and the perceived prospects and life-changing opportunities an academic qualification would grant them.

Participants were all descendants of the involuntary minorities of 1948 and some of their living forebears would have been directly involved in the War of Independence or Nakbe. However, there was strong family involvement and encouragement behind all decisions to pursue a higher education, and its practical advantages were seen as being a driving force. Family support was driven by a resolve to use the structures in place to move forward and improve life choices and outcomes. The participants felt hugely empowered by the possibilities of an academic degree and the perceived financial independence they believed it would offer.

If we understand the concept of 'habitus' to represent socially and culturally acquired ways of thinking and moving, or a set of beliefs which enable individuals to judge or perceive a social environment (Sullivan, 2002), it is clear that higher education as cultural capital is an asset imbued within the belief system of the community. In addition, its relation to economic capital is emphasised by the implication of how it can create greater opportunities and power for a minority group.

Within the higher education framework was the understanding that there was another education available, separate from the degree itself. Learning about 'the other' and life outside the family domain was perceived as an integral part of the learning process. Nahida referred to this when she said, 'but I do begin to see the world differently, different ways of thinking, different ways from different houses, all kinds of different things'.

Theoretically, this could also relate to cultural capital if the concept is understood to represent all material and symbolic goods a dominant society considers worth seeking or having. As Arabs in Israel do not represent the dominant society, and are to an extent isolated, suddenly being within the socially 'integrated' environment of higher education is significant. They have more opportunities to access knowledge regarding what the dominant society considers worthy and if what is worthy is directly related to promoting social mobility, then having access to that 'knowledge' may positively impact their prospects, as well as potentially changing future cultural values.

In a culturally diverse society, where integration of the minority groups is related to cultural change, the understanding of what is desirable for one cultural group could become desirable for another group. Ultimately, this could create a shift in heritage values, offering potential opportunities for a more cohesive society. It contains a process of exposure, observation, understanding, adoption, and belief. Further research is needed to explore how and at what point exposure to different cultural values of the majority population makes them desirable enough to be adopted into heritage culture.

These observations in some ways diverge from Ogbu's (1998) cultural ecological theory, which attempted to account for the way minorities are treated and respond to schooling. The present research findings suggest that an involuntary social and political reality does not necessarily negatively impact learning motivations. An involuntary and under-represented minority status did not affect participants' desire to take advantage of the higher education structure they perceived could offer them the capitals to improve their lifestyle options and futures. The participants were determined to make the most of choices available and in spite of acknowledging difficulties, had no intention of giving up or approaching their higher education experiences negatively.

Choosing higher education in an Arab-speaking environment abroad or in Israel was rejected by all participants. Arab-speaking programmes were perceived as projecting a more conservative Muslim outlook. None of the participants saw themselves as living or working outside Israel.

## The Elements in the Higher Education System Influencing Outcomes

Which elements of the higher education system most help and hinder potential learning outcomes?

Needing a high level of Hebrew literacy was the main element within the higher education system which affected learning opportunities and outcomes. Needing to spend significantly more time than native Hebrew speakers on assignments impacted on the time students had at their disposal to complete work, the grades they attained, and the quality of the learning experience. This tended to add to the overall pressure of student daily life.

The fact that in this college there was a support department for Arab issues (Centre for Peace and Democracy), and an Arab wing of the student union invoked mixed responses. These responses included satisfaction, disinterest, dissatisfaction, annoyance, and outright rejection, as it was suggested it further diversified an already fragmented university population. This might be an unexpected outcome as the Centre for Peace and Democracy is well established, has a very well qualified staff regarding Arab issues and Israel and does much to promote equal rights, debate and support for the Arab speaking student population.

Although perhaps not obviously related to college policy and as noted in Section 5.1, the lack of inter-ethnic relationships between the groups was perceived as important from an academic perspective. However, as addressed in sections 1.1.2 and 2.4.6, responsibility for improving the campus climate does rest on the shoulders of the institutions (Hurtado et al, 1999) and intercultural activity is much less likely to take place without intervention (Gurin, 2003). Participants felt that being able to take opportunities to work with mixed groups was beneficial, but not necessarily possible.

## Personal Characteristics and Practical Strategies

Which personal characteristics and practical strategies are important for enabling and maintaining success?

Being able to identify personal qualities of strength was important regarding a more unified future in which participants saw themselves as significant actors. They felt that having a strong character, self-discipline, determination, and self-confidence were all personal qualities that were imperative regarding their past successes and potential successful futures as academic students. While these qualities could be understood as important to any students embarking on an academic education, in the case of the participants in this study, their feelings towards students of different ethnic groups were significant. Being constantly aware of an 'other' was important, as it enabled them to focus on a sense of the positive while inhabiting challenging environments and spaces.

The participants identified an ability to keep all channels of communication open, and not giving up, as being important on a day-to-day basis. They explained that wearing a crucifix enabled them to demonstrate their Christianity and differentiate themselves from Muslims, indicating an awareness of the perceived higher status of Christians as well as an acknowledgement of inbuilt stereotyping on the part of the non-Arab student population.

Manifesting coping strategies is aligned with the ability to identify situations of stress; the participants all showed sensitivity regarding a balance between developing awareness and creating coping mechanisms in an uncertain and challenging environment.

## Negotiating Changing Linguistic, Social, and Cultural Domains

How do Christian Arab women students manage changing linguistic, social and cultural domains, and how does this affect their sense of identity?

There are a number of different ethnic groups living in Israel able to take advantage of higher education opportunities. As a minority ethnic Arab group and a minority in relation to Jews, the participants in this study felt the need to forge a space for themselves in which they could be identified as Christian. As previously mentioned, wearing a crucifix is one way in which they were able to do this. As a religious symbol, a crucifix is a way in which individuals can show affiliation and separation without provocation.

A Christian student's higher education environment is a microcosm of greater Israel and reflects their numerical minority status accordingly. As a neutral space, it enables opportunities and freedoms not necessarily available in their home environments, and participants found the more liberal and liberating place of college alluring. However, it necessitated careful management related to racial tensions within.

Moving physically between cultures was not perceived as a particular challenge, and participants felt excited by the developmental possibilities in an environment which was less restrictive and scrutinising. However, there was 'an element of suffering', which Lara identified as being part of the price for leaving the security and safety of home, which relate to the feelings of isolation, loneliness, frustration, and anxiety mentioned in Section 5.1. Going home presented a paradox, in the sense that its calm, non-judgemental, and safe environment was developmentally limiting. Higher education delivered a world which was less certain, but offered opportunities for personal and career development.

When I asked the participants to describe themselves, they all used the word Christian in their definition and this was important for them. Keeping their Christianity with them was a way which helped the participants regulate between different environments. Living and studying in Hebrew during their hours at college did not seem to impact on their perceptions of self and ethnic identity. Cultural beliefs, values, and selves stayed intact and safe as participants commuted between higher education and the home environments.

Whereas some participants felt disadvantaged and constrained at college, others found a strategy of educating other students about Christianity empowering. In addition, learning more about Jewish culture and the importance of looking at the world from a broader perspective were ways of making the transition between cultures easier.

In theory, offering higher education programmes to all Israel's citizens supports a philosophy of positive multiculturalism, supporting diversity, and equal opportunity, which is in direct contrast to segregation strategies. An expected outcome would be integration (Berry, 2005), and data from this research supports a type of 'integration' as participants spoke of opportunities and expectations of better life styles in Israel. Some participants described themselves as Israeli, while holding onto their Christian heritage. I believe that the situation of positive expectation can be tentatively related to what the higher education system has to offer.

However, this research also indicates a sense confusion regarding loyalties. Integration is dependent on many variables including the social, and political, present-day policies, as well as a unique individual response. The collective and individual histories are also significant. In addition, it is influenced by the means by which minority status came about and how people as individuals and group members are able to cope with the situation.

Since 1948, a message that has been internalized by Jews and Arabs alike is that Israel is a Jewish state which has no clause accommodating a civic culture of a separate but equal existence for Arabs (Al Haj, 2002). Christian Arabs, with double minority status, find themselves in an uncertain place. Mixed messages and a double-edged rhetoric continue to create opportunities with limitations, freedoms, and inequalities. There are linguistic challenges, a sense of separation, and isolation, but also feelings that life in Israel is alright.

Of the acculturation outcomes or strategies, (Sam and Berry, 2010) (Section 2.5.6), it is difficult to say that any of them entirely describes Christian Arabs in Israel today. Acculturation strategies presume a freedom to choose, and another element is related to the freedoms enabled or disabled by the societies of acculturating individuals. What if there is an intergenerational conflict or a conflict between the collective and the individual, as well as a conflict between the individual and majority culture? There is no acculturation strategy whereby individuals who are presently part of collective and strong heritage societies find themselves not easily fitting the accepted, assimilated, separated, integrated or marginalized outcomes? This suggests there is an outcome not described and that does not fit into the current acculturation model.

Even though there was not an obvious intergenerational or collective conflict between the participants and their families and collectives regarding higher education, there were implied differences relating to a more cohesive future. I therefore claim that there could be another strategy driven by a philosophy that neither entirely segregates nor is genuinely multicultural. The outcome I will call isolation. This indicates an outcome whereby there is a desire to integrate on the part of the individual, which is not entirely supported by either the country or heritage culture. This might be particularly relevant for minorities whose lifestyles have been changed by invasions as a result of international policy or war, although there is no reason to suppose that a dichotomy between the generations and new culture could not be present in other situations. It is important and relevant, as while heritage culture still has great significance, the experiences and desires of generations are different (Manago, 2011; Haj-Yahia and Lavee, 2017).

## Relevance and Implications

This study is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, Israel is a country with a particularly violent and controversial history and a troubled and uncertain present and future. A better future lies in the hands of all its citizens and the higher education experience is one which deserves investigation, as many of Israel's future citizens continue with further studies after age 18.

In Israel, higher education may be the first time that Arabs and Jews are together on a regular and daily basis for the purposes of study and work. It is therefore critical that the higher education environment is understood as having an important place in the potential cohesive future of the country. The higher education environment needs the knowledge and means to provide an optimum environment for all its diverse students choosing to study.

In addition, this research supports the aim of enriching knowledge about women in higher education (Cinamon, 2016). Christian Arab women represent a group whose voices are not often heard. This study acknowledged the importance of what they have to say and attempted to give this minority group a legitimate platform to speak.

I believe this research to be original, as it has attempted to situate Christian Arab women and higher education within the complex socio-cultural, historical, religious, and political context of Israel. This holistic lens of investigation was able to shed light on some of the many influential threads affecting experience.

There is scant research on the Christian Arab women of Israel and I hope this study will offer insight as well as encourage further work on underrepresented minority women both in Israel and abroad. This will help create a more complete picture of the aspirations of women and the practical realities and implications of higher education in their lives.

The significance of the methodology and data underscores the importance of recognising the voices of participants and being able to offer them the conditions to explore situations often put to one side. Challenges can be and are overcome, and less than perfect lives can be and are managed. However, this study contends that it is essential to address uncomfortable issues in order to create new knowledge for the purpose of generating the most positive environment for all those living, working, or studying within it.

Part of the title of this thesis is 'Crossing the Chasm to Pick Up the Gauntlet', and the findings enable a clearer understanding of what this means. As Hebrew is the dominant language of higher education, it serves as the bridge which connects the Jewish and Arab cultures. Existing policy relating to the sectors being linguistically separate from early education until higher education is therefore paradoxical. In addition, Jewish-sector students do not learn Arabic at school unless they elect to do so, reinforcing the linguistic divide between cultures.

However, it is not just about the language alone, as close family and community ties mean that getting to the other side of the 'chasm' is also dependent on family support. Once the chasm is crossed there are more challenges. As well as the continual day-to-day linguistic challenges of Hebrew as the medium of instruction (handing in assignments, reading academic articles, sitting exams, and public oral presentations), there are the added challenges of being a minority within a minority, perceived racism, views about Arabs in general, and a different cultural lifestyle.

The paradox of allowing Arabic to be used as the medium of instruction in schools – legitimizing the language and strengthening cultural roots – is offset by the fact that native Arabic speakers feel disadvantaged once in a higher education environment. However, this is not to say that Arabic should not be used in schools as a medium of instruction, but rather that policy could be transformed in order to offer advantages to students later in their lives.

As well as the linguistic paradox, the idea that a Christian culture is 'developmentally limiting' as opposed to a Jewish culture which is 'developmentally liberating' was explored from different perspectives by all the participants. (Mervat, who coined these phrases used the word 'Christian' rather than 'Arab', as although it might be acceptable to interchange the words, she was not willing to generalise regarding Muslim culture.)

Higher education offers all students a part in this liberation, which they defined as one which allowed freedom of expression and was non-judgmental. Entwined with these realizations came the deep love of Christian culture, introspection about Christian values, and importance of looking after their Christianity. In addition, they felt outsiders and the butt of racist behaviours.

The fact that participants said it was important to see the world from a broader perspective and look for a common thread indicates an awareness and need for a different future. When Sanaa' said emphatically and bravely, 'we will make the world a better place', she was ready to make a statement which appeared to not only accept a certain logic, but also a willingness to put the past behind her, and indicated an agreement to take on board the practical challenges of a more egalitarian and peaceful future.

I therefore see picking up the gauntlet as not only meaning having the ability and determination to meet the day-to-day challenges of learning. Picking up the gauntlet seems to be going one step further than that by claiming that bridges need to be crossed for the sake of future generations. As Nahida emphatically said:

Everything influences the new generation – the students, and in this country, there is hate, yes that is the word hate, hate, on the part of the Arabs to the Jews, so there has to be this thing – students, Jews, Arabs starting together, starting from zero.

These words indicate the considerable responsibility on the shoulders of higher education in Israel to provide conditions and opportunities for building positive relationships between the diverse groups it incorporates. This is consistent with the recommendations of Hurtado (1999), Gurin (2003), and Smith (2015), all of which focus on the importance of developing programmes and practice to improve the campus climate.

## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I make the following policy recommendations.

### For Schools

1. Review teacher training programmes for native Arab speakers to include greater emphasis on improving teachers' Hebrew language and literacy skills.
2. Create more official study hours for Hebrew language and literacy in the Arab sector.
3. Create a system of accountability for schools in the Arab sector to ensure pupils are getting enough hours of Hebrew literacy.
4. Review and refine priorities for standardized testing in the Arab sector.
5. Include compulsory spoken Arabic within the whole of the Hebrew sector.
6. Add spoken Arabic to the compulsory matriculation subjects in the Hebrew sector.
7. Create opportunities for more mixed schools in areas where different ethnic groups live in close proximity.

In practice, schools in the Arab sector need to be philosophically open to changing emphases, and accept Hebrew literacy as being critical for students’ on-going academic lives. In addition, in practice, they need to make the necessary timetabling adjustments to incorporate the extra hours required to achieve this goal. Furthermore, pedagogically, looking toward the Internet to provide sources of blended learning opportunities might realistically address different student abilities, as well as incorporating parents and other family members into a Hebrew study programme.

In addition, continuing and developing relationships with higher education institutions will enable schools to provide students with visits, as well as potential pre-academic course opportunities.

Developing liaisons with local business would be a way for schools to more actively promote gap-year work, which would accord students opportunities to further strengthen their Hebrew, as well as gain another year of maturity before entering higher education.

Including compulsory spoken Arabic in the Hebrew education sector also means changing emphases of importance. First, it would do much to change the ‘nod’ currently given to Arabic as an official language in Israel. In addition, adding Arabic to the group of compulsory matriculation subjects would enable native Hebrew speaking students to achieve a reasonable level of spoken Arabic. This could do much to redress the linguistic balance and social divide between the populations.

### For Society

In addition to policy changes in the formal education sectors, creating more opportunities and mixed culture programmes between Arabs of different ethnic groups and Jews offers social possibilities which could positively impact higher education as well. This would be doubly beneficial, as in addition to creating social meeting sites, it would enable young Arabs to get out and involved with the Hebrew language and people with different cultural backgrounds.

Clearly there are many opportunities already, as no law prevents intercultural activities, but it seems more organized prospects and innovative opportunities with more accessible and available budgets might do much to make the boundaries between cultures easier to transcend over time.

### For Higher Education

In order to 'produce graduates for a society we aspire to become in the future' (Hurtado, 1999, p. 19), we must create better conditions for intercultural relationships. However, Gurin et al. (2003) emphasised that 'structural diversity is not an air-borne virus that you simply "catch" by being on a campus which is ethnically diverse' (p. 23). The structural diversity they maintain is a resource, a condition for engagement, and an opportunity for change. It is therefore something that needs to be designed, developed, and resourced.

Each academic department might, for example, strategically design at least one class assignment per course, whereby mixed ethnic groups have to work together. This would include all minority groups. Through the ‘task’, students would interact and work co- operatively toward a common goal. It might also include a presentation aspect, which would reduce pressure on non-native speakers as well as promote collaboration.

Certainly, the finding that other students were interested to learn about Christian culture suggests that courses dealing with the histories, beliefs, and lifestyles of different cultural groups could have a place in the higher education curriculum and might even be prepared and taught by students in collaboration with lecturers and the Centre for Peace and Democracy for academic credit. These could be one-semester mandatory courses created for the purpose of promoting intercultural knowledge, communication, and activity. This may have the outcome of reducing stereotyping and generalisations, as well as offering more opportunities for collaboration in the future.

As Gurin et al. (2003) showed that greater student informal interactional diversity occurs on campuses with greater numbers of ethnically diverse groups, I recommend a policy of positive discrimination which supports the promotion of higher education amongst ethnic minorities, especially in the institutions where representation is small. There was a worry amongst participants in this study that the college campus reflected the global picture of Christian Arabs in Israel, and this is a picture where they feel isolated and underrepresented.

One example of positive discrimination is a new initiative and incentive in the Golan Heights. English teachers from the higher education college are planning a programme to teach academic English courses to Druze high school students. This will reduce the pressure on students regarding their mandatory English courses once they apply to that college. Logistics permitting, these courses for 16 to 18 year olds could actually take place in the college itself which could have other benefits relating to self-confidence in their future higher education environment.

## Recommendations for Further Research

A qualitative response to what is happening in schools in the Arab sector regarding their approach to Hebrew literacy from the point of view of management, teachers, and pupils would offer a stronger basis for implementing policy change in that environment.

In addition, further qualitative studies documenting higher education experiences of larger cohorts of different ethnic minority women's groups in Israel would enable more conclusive findings relating to their linguistic abilities perceptions of identity and social integration.

As there were mixed responses to programmes which pertain to promote integration of diverse student populations, further qualitative investigation into what is working in Israel from a student's perspective would be enlightening.

## Limitations

My idea of the importance of a multidisciplinary context as a backdrop for the research was challenging to negotiate, as there were many aspects contained within its boundaries. In addition, each aspect offered many opportunities for intense discussion, reflection, and consideration. This left me feeling that I was in danger of missing opportunities as well as not being able to tackle everything that was relevant. In retrospect, my ambition to create such a holistic setting may have been too ambitious.

It did, however, provide me, as a researcher, a way into a research which attempted to face the rather complicated and subjective reality so important for qualitative research, especially research which deals with complex situations and relationships. Therefore, although it was less dense than it would have been had a chosen a narrower setting, I believe it was able to reflect the multifaceted environment within which the participants live. Using this limitation to move forward and think about possibilities for further research, I would try to use this thesis as a broad starting point for more in-depth work.

It would be possible at this juncture to conduct a similar study across a number of colleges using the findings of this study to create a more refined methodology. By this, I mean to isolate areas of importance and organize guided questions which build on knowledge gained in this study. With the advantage of a larger cohort it would be possible to focus on different aspects separately and in more depth. It would also be possible to research other minority groups' higher education experiences, as well.

In addition, it would have been better to have been able to incorporate other data-collection methods. While semi-structured interviews are not limiting, it is sometimes difficult to recap and go back if an opportunity is not adequately followed up during a conversation. A larger sample would offer more opportunities for diaries, and a second interview, which I believe would have been important in ascertaining the most accurate picture possible based on reflection and review.

## Personal Development/ Learning from doing the Doctorate.

As a team leader, member and player, the doctorate has humbled me, equipped me and enabled me. It has inspired me and allowed me to aspire.

Even though I have 30 years' experience teaching in higher education, I came into the professional doctorate programme eager to learn more. The learning curve has been steep but exhilarating and I relate briefly to the impact of the doctorate on professional practice and discourse (Burgess and Wellington, 2010). Professionally, undertaking doctoral study has enabled me to approach teaching more academically. Whereas previously I could have been tempted to continue in the same tried and tested manner, I now question, and search the literature not just for answers, but for options, well-founded arguments and academic opinions. This hopefully affects my practice in a constructive way. I also feel surer of myself when working with students on academically oriented projects and am sure that new ways of thinking as well as new knowledge impacts on students positively.

Regarding discourse, I am now more articulate and more careful. I know more words and understand how they fit into the process of research. I can therefore explain myself more clearly. Working on this doctorate has enabled me criticality and an appreciation of the very good writing available.

I feel I have a more scholarly and restrained voice now and understand that the craft of academic writing is something that requires patience and practice. However, I hope to be able to disseminate my findings and continue to develop my writing and research.

**5.12 Final Words**

The words of the participants indicated a number of conflicts. Their lives as students and Christians in predominately Jewish Israel is challenging and comes with conditions, but with the opportunity to higher education they have a chance to pursue better career options which they seem not only unwilling to give up on but determined to take advantage of.

Their determination and motivation to succeed in spite of challenges appeared to override feelings of resentment and even though there were understandable elements of frustration, their outlook was optimistic. The feeling of not being 'here or there' seemed to be a dominant feeling amongst participants, and the transition from the fixed, closed, and more isolated communities of their upbringing to a more integrated future where they would have influence was emphasised. At this point in time, it was more perceived as a problem, but I felt the participants had some measure of confidence that being able to embrace heritage as well as live a fair and unbiased day-to-day reality was not an impossible dream.

I echo the claim I made in the introduction of this thesis, that higher education programmes in Israel are indeed a daring exercise. They dare to offer an environment for Jews and Arabs to stand outside the shadows of their pasts and work and study together. But this is not easy for either population, as it is never enough just to put different groups into the same environment without the appropriate action to ensure cooperative and inclusive outcomes (Gurin, 2002).

In spite of this, awareness is growing and action is being taken all over the country in higher education establishments. This happens in learning support centres, extra and subsidized diagnostic testing, regular open-forum discussion groups, student union interventions, and centres for peace and democracy.

Without going as far as to predict an entirely optimistic future, I do predict a future of hope for new generations of individuals of mixed cultures, languages, and religions living in the challenging environment of Israel.

As an initially novice interviewer, I look back on this enterprise of a doctorate in education as being one which has educated and enthralled me. I am humbled and privileged to have heard the stories of Christian Arab women in Israel and both shocked and respectful to realize the complex and challenging lives these young women lead. I hope my work will do them justice. Their true grit, their belief in themselves, their determination to succeed, and their hope for a better future give hope and inspiration to me as a woman, a teacher, and a researcher.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS DATE

CROSSING THE CHASM TO PICK UP THE GAUNTLET: HIGHER EDUCATION AND CHRISTIAN ARAB WOMEN IN NORTHERN ISRAEL.

The title of this project acknowledges there is a large cultural divide between the different ethnic minority groups in Israel and the dominant Jewish culture. 'Picking up the gauntlet' is based on the Medieval English phrase of accepting a challenge or taking a dare. A large percentage of higher education in Israel is conducted in Hebrew, which is not the native language of ethnic minority groups who are not Jewish. Education until age 18 is separate, so Jewish students study in Hebrew, Arab students study in Arabic and therefore quite often find it more challenging to pursue higher education studies in Hebrew.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide if you are willing to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

1. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT.

The aim of this project is to document the experiences of a group of Christian Arab women in northern Israel studying for their first degree. I hope to understand more about what lies behind your higher educational aspirations and how those aspirations are realized in a country which is politically controversial and culturally diverse. It will focus on the motivations driving your pursuit of higher education and on your strengths and strategies that have been essential for academic success and its maintenance. In addition it will focus on your lives as a minority group in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and politically challenging environment.

1. WHY HAVE I BEEN CHOSEN?

You have been chosen for this project because you are a woman, a Christian of Arab ethnicity living in Israel and a student in the second year of higher education studies aiming for a first degree.

There will be a maximum of 15 interviewees altogether but perhaps as few as 6.

1. DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and if you choose not to participate it will involve no penalty. You may discontinue participation at any time without having to explain why.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part and you will be given this sheet to keep. I will ask you to sign a consent form but you can withdraw from the project at any time. If this will be the case you do not have to give a reason.

1. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I TAKE PART?

Your choosing to participate or not has absolutely no influence or relationship to your studies at the college.

Your part in the project will be to participate in an interview with me related to topics mentioned in Part 1. There is no fixed time for this and it can be as long or short as is comfortable for you.

If you feel one interview is not enough, we could meet again at your convenience or you could e mail me or telephone any further thoughts you feel are relevant.

The questioning style will be open. This means you will have an opportunity to talk freely and explain yourself in as much detail as you feel you can or want.

You will in addition be asked to fill out a short form giving some demographic information.

I will use a voice recorder to record the interviews. They will only be used for analysis and for illustration in conference proceedings and lectures.

1. WILL I BE RECORDED?

The audio recordings of your activities during this research will be used only for analysis and illustration in conference proceedings or lectures. No other use of them will be made without your written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

1. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF TAKING PART?

I do not foresee any risks or disadvantages of taking part in this project.

1. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those taking part in this project, it is hoped that you will benefit from the experience of thinking and talking about your educational aspirations, what it has meant for you to maintain academic success and how you have been able to do it. Once you are able to articulate this new knowledge it may be easier to understand and help other culturally and linguistic minority students deal with the challenge of higher education in Israel.

1. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE RESEARCH STUDY STOPS EARLIER THAN EXPECTED?

If the research study stops earlier than expected I will telephone you and explain why.

1. WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

I do not see that anything can 'go wrong' as such. However in the account of you feeling any need to make a complaint please note the e mail address of my chief supervisor at the end of this document. And should you feel that this is inedquate, the University's Registrar may be contacted.

1. WILL MY TAKING PART IN THIS PROJECT BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential. You will never be identified in results or publications.

1. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

The results will be published in my Doctoral Thesis. They may be used for additional comparative research with other minority women’s groups. They may be used in a publication but I reiterate that neither you nor the college you attend will be identified. I will contact you with information about where the results can be read and accessed.

1. WHO IS ORGANIZING FUNDING OF THE RESEARCH?

No organization or company is funding this research. I am doing so myself.

1. WHO HAS ETHICALLY REVIEWED THE PROJECT?

This project has been ethically approved by Sheffield University via The Department of Education's ethics review procedure and the ethics committee at the college where the research takes place.

CONTACT INFORMATION.

You may contact any of us at any time.

Alison Touval. [ali.touval@gmail.com](mailto:ali.touval@gmail.com) tel. 0545 681 605 – researcher

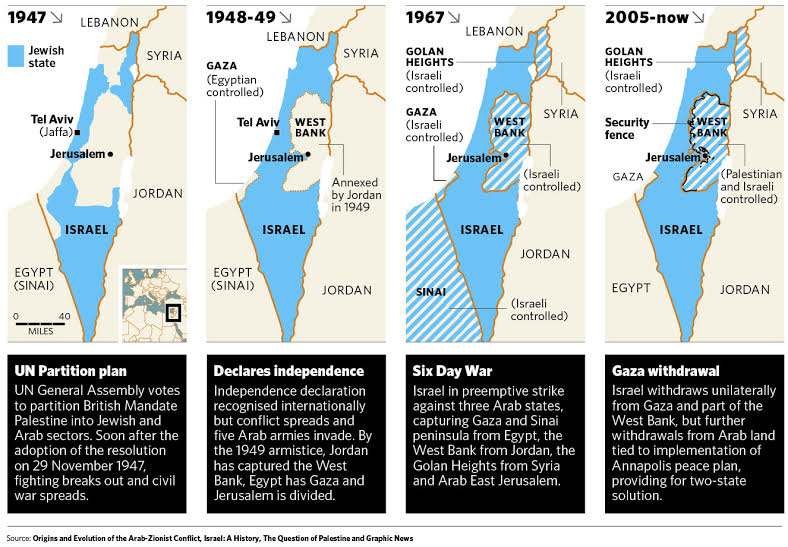
Dr. Sabine Little. s.little@sheffield.ac.uk University of Sheffield. Supervisor.

THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO TAKE PART

APPENDIX 2 CONSENT FORM

|  |
| --- |
| **Title of Research Project:**  Crossing a chasm to pick up the gauntlet: further education and Christian Arab women in the north of Israel.  **Name of Researcher**: Alison Touval  **Participant Identification Number for this project:**  **Please initial box**   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet  dated *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_* for the above project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.   Telephone number of lead researcher – Alison Touval 0545 681 605  3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.  I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my  anonymised responses.  4. I agree to take part in the above research project.    \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  (*or legal representative*)  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of person taking consent  *(if different from lead researcher)*  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*    \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*    Copies :  After all parties have signed each will receive a copy of;  the signed and dated information sheet and the consent form.  Copies will be kept by the lead researcher and placed in the project's main record file. |

APPENDIX 3 MAPS OF ISRAEL



APPENDIX 4 QUESTION GUIDE

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| **INTERVIEW GUIDE –** |
| Before coming to college you completed high school matriculation.  **Do you feel your pre-college education prepared you, or did not prepare you for an academic college education?**  *Other question topics as related to the above question*  private or government school  teacher professionalism  quality of teaching - excellent - good - poor - average teaching skills  number of hours and quality of Hebrew studies  number of hours and quality of English studies  availability of diagnostic tests and counseling for students with learning difficulty  school facilities – technology, library, buildings and could be more  attitudes towards education /higher ed on part of the school |
| Were boys treated differently from girls at school?  If yes,  in what ways? Why might this be the case? |
| **What were the main reasons you chose higher education?** |
| **How will having a degree influence your future? – and that of your family – children?** |
| **Do you think that studying for a degree as a woman and an Arab is challenging?**  In what ways?  **Which personal *characteristics* do you feel are important, for you as a woman and Arab to meet the challenge of higher education?** |
| **Apart from your own personality – what else do you do to maintain success?**  *Possible areas to develop*  Sitting at the front,  getting to know the teacher,  working in groups,  socially making an effort to mix with people different to me,  doing everything myself,  not doing everything myself (leaning on others, cheating)  not taking work home,  focusing on homework and nothing else at weekends,  not having an outside job – (funding)  coming into to college at weekends to study,  private lessons,  putting texts through translating software programmes or text to speech. |
| **Does your close and extended family play a role in your being a student? Can you tell me about this?**  Would you say they were influential? Helpful or nor not? In what ways?  **What happens here at college that influences your learning in a positive way?**  *Possible areas to develop*  Centre for Peace and Democracy.  Support systems for students – extra help, diagnostic test opportunity, centre for disabled students, support for students with learning difficulty.  Lecturers who are native Arabic speakers. Do you choose native Arabic speakers when you have a choice? Why? Why not?  Being in a mixed ethnic environment  Positive attitudes and environment – teachers, students, administrators  Competent teachers  Efficient and clear administration procedures  Library procedures  Facilities in general – buildings, technology, gardens, views, privacy, student union. |
| **What happens at the college which holds you back or has a negative impact on you?**  *Possible areas for development*  The language of instruction  Learning English (as a third language) and the fact you cannot graduate without passing a difficult English exit exam?  Discrimination – teachers, administration, fellow students?  Poor teacher feedback  Disinterest even antipathy of teachers towards Arab students and their needs. |
| **Do you prefer to study in groups with Arabs or Jews or a mixed group? Can you explain a little more about this?** |
| Your studies are conducted in Hebrew even though it is not your native language.   1. **How are your Hebrew literacy skills? Writing, reading, speaking? Is your Hebrew good enough for your college studies?** 2. **How do you feel about this?**   When you study texts in English**,** do you write translations in Arabic or in Hebrew? Why? |
| Sometimes you speak Arabic, sometimes Hebrew.  **Do you feel different when you speak Hebrew?**  **Does it change the way you behave? In what ways?** |
| **For what purposes do you use Arabic during the day?**  How do you feel when you speak Arabic?  As a student, do you perceive having Arabic as a native language, advantageous in any way? |
| I **want to know how you *deal with* moving between and actively participating in, two different cultural and linguistic environments.**  **Do you consciously think about this at all? – the fact that you cross boundaries so often. Does it affect you in any way?**  **Do you change your behaviour in any way, or in the way you speak in order to make moving between the two environments more fluid?**  **When you go home, what differences do you notice? Do you make adjustments?**  **What about when you get to college? What differences do you notice? Do you make adjustments?** |
| **How would you define yourself?**  Christian, Palestinian, Israeli, Arab and woman, are all words that may apply to you?  **Can you put them in the order of importance that most describes or identifies you?**  reasons for choice – other words?? |
| **Did you consider studies in Arabic? Here or abroad?**  Would you prefer to go to a college in Israel where Arabic was the language of instruction? Why? |
| **Out of the things we have talked about, what do think has been most important? Can you explain why?** |