

"The Right to Adequate Housing: Palestinian-Single Mothers in Israel"

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Abstract

This article presents the issue of housing for Palestinian-Israeli single-mothers, presenting both a gender analysis of their available housing options and the case for their right to adequate housing. A critical analysis from the perspective of gender mainstreaming on these women's rights to adequate housing creates a prism for examining additional spheres of life that relate to them and their children. The paper is based on a study I conducted among Palestinian-Israeli single-mothers, whether divorced, separated or widowed, which examined their situation and status in their families and communities. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews which were analyzed according to the principles of feminist research. The findings indicate that in the absence of government solutions, women are relegated to repressive family arrangements without autonomous spaces for themselves and their children. Their existential and housing difficulties can in extreme cases even put their lives at risk.

Keywords: Palestinian-Israeli women, single mothers, divorcees, widows, adequate housing, public housing, gender mainstreaming.

1. Introduction

In the last three decades, Palestinian society in Israel has undergone changes in different spheres. Trends of change and preservation have evolved simultaneously. Part of the changes in the familial sphere includes a rise in the percentage of single-parent familiesⁱ resulting from divorce or widowhood.ⁱⁱ In this paper, I will focus on the issue of housing in relation to Palestinian-Israeli single mothers, and I will present a gender analysis of their available housing options as well as the realization of their right to adequate housing. A critical analysis from the perspective of gender mainstreaming on the right to adequate housing, as manifested in the case of these women, creates a prism for examining additional spheres of life that relate to them and their children.

This paper is based on a study I conductedⁱⁱⁱ among Palestinian-Israeli single mothers, whether divorced, separated or widowed, which dealt with their situation and experiences, and examined their status in their families and communities. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed based on a commitment to the principles of feminist research. The issue of housing was a central theme in many interviews.

Due to lack of government housing solutions, economic hardship and lack of social support, the women are squeezed for housing solutions in family spaces. Within these spaces, they are subjected to gender and patriarchal norms. This article focuses on their experiences and studies them in relation to the limited supply of housing solutions offered to them.^{iv} The vulnerability and distress of these women regarding housing may in extreme cases lead them to fear for their lives. Many studies have already pointed to the severe housing shortage experienced by the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Abu-Salih et al., 2010; Bauml, 2010). Their distress stems from natural increase coupled with a national policy of restriction of settlement and development and the reduction of land reserves Arab communities.

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On most issues, the debate on Palestinian society in Israel is conducted as though the society were homogeneous. The few distinctions that are drawn in public policies usually differentiate between Muslims and Christians, Arabs and Druze, Circassians and Bedouins, and so on. These distinctions are insufficient and mandate a gendered analysis that focuses on the unique needs of Palestinian women (Abou-Tabickh, 2008; Yahiya-Younis, 2006). Implementing gendered thinking would be a first step in improving the effectiveness of public policy, as noted by other researchers in diverse contexts (Benjamin, 2014; Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005).

In this paper I take a critical view of Israel's conventional housing policies from a gendered perspective, which takes into account the changes in Palestinian society in Israel, and especially the increase in single-parent families headed by a woman due to divorce or widowhood. I will present my analysis of these women, who belong to a social category that is subject to patriarchal cultural pressures and is inimical to their personal status, and I will examine the housing solutions they find. By understanding the implications of Israel's public policies for these women, I can show that these policies violate one of their basic human rights – the right to adequate housing.

The right to adequate housing^v is grounded in international covenants as part of the individual's right to adequate living conditions. Since the UN's Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, numerous international covenants and accords have been published, specifying a constantly growing list of rights, including the right to a decent standard of living and the right to shelter. Human rights are perceived as one of the most important cultural structures created by the world political system. They are an extra-state principle that instructs the state how it should treat the individuals residing within its territory regardless of their civic status. In this way, countries that ratify these rights include universal norms in their constitutional obligations on a state level. Framing a social struggle as being grounded in the international discourse on human rights can serve as an anchor for judicial activities and a basis for judicial criticism and can also fill a judicial void.

Consequently, an examination of public policies pertaining to housing for Palestinian-Israeli single mothers through a gendered lens and in the context of the human rights discourse, aims to help identify the problems or define them as human rights violations. It also contributes to the formulation of a discourse that can empower individuals and provide them with a source of legitimacy, and with rhetorical-symbolical and legal-formal tools to present their claims (Berkovitch, 2003). This analysis emphasizes the existing gaps between the social reality and the desired situation, and at the same time enables the data to become an instrument of struggle, helps to empower social groups, and establish them as legitimate social players for collective action.

The main contribution of the article lies in its presentation of housing as a central motif in Israeli institutional policies that discriminate against Palestinians-Israeli. Since the very beginnings of Zionist settlement in pre-state Israel, land laws have been ethno-national in character. Various studies have shown that the land separation policies practiced in Israel are manifested in establishing settlements only for Jews. Housing possibilities for the Palestinian population in Israel and the rights of Palestinian citizens to housing have been deliberately limited, as seen in the reduction of the area of jurisdiction of Arab localities, the arrested urbanization process,^{vi} and the absence of government programs for public construction^{vii} (Abu-Salih et al., 2010; Bauml, 2010). A number of researchers have documented deliberate policies of house demolitions, Judaization, and urban gentrification,^{viii} primarily in mixed cities like Yaffa and Acre (Bana-Geries, 2007; Gan-Mor, 2008).

Researchers have contended that in this respect the State of Israel, like other colonizing countries, consciously engages in policies that are typified by 'supervised abandonment' (Bauml, 2010).^{ix} These policies are based on many years of discrimination, exclusion and neglect, concurrently with the inclusion of Palestinians in Israel's formal civic frameworks. It should be noted, however, that other disadvantaged populations in Israel have suffered from housing shortages in recent years, which culminated in a public protest in the summer of 2011. Neoliberal trends, privatization processes, and reduced welfare policies – which have all increased in Israel in recent decades – have also influenced the shaping of housing policies in the form of reduced assistance to homebuyers, privatization of the mortgage market, and reduction of public housing. However, even the planned government reforms in the wake of the public protest do not provide an appropriate solution for the housing shortage in the Arab localities. Moreover, even if the recommendations of the reforms are fully implemented, their impact on Palestinian women in general and the single mothers among them in particular, will be limited. This is because the need to provide a solution for the housing problem in the Palestinian population in Israel is usually linked to the demographic growth of this population, and does not take into account its heterogeneity and the discrete needs of the different social categories within it.

In 2012, more attention was given to the housing shortage in Palestinian society in the Knesset Economic Affairs Committee.^x The discussion centered on the exclusion of Arab towns from the list of communities eligible for the provision of rental assistance. There has been more general discussion of the existing housing shortage in Arab communities, particularly in light of the price of land and planning difficulties. But even in this context, the differential needs of a social category such as women are not mentioned, and Palestinian-Israeli society is treated as a homogeneous whole. So far, I have presented the link between gender, national identity and marital status on the one hand and opportunities for housing of single Palestinian-Israeli mothers on the other. Gender analysis of Israeli public policy shows that the distress of single mothers in Palestinian-Israeli is in many ways similar to that of other disadvantaged women in Israel.^{xi}

Government Aid Policies in the Field of Housing

Since the establishment of the state, government policy has been to establish procedures aimed at helping alleviate housing shortages by providing subsidized rental housing, mortgages, and subsidies to people renting in the private sector (Ben-Shitrit, 2003). The term 'public housing' refers to government or government company-owned housing that is rented at subsidized rates to populations that meet certain eligibility conditions. Eligibility is granted only to non-homeowners who meet certain intersecting criteria based on the applicant's marital status, number of children, and income, and eligibility applies only to the applicant's current area of residence (Ministry of Construction and Housing, 2012).

Public housing options in the Palestinian localities in Israel are very limited and for the most part only available in mixed cities. The fact that Arab communities are not eligible for public housing is part of a broad Israeli lands policy. Moreover, Rabinowitz (2003) believes that this discriminatory approach extends to immigration, housing, local planning, social services, health and education, leading to marginalization and dispossession of Arab citizens. In addition, Yona & Saporta (2003) claim that the rhetoric surrounding the struggle for a public housing law in 1998 appealed to the national Zionist ethos and tied the right to land and resources to contribution to the country, which in turn gave legitimacy to excluding the Palestinian-Israeli public. During the 1990s, many Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union immigrated to Israel, thereby putting pressure on housing policy in diverse ways. In the last ten years, many programs aimed at encouraging direct purchase of housing have been implemented. This has resulted in depletion of the stock of apartments in public housing, in contrast to what is happening in European countries, where, despite the ideology of privatization, there is ongoing renewal of the supply of socialized housing for rental (Ben-Shitrit, 2003). The sharp decline in housing stock and the long wait for public housing has given support to the alternative of providing rent subsidies in the private rental market, but in practice many families are unable to obtain this help, and for those who manage to do so, the allowance from the Housing Ministry is updated only once every few years, while rents rise annually (Gan-Mor, 2008).

Moreover, conditions for eligibility apply, entailing meeting certain personal and locality criteria. These include marital status, number of children, income, and so on. Eligibility is subject to renting in cities or localities with over 1,000 residents in which the rental market constitutes at least 5%. By means of this criterion the Ministry of Construction and Housing has drawn up a list of 229 eligible localities (of which only 17 are Arab), which discriminates against the ability of residents from localities not included in the list to benefit from government assistance even if they meet the personal criteria. Hence, this regulation affects single Palestinian-Israeli mothers who wish to continue to live where they lived during their marriage. If their locality is not controlled by the Ministry of Housing, they are not eligible for rent subsidies, which in effect violates their right to choose their place of residence and live in dignity (Gan-Mor, 2008).

The Sociopolitical Context of Palestinian Women who are Israeli Citizens

In 2015, the Palestinian minority in Israel numbered some 1,757,000[i] people who constitute about 20.7% of of Israel's entire population. Women make up approximately 49.1% of this population (ICBS, 2015). Women make up approximately 49.1% of this population (ICBS, 2013). According to researchers, the status of Palestinian-Israeli women gives rise to inequality and oppression in many aspects of life including the economy, employment, politics, and education.

Moreover, the gender inequality stemming from the patriarchal order typifying Israeli society in general and Palestinian society in Israel in particular constitutes a further dimension of oppression experienced by Palestinian-Israeli women (Herzog, 2004). Numerous studies have described the complex life of Palestinian women in Israel, and the hybrid reality of their lives. Among other things, this is due to the fact that within this reality, situations of oppression and practices of preservation are interwoven with acts of challenge and resistance (Sa'ar, 2007). Despite their exclusion from the hegemonic society of Israel and despite the multiple economic, status, and political tensions that shape their lives, including their marginality, and the vicious circle in which they live, the various processes that Israeli society has undergone and is still undergoing have not left Palestinian-Israeli women untouched. In the last three decades, familial, economic, educational, and sociocultural changes have been taking place in Palestinian society in Israel. Central to these changes are declining birth rates, more women going out to work, increased rates of education, and changes in traditional-patriarchal perceptions (Gharrah, 2013; Hleihel, 2011; ICBS, 2012). These changes are reshaping the possibilities open to Israeli-Palestinians in general, and Palestinian-Israeli women in particular, in numerous spheres, including family and gender relations.

As part of the process described above, the rate of single-parent families has increased to 10% of Palestinian families (ICBS, 2014). However, despite the increased frequency of the "single mother" category in Palestinian society, and the concomitant sociological trend towards heterogeneity, the patriarchal context remains a factor shaping family patterns, including that of single mother.

The status of Palestinian Single Mothers in Israel

In recent years, the divorce rate has also risen in Palestinian society,^{xii} even though this society still does not encourage or approve of divorce. In many families from different social backgrounds, divorce carries a mark of disgrace, and divorcées are still the object of condemnation and criticism. In many communities, a woman living alone with her children is unacceptable. In the economic context as well, many women leave their husbands' home penniless and without receiving alimony.

In many aspects their status as single-mothers is also influenced and shaped by the wider social trends in Israeli society. The ideology advocating the values of a welfare state has diminished in Israel, while the neoliberal perception that undermines the foundations of a welfare state has strengthened. Policies pertaining to single mothers in Israeli society have been shaped in accordance with these perceptions, and policies concerning allowances that prevailed in the past have been curtailed. In the absence of support systems, a substantial number of single mothers face poverty (Herbst, 2010; Toledano & Eliav, 2010). Beyond their personal status as 'single mothers in Israel', which shapes the possibilities of the women who participated in the present study, their status is also influenced by the social context and their civil status.

The ratio of Palestinian women's participation in the labor force in Israel^{xiii} is lower than that of Jewish women. A combination of cultural factors and the structure of financial and occupational opportunities for the Palestinian community in Israel hinder the attempts of single mothers to live independently. The traditional nature of Palestinian society, exclusion based on gender, and the pressure exerted on women by their families on the one hand, and inequality in infrastructure, discrimination based on nationality, and the fact that many workplaces in Israel, both private and public, refrain from employing Palestinians on the other, bring about this financial and occupational limitation of opportunities that does not enable single-mothers to subsist independently. Added to this is the civil context that affects land availability, which is the issue I shall be discussing in this paper.

Moreover, living in an extended family has become more common as a result of the financial constraints on single mothers, a phenomenon increasingly common in recent decades among white families in the United States and Europe (Hansen, 2005; Hertz, 2006), in contrast to conventional perceptions of families and to the doctrine of family privacy and faith in American individualism and self-actualization (Hansen, 2005).

Raising children in the framework of single parent households entails dependency on relatives and family networks. In the transition to the 21st century, socio-political and economic pressures forced middle-class women to rely on their families, a practice usually seen among lower-class women. This is also apparent in the housing shortage experienced by Palestinian-Israeli single mothers, a unique feature resulting from the legal structuring of the division of property at the termination of marriage, according to the Financial Relations Law of 1973. Whether the marriage ends due to divorce or the death of the spouse, each spouse is entitled to half the value of all the joint assets, excluding assets in their possession before the marriage or received by gift or inheritance during the marriage.

However, while many Jewish couples in Israel buy their apartment during the course of the marriage, in Palestinian-Israeli society, it is accepted practice of the man to build the house before marriage, and therefore it is considered his or his father's property. Thus, divorced or widowed Palestinian-Israeli women cannot benefit from the Financial Relations Law. Since community of property is not recognized in Islam (Layish, 1995), women are left defenseless under Islamic law as well as under Israeli law which does not relate to gender or cultural rights to housing. In the face of so many barriers, the usual and the most accessible arrangement is to live in the extended family household. For divorcees, this means returning to the family of origin, and for widows, living in the husband's family's household.

Method

This article is based on a field study conducted between 2007 and 2011. The data is drawn from interviews with twenty-four widowed or divorced/separated Muslim and Christian women. Sixteen of the women who participated in the study were located through mutual friends, and six by the 'snowball' method; I met two additional women by chance. All the women who were interviewed had children of various ages, some of whom lived with their mothers while others had married and left the home. The interviewees were aged between 30 and 45. They lived in various localities; half in urban and half in rural ones.^{xiv} Some were employed while others did not work, and their educational background was varied. Since the population was heterogeneous, I conducted an intersectional analysis that enabled me to depict the repertoire of different voices in the field, and to accentuate the contexts in which different power structures (such as education, status, nationality, and so forth) emerge as meaningful in the women's experiences.

In this paper, however, I will not address this methodological aspect, and therefore I shall not expand on it. Since I wish to examine issues associated with public policies, I expanded my research fields and added interviews with a lawyer and a social worker. I also examined relevant court rulings and information from housing companies in Israel and the Ministry of Construction and Housing on the housing possibilities at the disposal of the Palestinian-Israeli population in general and Palestinian-Israeli single mothers in particular. The institutional information I gathered was consolidated and analyzed in accordance with 'gender mainstreaming' principles; in other words, public policies which are perceived as gender-neutral were examined through a gendered lens.

The Interviews

The interviews lasted no less than 90 minutes and were conducted in Hebrew. The accepted research approach holds that an interview conducted in a non-mother tongue language heightens the sense of 'symbolic violence' that in any case exists in the aggressive setting of an interview (Geertz, 1983). Lomsky-Feder et al. (2006) challenge this view. They claim that in certain situations there are in fact advantages to conducting an interview in a language that is not the interviewee's mother tongue. Speaking in a non-mother tongue language enables interviewees to distance themselves from sensitive and vulnerable issues, to be less exposed to the interviewer's intrusiveness, to set boundaries with which they feel comfortable, to employ different thinking categories, and to tell their story in different ways, at the same time providing them with an opportunity for reflective observation on their life. The women in the present study agreed to be interviewed in Hebrew, and perhaps, despite their diverse backgrounds, their agreement to participate and their sense of ease with speaking Hebrew indicate a certain commonality and a latent sample bias. Many women who had been approached refused to be interviewed, some explicitly, either directly to me or the person who facilitated contact between us. Another five evaded the interview in a variety of ways: they repeatedly postponed it, stopped answering the phone, or failed to show up at the prearranged meeting place. Some women who agreed to be interviewed initially displayed some suspicion or allotted a relatively short time for the interview. But once the interview began, they relaxed and even 'overran' the time that they had allotted.

In each of the interviews, I endeavored to allow the interviewee to express herself and introduce subjects into the conversation as she wished. At the same time, I addressed a number of central themes, such as the marriage period with reference to pre-marriage contexts (studies, meeting, and choosing her partner), her relationship with her family of origin, her relationship with her husband's family, relationships between herself and her children, her place in the community, her employment, her education, and so forth. The venue of the interview was chosen by the interviewee on the premise that her choice would be not merely technical but also meaning-laden.

Additionally, in a situation where a Jewish researcher interviews Palestinian women, the interviewee's choice to hold the meeting in her own home can be viewed as a demand that the interviewer cross social and geographic borders and as an opportunity for the interviewer to prove her willingness to do so (Herzog, 2004). Most of the interviewees endeavored to meet me alone in their homes with no one else present. When this was not possible, we met at the college that they attended, their workplace, or another public institution.

Interview Analysis

The analysis employed a 'naive empiricist' approach to the interview texts, in line with Grounded Theory as defined by Strauss & Corbin (1990), a method based on the discovery of inductive connections between the various units of textual meaning arising from the interviews. One of the most significant themes was that of living arrangements and their influence on their relationships with the families.

In answer to the question, "Where do you live now?", interviewees described their experiences of living arrangements both technically (a description of the physical space at their disposal, the division of this space between them and their children, or with other family members), and referentially (the difficulties, the advantages, the attitude of other family members towards them and to their children either with the family of origin or that of the husband). From the technical descriptions such as their and their children's sleeping arrangements, for example, one could deduce whether they had some significant space to themselves, how they were expected to behave in the home, or what they and their children were permitted or forbidden to do.

During the interviews, many women expressed the hope that the study would help to raise public awareness of their situations and would improve public services for them. This led me to a feminist analysis of public policy and its suitability for their special needs. This analysis is grounded in Smith's (2005) methodological conceptualization of institutional ethnography, in which women's daily activities and experiences are expressions of their institutional context. To understand the reality in which women live, one must explore the institutional relations and organizational spaces in which they operate.

The importance of and need for research that employs ethnographic tools to examine social policies from the perspective of excluded and discriminated groups was also emphasized by Yanow (2003). She holds that public policies can be analyzed as the narratives or stories by means of which politicians relate to themselves and others. In this sense, public policy is a collective narrative, and consequently it would be appropriate to adopt and develop interpretive approaches to policy analysis that address the meanings of the policies for the people affected by them, and examine the ways in which these meanings are shaped. Analysis of policy components can lead to an understanding of the decision-making frameworks and sources of power, and reveal the silenced voices.

In order to analyze the housing options available to these women, I expanded the study field and added interviews with a lawyer and a social worker, and examined relevant court rulings and information from housing companies and the Ministry of Construction and Housing. The institutional information I gathered was consolidated and analyzed in accordance with 'gender mainstreaming' principles according to which, public policy which is perceived to be gender neutral is examined through a gender lens (Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005).

Findings

Due to the reasons I mentioned, which are grounded in the structure of opportunities and the conservative culture, the two most common living arrangements are for single mothers to initially live in the extended household; in other words, for divorcées to return to their family of origin, and for widows to remain in their husbands' family home. This means that the women are forced into oppressive family arrangements in which they have to fight for autonomous spaces for themselves and their children.

In addition to these living arrangements, there is a third residential pattern of 'living in an independent household'. Despite the potential for maintaining a freer way of life, this residential pattern is not an option for the majority of the interviewees, at least in the initial stages following separation or widowhood. Added to this, due the housing shortage I mentioned earlier, this residential pattern is only possible in Arab or mixed cities.

Family Residential Spaces: Patriarchal Gender Subordination

In this section, I shall briefly discuss the complexity of the housing issue as experienced today by Palestinian-Israeli single mothers. The findings of my study show that out of the sixteen divorcees in the group, ten relinquished their housing rights, left the home in which they had lived during their marriage with nothing, and went back to live with their family of origin. Of the eight widows in the group, six continued living in their husband's family home.

Within these residential arrangements in extended-family spaces, the interviewees experience physical and psychological hardship, and were subjected to patriarchal gender subordination, which was manifested in strict supervision by family members and the community. From the interviews with the divorcees it is evident that in many cases, leaving the home in which they had lived during their marriage is seen as escaping and as protecting their and their children's lives in exchange for relinquishment of their property and home.

This is how forty-year-old mother of four Rasha describes her situation:

After twenty years I went back to my parents - I felt it was more comfortable for me. I left a five-hundred square meter house, a car, a bank account. I had everything I wanted, but I didn't want any of it, I didn't care about any of it... in exchange for my and my children's lives. The first problem that arises when they return to their family of origin is crowding within the family space which is often also shared by younger brothers and sisters.^{xv} Most of the interviewees describe crowded conditions and lack of privacy and a separate space for them and their children.

This is how Zohara, who has been divorced for five years and moved back into her parents' home with her son, who was four at the time, describes the situation:

No, we don't have our own room... our house is very small. This is where my mother and father sleep, there's another room for two of my sisters, and my two brothers and another sister [who are not yet married] are upstairs - three rooms. Sometimes my son is with my sisters, at others with my sister upstairs, sometimes I'm here, sometimes with my sister. A different place every time, and that's difficult as well...

The interviews suggest that the shared living space also entails the single-mothers' return to family supervision and the reinforcement of patriarchy - returning to the household without receiving 'their own room' carries implications that deviate from issues of crowding. The women pay a heavy price in the form of ongoing denial of basic living conditions for them and their children, and they become unwanted 'add-ons' that are exposed to a wide range of disempowering practices in their extended families of origin.

In this situation, the concept of 'home', usually perceived as a safe, supportive space, is identified by the interviewees as an arena of conflict, one of exclusion and alienation, and a place where they experience cultural crisis. On the one hand, they have their own identity, which became established during the years they were absent from their parents' home. They also underwent changes in the process of separating from their husbands and seeking to bring about change in their lives. On the other, the home to which they return often constitutes a shackling, policing, and supervising patriarchal space. Even if the women are able to negotiate the terms of their supervision, in the absence of other institutional housing solutions in neutral spaces, they are forced to continue living in the family space.

The housing shortage: Palestinian-Israeli widows

Although Islam has somewhat relaxed customary law, there is still no absolute freedom to bequeath. Thus for example, making a bequest in favor of a particular legal heir, specifically a wife, is not possible since a widow is not considered heir to her husband's property when he dies. The forced migration^{xvi} of Palestinian women when they marry, together with the realization of the patrilocal principle, is exacerbated when they are widowed. Despite marriage relationships and blood ties with the husband's family, and even though their children 'belong' to the new family, a widow is more vulnerable in the absence of the 'connecting' man, and her experience of alienation is intensified and her status becomes increasingly complicated. Many of the widows in my study remained with their husbands' families after his death; however, they expressed their uncertain feelings regarding ownership of their property and home.

A widow's husband's family sees her as retaining property that is not hers, and as living on the land of a family which is not her family. Since there are no legal arrangements regarding land, widows are not granted any legal protection whatsoever and are left to fend for themselves vis-à-vis their husband's family. An example is Nasreen, holding an MA and financially independent, a widow and mother of one daughter, who married relatively late in life at the age of thirty-six. After the marriage, her husband began building their home as part of an integrated family project in which she invested savings from an inheritance she had received. In fact, during most of their marriage she was considered the main provider. A few years after they married, her husband suddenly died, leaving her in an unfinished home in which most of her savings had been invested. The problematic relationship with her late husband's family forces her, from a legal standpoint, to live in the house in order to protect her and her daughter's rights:

Yes, when we got married they drew up plans for this building, he and his brother, and that's what saved me, that his name is on the plans, they tried to drive me away, but from a legal standpoint they can't... The fact that the plans are in his name, and I've got an inheritance order, so I've got half a building. They started telling me the walls are yours, the floor isn't yours, the lower floor isn't yours. Now I'm starting litigation with them in the courts. Thus, Nasreen has to contend both with the loss of her husband and the difficulties of raising her daughter as a single parent, and with daily attrition from her late husband's family. The constant physical proximity makes her life difficult, but she refuses to move out since continuing to live there helps her protect her financial rights.

Another issue connected to children relates to widows who seek to leave their husband's family complex where they lived in the past in order to free themselves from supervision by the husband's family, and to exercise their right to adequate housing.^{xvii} When women decide to comply with the rules of patrilineality and reinforce their children's identity as part of their father's family, they protect the children from separation from the accepted family backing and their exclusion from the accepted structure, which would be the case if they moved to their mother's village. In order to protect their children from feeling that they were outsiders, the women accepted their own feelings of foreignness and paid the price in order to reinforce their children's sense of belonging.

Palestinian-Israeli Single Mothers: Relationships of Support and Supervision

The physical protection and emotional support entailed in family 'giving' were of paramount importance to the interviewees. The material component of the family's 'giving' gives them and their children a reasonable existence, while the emotional support they receive establishes their identity in the community as the head of a single-parent family. However, the family's 'giving' is not unconditional. The women are forced to increase their dependence on their families and communities, while bowing to local patriarchal arrangements which in most cases result in their increased subordination and oppression.

From the interviews it emerges that receiving support is conditional on the demand to adopt strict rules of conduct, the implications of which are agreeing to be policed and restricted in movement. In contrast with other studies which described the imposition of restrictions by aggressive means such as disparagement, humiliation, or violence, the analysis in the present study was based on the conceptualization of 'gift economy', wherein dependence and obligation are created between the women and their families – on the face of it, not an aggressive act. The women receive some form of support from their families, and at the same time various levels of supervision are imposed on them by different family members as well as others, such as neighbors.

The supervision is manifested in different ways:

- Supervision over freedom of movement in public, and over accompaniment imposed on their movement in public areas, which also impacts their leisure time and going out to work.
- Supervision in the private domain – supervision over the traffic of visitors in the home, and the forbidding of entry to strange men when the woman is there alone.
- The family's demand for constant updates in every sphere: financial, personal, filial, domestic, and so on.
- Supervision over the women's motherhood and interference in the children's upbringing and education.

At the same time, the supervision is not uniform, and its scope varies in accordance with different sociological variables such as the woman's and her family's economic status, religiosity, and education. In this section of the article I have discussed the complexity of housing as currently experienced by single Palestinian-Israeli mothers. This discussion will help develop a conceptual framework for formulating appropriate policy based primarily on understanding the plight of these women, and which is aimed at answering their needs within their social framework.

Discussion

In this paper I have presented an analysis that shows the difficulties with which Palestinian-Israeli single mothers contend when they seek adequate housing for themselves and their children, together with existing public housing policies. Due to the restrictions that make moving to neutral residential spaces difficult, living in the different family spaces becomes the default option for the women, their children, and other family members. These spaces become spaces of supervision in which there are frequently hostile relationships and conflicts between the women and their family members. These relationships of dependence are potentially restrictive, and the women are forced to participate in the circles of family and community belonging (see also Josef & Stork, 1993).

Analysis of public policies in Israel shows that in addition to the problem of their limited scope, they are founded on criteria that limit the ability of Palestinian-Israeli women to receive any kind of institutional assistance. The policies in force today, as well as the proposed reforms concerning the Palestinian-Israeli population, do not take into account the unique circumstances of the single-mother social category within this population. Thus, while the public discourse in Israel fosters a debate on affordable housing in general and public housing in particular, these women remain invisible to policymakers and shapers of public discourse alike.

An analysis of Israeli public policy shows that besides offering too little, it is also based on criteria that limit the ability of Palestinian-Israeli women to gain institutional support of any kind. The current policy and proposed reforms for the Palestinian-Israeli population do not take into account the unique circumstances of the social category of single mothers. Thus, at a time when Israeli public discourse fosters discussion on affordable housing in general and public housing in particular, those women remain transparent to both policy makers and shapers of public discourse.

The inability of Palestinian-Israeli single mothers to exercise their rights to adequate local housing results in many women unwillingly remaining in patriarchal family frameworks which provide them with shelter, support, and assistance, but also demand their cooperation with a policing, restricting, gendered hierarchy. Their housing problem becomes more acute in the form of restrictions on their freedom, on their right to mobility and independence, on their participation in the labor market, on exercising their right to raise their children in their own way, and on forming and maintaining a new intimate relationship.

In my study I combined two discourse fields that enabled me to conduct an analysis based both on the interviewees' perceptions of their situation, and on deciphering the institutional forces to which they refer in their interviews (Berkovitch, 2003; Gan-Mor, 2008; Gil-Ad, 2007:).

Thus, the 'no choice' approach that recurred in the interviews regarding the housing solutions they adopted, is accorded additional meaning in light of an examination of the existing institutional arrangements concerning the rights of Palestinian-Israeli single mothers to housing. The incorporation of the international law discourse is of considerable importance not only methodologically and epistemologically; it also has value politically.^{xviii} Understanding the blindness of housing policymakers with regard to Palestinian-Israeli single mothers is a first and crucial step toward advancing informed policies that provide discrete solutions for different social categories within the population defined as 'Palestinian society in Israel'.

The scope of this article precludes a discussion of practical solutions for the problems I have raised. However, an initial presentation of the issues will compel decision makers to give serious consideration to the variance among these women. The conclusions emerging from analysis of the findings highlight the need for combined solutions based on the formulation of a holistic approach to planning together with supportive welfare policies, and support for these women who conduct constant negotiations with their families and communities on their status as heads of the new family unit. This work reinforces previous research (Berkovitch, 2003; Berkowitch & Gordon, 2010; Hacker, 2008) which stressed the importance of taking the discussion on affordable housing to the international arena. Such a step could be a powerful political tool in showing that the state's responsibility is to all its citizens within their social framework.

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ⁱ In the present study, the term 'single mothers' in Palestinian society refers to widows or divorcees living with their children, and not to women who have chosen to have a child out of wedlock. In most cases, such families live in Jewish cities, try to assimilate, and are regarded as being on the margins of Palestinian society.

ⁱⁱ The proportion of single parent families is currently about 10% of all Palestinian families in Israel (ICBS, 2014).

iii Between 2007 and 2011.

iv At least two cases of murder of divorced Palestinian-Israeli women have occurred in recent years. These might at first appear to be incidents of honor killings, but an examination of the minimal information available suggests that this is not the case. Their being divorced distinguishes them from other victims of honor killings (Hassan, 1999). The murder suspects were not relatives of the anchoring family, and the pretext for the murder was not connected to any imagined insult to family honor. In both cases the divorcees refused to leave the homes in which they had lived their married lives, requesting to stay there until they had found alternative housing (Meler, 2014).

v The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Chapter 11, 1037) was adopted in New York on December 16, 1966; Israel ratified it on October 3, 1991 (31, 205).

vi The term 'arrested development' was coined by Meyer Brodnitz in 1969 (Khamaisi, 1993) and published in a newsletter of the Israeli environmental planning organization. Khamaisi claims that the process is the result of population growth and changes in structural, functional and economic characteristics in Arab towns and villages alongside partial lifestyle changes. No migration takes place, and the demand for housing grows. At the same time, villages retain their rural character.

vii Government programs that are supposed to address the housing needs of the Arab population are very limited. It was only in 2001 that the state began to include a few Arab localities (Nazareth and Umm al-Fahm) in the public construction programs it is advancing. Furthermore, the decision to address the issue of housing is included in the declared objectives of the Agency for Economic Development of the Arab Sector in Israel, which was founded in 2007 (Sikkuy-The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel, 2009).

viii This term refers to the process wherein relatively affluent people move into less affluent areas.

ix The term 'supervised abandonment', which is extensively discussed in *Abandoning State – Surveillancing State* (Katz & Tzfadia, 2010), was coined by Shenhav (2007) to describe a country's two faces that "do not obviate one another, but appear concurrently".

x The discussion took place on 20.3.12 at the instigation of Knesset members Hana Sweid and Ghaleb Majadele.

xi See also Harbon, 2007, for a discussion of the housing hardships of eastern women.

xii In 2008, a total of 11,304 Jewish women were divorced, compared with 1,313 Muslim women. In 2010 the divorce rate stood at 6.2 Muslim women for every 1,000 marriages (ICBS, 2011).

xiii The percentage of employed Israeli-Palestinian women is 20.5% of all women of working age. However, it is worthy of note that in recent decades the ratio of Palestinian women's participation in the Israeli labor force has risen consistently, and corresponds with a general decline in birthrate and increase in the standard of education. Nevertheless, it is still low in comparison with the ratio of Jewish women's participation in the Israeli labor force, which is presently 55.8% (ICBS, 2012).

xiv The interviews were held in mixed population cities, e.g., Akko and Haifa, Arab cities, e.g., Nazareth, localities in the Sharon plain and the Megiddo region, and in rural localities in the Haifa and Central districts.

xv Housing occupation density in Arab households is higher, and stands at an average of 1.5 people per room, in contrast with 0.83 in Jewish households (ICBS, 2012).

xvi The de facto enforcing of the patrilocality principle creates a form of forced migration which Palestinian women experience upon marrying. Despite the fact that these women belong to one national, cultural, and religious group, a sense of alienation and marginality accompanies them throughout their lives, as they are excluded from the local collective by a discourse of alienation.

xvii In Israel, religious courts have jurisdiction over religious matters. According to Sharia law, women can have custody if she is not married to another man; if her children are under a certain age (seven for boys and nine for girls) and as long as she remains near the anchoring men.

xviii This article emphasizes the national and patriarchal oppression that influences the issue of housing for Israeli-Palestinian single mothers. However, the implications of intersecting locations cannot be examined without mentioning these women's relative, albeit limited, advantages due to the very fact of their being Israeli citizens. See Sa'ar's (2007) argument whereby the liberal component grants them important citizen's rights. The complexity of the women's status under different regimes (family, community, state) shape the Israeli-Palestinian gender experience, on the one hand creating a strong experience of oppression, but on the other, due to the rivalry between them, important spaces for action and maneuvering also open up to women (Sa'ar, 2007). In certain cases, such as domestic violence, the women can enlist the state's help in their status and their gender interests (see also Meler, 2012; Sa'ar, 2007).