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Palestinian-Arabs Volunteering in State Institutions in Israel: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding or Conflict and Suspicion?

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Abstract

Volunteering in government institutions by national minorities in conflict with the state raises fascinating issues. The identity of Palestinian-Arabs in Israel is divided, as they belong to the Palestinian people and Arab nation, as well as nominal citizens of Israel. This perception study explores the meaning of the volunteering experience for fifteen Palestinian-Arabs in various Israeli state institutions. Three themes arise from the interview analysis: motives for volunteering, challenges faced by the volunteers, and their coping strategies. The study contributes to the theory and practice of the meaning of volunteering in government institutions for minority members in conflict with the state by demonstrating that volunteering is a way of belonging to the society despite the dilemmas and challenges it poses.

Keywords: *volunteering, Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, government institutions, national minority, conflict, reconciliation*

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Palestinian-Arabs Volunteering in State Institutions in Israel: Reconciliation and Peacebuilding or Conflict and Suspicion?

Edith Blit-Cohen and Mays Essa

The value of volunteering in Arab society is grounded in both social and religious foundations (Almaney & Alwan, 1982). Some 6% of Palestinian-Arabs in Israel are currently involved in formal volunteering (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020), and this rate appears to be growing. They choose to do so despite the fact that they belong to a minority that is essentially involved in an intractable conflict with the Israeli state. This study examines the experience of these volunteers, with particular emphasis on the complexity of their motives, the challenges they face, and their coping strategies.

Volunteering

The definition of volunteering is controversial. There is no one definition that determines which activities are included under the term (Daly, 2012). Volunteering is commonly defined as helping activities extended over time without the expectation of monetary reward and performed for public causes or individuals in need (Carabain & Bekkers, 2011; Hooghe, 2003; Wilson, 2012). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2010) volunteering is human love. Lowenberg (2001) defined volunteering as any form of individual assistance designed to improve the condition of society as a whole. Snyder and Omoto (2008) defined the volunteer's work as acting deliberately and out of free will to promote goals or help people in need over a long term, without the expectation of reward, usually through a formal organization.

According to Meijs (2004), one of the essential aspects of volunteering is the interpretation attributed to it. In an international comparative study participants have been asked to decide to what extent each of the activities described in the examples is volunteering. For example: "A manager who works for free hours" or "a parent who operates as a scout tribe, as long as his child is active in the tribe." The results showed that people from different countries define volunteering in different ways. The conclusion of the study is that although volunteering exists in many countries, it has many different interpretations and is influenced by cultural differences and social norms. For this reason, organizations utilizing volunteers must produce their own interpretation of the term (Handy et al., 2000).

There are various reasons for the integration of volunteers into organizations. One of them is the economic value of volunteering. Volunteers donate time, skills, and abilities, effectively providing the organization with a contribution, which can be quantified as a significant monetary value (Manetti et al., 2015). Volunteers also enable organizations to

maximize existing resources, mobilize additional resources, and raise awareness of the very existence of the organization. Volunteers help build a positive image and public support for the organization. Volunteers connect organizations and their community by representing the organization in the community and reflecting the needs of their community within the organization (Nesbit et al., 2017). In this study, we refer to volunteering as unpaid activities that people do in state institutions such as law enforcement, hospitals, etc.

Over the years, volunteering has become a fundamental value of Israeli society, considered by many to be integral to its democratic form of government (National Council for Volunteering in Israel, 2007). Yet the motives that bring minorities in conflict with the state, such as Israel's Palestinian-Arabs citizens, to volunteer in government institutions remains a crucial question. There is extensive literature on volunteering by migrants (Sinha et al., 2011; Wang & Handy, 2014). It can facilitate social integration, entrance into the job market, and empowerment (Slootjes & Kampen, 2017; Voicu & Serban, 2012). Alongside the extensive research literature on immigrant volunteering, no studies have been found dealing with minorities that are in conflict with the state who choose to volunteer in state institutions. For them, being a volunteer can be challenging because social, organizational, structural, and political contexts are critical and conflictual.

The literature refers to both internal-personal and external-altruist motives for volunteering (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999; Yeung, 2004). One of the most influential models is based on Clary et al.'s (1996) functional psychology approach. According to this approach, behavior, including volunteering, may be explained in terms of satisfying personal needs. Moreover, since these needs are many and various, as are the behaviors intended to satisfy them, different needs might motivate people to similar behaviors – so that one person may volunteer for one reason, whereas another would do so for another.

The functional theory lists six motives for volunteering: (1) Identifying with the values of volunteering and with others in society; (2) Learning, understanding and experiencing; (3) Social belonging; (4) Professional and career development; (5) An emotional need to protect the self; and (6) Self-empowerment and growth (Clary et al., 2004; for the career motivation, see also Lasby, 2004). Note that these motives include both self-centered and altruist factors. Usually, some combination of these factors, with different intensities, motivates the volunteer.

Other models for explaining the motives for volunteering include Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991), who list three types of volunteers: altruist, egoist, and social. In addition, Yeung's (2004) Octagon Model suggests the following motives: action, proximity,

newness, giving, thought, distance, continuity, and getting. Finally, Shye (2010) refers to motives for volunteering from the perspective of the utilitarian approach, based on the systemic quality of life model. Overall, the literature seems to suggest a variety of different motives that combine psychological, utilitarian, and social aspects (Wilson, 2012).

Yet an unexplored dimension in this literature is the motivations of minorities in conflict with the state to volunteer within government institutions. Is volunteering a path to reconciliation and peacebuilding or does it highlight the conflict and intensify suspicions? Does volunteering offer minorities a meaningful opportunity for a stronger sense of belonging in the state, or do volunteering interactions exacerbate the conflict between the groups? Answering this question has both theoretical and practical importance, as it is essential for understanding the meaning that the volunteers give to their activities.

Arab Society in Israel

By the end of 2019, Israel's Arab population was about 1.9 million, or 21% of the entire population of sovereign Israel. Most Arabs in Israel (84%) are Muslim, and the rest are Christians (9%) and Druze (7%) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). For many scholars and communities, East Jerusalem should not be included in the demographic statistics. This is due to the special status the Arabs of East Jerusalem have. At the end of 2019, 577,600 Jewish residents lived in Jerusalem, alongside 358,800 Arab residents (Korah & Hushan, 2021). Arab society in East Jerusalem originated from the annexation of the East Jerusalem area to West Jerusalem in 1967 (Ramon & Lhrs, 2014). After the annexation, the Arab residents of the eastern city were granted permanent resident status. Accepting this status of Israeli residency was the only way for them to stay and live in the city and receive social rights, such as social security and health insurance. At the same time, in every application to the municipal and governmental authorities, the new residents were, and still are forced, to pass tests to prove physical presence in the city called "tests of the center of life" (Nasara, 2019). Most Palestinians living in east Jerusalem do not participate in local government elections due to their opposition and refusal to legitimize the occupation and recognize Israeli sovereignty over the territory (Avni, 2020), and for this reason they also refrain from applying for Israeli citizenship.

Arab culture in Israel is an integral part of Arab culture in the Arab world (Alkrenawi & Graham, 2005). In order to understand the experience of Palestinian volunteers who volunteer in state institutions in Israel, one should learn about the Arab minority status in Israel and about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The status of the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel was designed in 1948 in tragic circumstances of war and destruction. The Palestinians

were subject to a military government that included, among other things, the leasing of many lands (Smootha, 2012). Two types of discourse have been created since the 1967 war—a discourse that has been repeating the political reality created after the 1948 war (discourse 1948) and a discourse that complements it but raises claims for change (discourse 1967). Discourse 1948 is related to the national field (Haidar, 2018). It characterizes both the secular-national stream and the ideological-religious stream represented by the northern Islamic movement. Discourse 1967 is related to both the national and the civilian field and is the main discourse in Palestinian political thought. This is a collective national claims discourse, which is in principle opposed to the political order of the state of Israel and at the same time, it accepts Israeli citizenship. This discourse applies the concepts of occupied territories in the areas of Israel in 1948, seeking to address the unresolved problems created then, like the expropriated lands and lands under the jurisdiction of Jewish local and regional authorities (Haidar, 2018). The claims of the Arabs are related to the policy of the State of Israel, which is characterized by neglect and exclusion towards its Arab citizens (Loustik, 1980; Zuriek, 1979). The Arabs responded by receiving the new status, which offers some degree of recognition and accessibility, or by radicalization of their attitudes. The vast majority of Palestinian Arabs in Israel chose to express a lack of interest in Israeli politics, and they diverted their resources to economic survival and improving their living conditions. The socio-cultural context of Palestinian Arab society in Israel is therefore important in order to understand the experience of the Palestinian Arab volunteers who are citizens of the State of Israel and volunteer in various state institutions (Hertzog, 2004).

Being exposed to both Palestinian-Arab and Jewish-Israeli culture, the Arabs in Israel are considered a culturally diverse national minority (Horenczyk & Bergman, 2016). The Arabs living in Israel have unique demographic characteristics, including larger families, lower education, and lower income compared to the Jewish majority (Gharrah, 2015). They are also distinct culturally, with their own language, culture, values, religion, and nationality (Smootha, 2014). In their relations with the Jewish majority and the state, they suffer from both unofficial discrimination in the form of racism and official discrimination in the form of structural inequality. For example, Arab children study in a separate education system, even in ethnically mixed communities, with separate schools and separate curricula (Schnell, 1994). This status may be interpreted as preserving their cultural difference, but also as a way of marginalizing them socially (Lerner et al., 2008). From the Arab minority's point of view, the relationship is usually ambivalent, ranging between the desire to become closer to Jewish-

Israeli society and integrate, or maintaining and even increasing their social distance (Smootha, 2005).

This tension has a significant impact on Arab society, including on the growth of Arab civil society organizations engaged with the state's policies towards the Arab minority. Many Arabs in Israel try to bridge their two identities.

The Identity of the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel

Al-Hajj (2000) argues that the identity of the Arab minority in Israel consists of two main components: the civic component resulting from the very status of Arabs as citizens of the state, and the national component that results from their national affiliation with the Arab world and the Palestinian people. Al-Hajj adds to these factors the religious factor concerning ethnic identity among Muslims, Christians, and Druze. Rouhana (1999) argues that Palestinian identity is the central identity that expresses positive collective sentiments because it reflects a connection of belonging, pride, attachment, values, and ideology, while Israeli identity is instrumental and secondary and offers no emotional identification. Dichter (2003) emphasizes the meaning of "joint citizenship" and the existence of two peoples in the country. He argues that citizenship is one of the components of the conflict between Jews and Arabs. The ongoing conflict between Arabs and Jews in Israel has sharpened the national component in the collective identity of Arabs in Israel. The Arabs as an ethnic minority in the country are exposed to conflictual pressures due to the fact that they are Israelis and Arabs. Constant changes of these factors strengthen or weaken the various components of identity.

Kimmerling and Migdal (1999) highlight two historical periods as the main influences on the definition of the identity of Palestinian citizens of Israel: from 1948 to 1967, and from 1967 to the present. In the first period until 1967, the definition was Israeli, Arab, and Palestinian. The reason for this is that during this period the Arab citizens of Israel lived physically, culturally, and socially isolated from the surrounding Arab world. There was almost no preoccupation with the question of their cultural and national uniqueness. In contrast, in the second period, after 1967, the definition changed to Arab, Palestinian, Israeli.

The severe conflict the war posed between their state and their people aroused Palestinian identity and created an imbalance between the two components. The Arab minority is struggling in a mix of conflicting currents and trying to realize its identity on all its constituents. This struggle has caused the Arab minority, whose sons seek their identity, torn between the poles, to always be wondering about their essence; a minority in Israel or an integral part of the majority in the Middle East? Israelis or Palestinians? (Stendel, 1992). The various definitions represent an ideological choice and show that one of the paradoxical

consequences of government policy toward the Occupied Territories is the acceleration of the process of reunification of Palestinians in Israel with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories (Rabinowitz, 1993).

The political and security control was the outer shell, and at the center was the struggle to shape the consciousness and identity of Palestinians in Israel detached from the Palestinian or Arab-nationalist narrative (Cohen, 2006). The state tried to uproot the Palestinian identity and create in its place a unique identity that would allow the Palestinians to accept the state and their status as a minority. Phrases such as Israeli Arabs were intended to obscure their connection and belonging to Palestinians, and to divert attention from the word Palestine, which was perceived as having a threatening connotation among many Israelis. Sa'adi (1992) attributes the invention of the definition "Arab-Israelis" to the conscious attempt of the Israeli bureaucracy to refute the historical, cultural, and national uniqueness of the Palestinians.

According to Viswanathan (2005), Said refers to orientalism as a discourse that accompanied European colonialism and played a key role in creating its authority over the societies it ruled. Through a dichotomous distinction between East and West, discourse shaped the Oriental as an object devoid of independent action and thought, thus enabling the European to establish himself as a subject and as a cultural and moral superior. In that way, culture often becomes identified with the state, allowing for a distinction to be made between we and they, almost always to a degree of xenophobia. In this context culture is a source of identity.

It is Israeli citizenship that distinguishes Arabs in Israel from other Palestinian Arabs, but does not penetrate national identity, so the Arab minority tries to bridge the two identities: the national-Palestinian identity and the Israeli civil identity that is in conflict and competes with each other (Bishara, 1999). Smootha (2004) and Nabil (2005) argue that there is a trend of Israelization, that is, the strengthening of the Israeli dimension in the identity of members of the Arab minority. This process binds the Arab citizens of Israel in close contact with Jews and the state in many areas of life. Israelization is expressed in the modernization of the way of life, in the acquisition of the language and Israeli Hebrew culture as a second language and as a secondary culture. Israelization is considered a historical process in which the Palestinian citizens of Israel are involved and its meaning is twofold: increasing integration in Israeli identity and politics, on the one hand, and distancing from Palestinian identity and politics on the other (Smootha, 2004; Nabil, 2005). The process indicates a crisis among the Arabs, the erosion of Palestinian identity, their distancing themselves from the interests of the

Palestinian people, the moderation of the struggle for equal civil and national rights, and coming to terms with the Jewish-Zionist character of the State of Israel. Thus, the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel are subject to embarrassment, distress, loss of way, despair, and lack of intentional leadership (Israeli, 2002).

Volunteering in Arab Society

About 6% of Palestinian-Arabs in Israel are currently engaged in formal volunteering activities, compared to 27% among the Jewish population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). One of the reasons for this relatively low rate is the structure and nature of Arab society: a collectivist society where the natural groups of belonging, such as the extended family, are highly significant in the individual's life, more so than formal groups and organizations (Hofstede, 2000).

The value of volunteering in Arab society is grounded in both social and religious foundations (Almaney & Alwan, 1982). Hospitality and kindness towards the poor and helpless have been key tenets in the moral system of semi-nomad Bedouin Arab society in the Arab Peninsula, long before the rise of Islam in the seventh century. This value system has grown given the helplessness of the individual in the sprawling desert and his dependence on the collective for survival (Dwairy, 2002). Almsgiving (*zakat*) is the Fourth Pillar of Islam, serving to help the needy and redistribute wealth in society (Dean & Khan, 1997).

Charity is also a major obligation in Christianity, as emphasized in Jesus's sermons in the New Testament. The various Christian denominations in Israel offer a well-organized network of charitable institutions, including hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools, and soup kitchens (Katz et al., 2007).

Coping Strategies

As mentioned, being a Palestinian-Arab in Israel is a source of ongoing stress. There are many theoretical approaches for understanding the intergroup processes and ways of coping with stress and trauma situations between the Palestinian-Arabs living in Israel and the society in Israel. One approach emphasizes the economic aspects that underlie the polarization processes in the Israeli economy. This approach emphasizes the class structure in society. According to this approach, the Zionist ideology and the manner in which the Jewish state controls the economy constitute key factors in the formation of the inferior class structure of Arab society (Rosenfeld, 1978). This relationship is characterized by a relationship of dependence—controlling and being controlled. Shehadeh (2006) concluded that Israel pursues a special economic policy toward the Palestinians in Israel that does not meet the laws and criteria of the global liberal economy, all to preserve the weakness and

dependence of the Palestinian minority in the State of Israel on the one hand, and to ensure the success and superiority of the Jewish majority.

Another approach to analyzing majority and minority relations is the theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The theory claims that one of the basic human needs is a sense of self-worth and appreciation on the part of others. An important component of self-perception is anchored in the belonging of individuals to social groups. A relatively convenient way to improve self-worth is by reducing the value of the other group. Tajfel & Turner's social identity theory (1979) addresses the potential problematic as a result of societies in two cultures. The theory also explains the mechanisms by which preference for a group of people is formed. Since social identity is a significant component of personal identity, and social identity is formed by comparing the belonging group to other groups, it is assumed that people will tend to see their belonging group in a positive light.

An important study in this regard was conducted by Helms (1990) in which the development of the ethnic identity of Blacks in the United States was examined. It was found that the first stage is the idealization of the whites and the strong desire to resemble them. The second stage is the encounter with a bitter reality and the recognition that it is impossible to be white. In the transition between the first and second stages, the individual from the ethnic group experiences frustration and anger that lead, at best, to the beginning of a re-search for the Black identity, and at worst to violence.

Accordingly, ethnic minorities often identify strongly with their origin group, in part due to their frustration caused by the inability to be absorbed into majority society. In the many experiments conducted in the paradigm of minority groups, the phenomenon of in-group favoritism has been found, and researchers believe that discrimination and depreciation of the Other is a normal and natural part of social life. Hog & Abrams (1990) argued that in a meeting between groups with unequal status, the low-status group sometimes tends to demonstrate a preference for the foreign group, which is the high-status group. This harms the group image and consequently the self-image of the members of this group. Individuals from low-status groups will seek solutions to this unhealthy state of negative group image, and will develop some strategies that will protect them from the threat to their group and individual identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The choice between one strategy and another depends on the individual's beliefs about the possibility of realizing a solution of social mobility or social change (Ellemers et al., 1993).

The Current Study

The marginality of the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel, its discrimination, and the ongoing identity tension it experiences – as reviewed above – are related to the finding that constant daily stressors erode individuals' resources, leaving them little with which to cope with other stressors (Hobfoll et al., 2006). This ongoing situation, involving a combination of passivity, helplessness, and lack of resources, affects coping and has direct bearing on the complex emotions of the volunteers in this study. Our objective of understanding the perceptions and experiences of Palestinian-Arabs choosing to volunteer in state institutions in Israel raises the following research questions:

1. Why do Palestinian-Arabs with nominal Israeli citizenship choose to volunteer in state institutions and how do they experience their formal volunteering?
2. What challenges and difficulties do they face?
3. What strategies are used to cope with these challenges and difficulties?

Method

Design and Participants

This study was conducted in the qualitative approach, which focuses on the individual's experience in order to understand how people perceive and give meaning to their world, and how they interpret situations and phenomena in terms of their worldviews (Patton, 2002). A perception approach documents sociocultural perceptions among minority groups, requiring a unique methodology in keeping with their situation. Accordingly, Greenfield (1992) suggested a research paradigm that would be sensitive to the way members of cultural minorities give meaning to and express their perceptions.

In a qualitative study, relatively small samples are used, to enable the researcher to present the diverse perceptions of the participants (Patton, 2002). The idea is to focus on understanding the meanings and processes of the phenomenon under study in depth rather than in breadth. The present study included fifteen Palestinian-Arabs, nominal citizens of Israel, who volunteer in various state institutions, including the National Insurance Institute, Magen David Adom (the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross), National Fire and Rescue Authority, Israel Police, and hospitals.

We used purposeful sampling and the snowball technique to locate the participants. Inclusion criteria were Arab citizens volunteering in state institutions of diverse background in terms of socioeconomic status, age, gender, and residential area. The participants' mean age was 40.2 (range = 18–72), and their mean experience in volunteering was 5.5 years in the

same institution (range = 1–18). Five participants were women and the rest men. Four participants are residents of East Jerusalem and the rest live in northern Israel.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Such interviews can reveal the ideology, values, lived experiences, worldviews, decisions, and perspectives of the interviewees (Johnstone, 2000). The interviews included two sections: 1) a brief sociodemographic questionnaire; and 2) questions whose importance for the research purposes was indicated by the literature.

The interviews were conversational in character and took 60–90 minutes to complete. They were conducted in Arabic in a safe environment for the interviewees, usually in their homes. They were audiotaped, transcribed, and translated professionally into Hebrew and English.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The interviewees signed an informed consent form after it had been made clear to them that they could stop the interview at any point and choose which question to answer, and that their responses would remain anonymous.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in three stages. First, the researchers read the transcripts carefully several times to arrive at an in-depth familiarity with their contents (Moustakas, 1994). Second, they differentiated between various transcript sections and classified them into units of meaning according to the research purposes and questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, they grouped similar statements together to extract themes that constituted the findings' conceptual skeleton (Cresswell, 1997).

Trustworthiness

Five tools helped form reliability of the current research: 1) preserving a chain of testimonies consisting of data and documents (Mason, 1996); 2) a reflective diary was kept to maintain the balance between the theoretical aspect of the study and the discourse of the participants and the phenomenon under study; 3) member checking, in order to verify that the interviewees' words were understood correctly, making an effort to pinpoint their interpretations and perceptions by means of clarifying questions; open questions; requests for additional explanations; and reflection; 4) thick description, which includes every piece of contextual information during the process of information gathering. 5) We included quotes from the interviews to flesh out our findings and remain faithful to the interviewees' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness was also ensured by virtue of the fact that the study was conducted by two researchers with relevant skills and expertise. The first, a Palestinian-Arab who conducted the interviews, has volunteered for two years with children at risk, and today serves as a social worker in East Jerusalem. The second, a Jewish-Israeli, is a social worker specializing in the areas of volunteering, multiculturalism, social exclusion, and human rights.

Results

The interview analysis raised three main themes. The first has to do with motives for volunteering. The second theme is related to the challenges faced by Arab volunteers. Finally, the third theme concerns the strategies used by the volunteers to cope with these challenges, again with three subthemes: reconciliation with reality; avoidance; and establishing their presence in the organization as a fact.

Motives for Volunteering

The main reasons why the volunteers chose to volunteer were related to *the desire to improve Hebrew skills and gain a career advantage*. Some of the participants chose to volunteer in a state institution where the language of communication is Hebrew because they wanted to improve their skills in that language. Given the fact that Hebrew is the language of instruction in all leading higher education institutes in Israel, for some Arabs this becomes a barrier, which continues to plague them when they attempt to integrate in the Israeli job market. The participants in this group assumed that volunteering would help them overcome that barrier. Some of them stated that they had tried to study Hebrew (beyond the level taught in the Arab education system) in the past, but that this required financial resources, time, and energy they did not have, whereas volunteering in a government organization helped improve their mastery of the language. According to Fadi, an 18-year-old Christian boy, who lives in the north and volunteers in the National Fire and Rescue Authority for three years:

It's true that you study Hebrew at school, but I think it's very basic, so that you can't hold a conversation in Hebrew [...] being in a Hebrew-speaking environment and being required to speak the language improves the ability to speak and understand Hebrew. Eventually, I would like to study in state universities, and there is a Hebrew proficiency test. I thought of taking advantage of volunteering to speak Hebrew, and to pass the test this way and manage to integrate more quickly in a university.

Other participants saw volunteering as an opportunity to advance their professional career. Twenty-year-old Aman, a veiled Muslim woman from East Jerusalem with a high school

education wants to become a registered nurse. She joined Magen David Adom as a volunteer four years ago when she studied in a paramedic course, and has been there ever since:

I dream of becoming a nurse, but regrettably, the Arab universities [in the West Bank] did not admit me because I had a low GPA in the high school finals. [...] I knew that to reach my goal I had to volunteer in Magen David Adom and be a paramedic, because this area is very close to nursing [...]. Volunteering in Magen David Adom adds so much. Every day, I'm learning something and I feel I'm getting closer to my goal [...]. Magen David Adom opened my path to learning and developing [...] they didn't look at my grades. The only thing that mattered was what I wanted.

Other interviewees expressed *a desire to belong more fully to the State of Israel*, because to them the state belongs to all its citizens, both Arabs and Jews. Thirty-nine-year-old Majd, Muslim from an Arab village in northern Israel has been volunteering in the police for eighteen years, currently as the commander of the volunteer unit at the local station. His main activity is to recruit volunteers and facilitate workshops and trainings in schools:

Today we live in the State of Israel, a Jewish State of which we are part, although we are Arabs [...]. I receive all my rights [...]. I have to give back and fulfill all my duties [...]. I wanted to join the military [...] and was admitted to the Border Police, but at that time a good friend was killed in action [...] and dad became afraid and changed his mind and prevented me from enlisting [...]. Today I'm sorry I didn't enlist, and today I blame my dad for that [...] but I enlisted as a volunteer in the police, perhaps as a kind of compensation [...]. But today my son, even if he doesn't want to, I'll make him enlist [...]. Because you want your rights, and you want to be a proper and loyal Israeli – come join the army or at least serve the country by volunteering...

Still other participants considered getting to know the Other helping them *integrate in Jewish society and narrow the socioeconomic and political gaps between the two societies*. Hadi, a 28-year-old, emphasized the importance of state institutions and their pivotal role in improving the conditions of members of the Arab minority, and therefore felt obliged to be part of these institutions and thereby help reduce inequality:

I don't think the Arab in this country can receive what a Jewish citizen can. I think that as Arabs, we suffer from discrimination and inequality. We have to unite and be and work together to achieve at least equality [...]. We need to use the various state institutes, and I for example volunteer here as a firefighter in order to be involved in

the entire process that's occurring from within [...]. This is my land, and I have no other country. I fight the fire for it [...].

Amer, a 72-year-old from northern Israel, volunteers in the National Insurance Institute, mainly in helping its target population take up its welfare rights. This population includes some Jews, but mainly Arabs, given their low socioeconomic status and lack of awareness of their rights:

When the National Insurance grants 140 [the number of entitlement points for receiving an income support allowance] to help Arab society, and we know nothing about it, then I have to fight and struggle in order to make this type of assistance to my people. [...] You have to recall that in order to achieve equality, rights and social justice, we have to fight and struggle with every possible means, and volunteering in National Insurance is part of that struggle. [...] We are a marginalized society: nobody will lift us up or give us a hand [...]. We have to take care of our society.

Challenges Faced by the Volunteers

The findings show that some of the volunteers experience a crisis of loyalties – they are torn between the Palestinian people and the State of Israel. This crisis occurs given the contradictory expectations of the two groups and an ongoing experience of a multifaceted, incomplete identity. The tension between national and civic identity is riddled with contradictions that pose a challenge to the process of shaping one's identity, as shared by Aman:

On the one hand, I am a Muslim Arab with a headscarf who comes from East Jerusalem [...]. On the other hand, I'm not willing to live in the [Occupied] Territories [...]. Here I get all my rights, so why should I want to be part of the Arab countries [...]. It's like you're fighting against yourself, against your very genes, against your religion, and certainly against the beliefs and tradition of the Palestinian people [...]. But I was born here [...] I'm a citizen [...]. The other side also wonders and questions and sometimes I experience rejection, rejection by the Palestinians because of my opinions and because I chose to wear the uniform of Magen David Adom [with its red Star of David]. And on the other hand, I wear a headscarf [...] and then you encounter another type of rejection [...]. It's like you stand in front of yourself and ask, "Where can I belong?"

Closely related to the previous quote, some volunteers, despite their commitment to and willingness to serve Arab society, feel that the Arab society views them as collaborators and traitors, if not outright agents of the establishment. Amer, whose father died and whose

two brothers were expelled from the country in the 1948 war, was active in the communist party throughout his adult life. He often finds himself struggling to explain to other Arabs that he is not a traitor, and that he chose to volunteer in order to help members of his community take up their rights:

There are those who tell me that National Insurance [is a] state institute, and that I work for the state [...] some also described me as a traitor [...]. I'm not a collaborator; I volunteer [...] to help you obtain your rights [...].

Others described a strong desire to show loyalty to the State of Israel, even if they did not feel loyal within, out of interest and because of the fear of the price they would have to pay should they be perceived as disloyal. Hadi has a tattoo with the number 1948 on it, which he explains as follows:

[...] because I was born here, and I stay here and nobody can uproot me from my land [as happened in that year]. [...] Yes, we the Arabs are scared, because we're a minority, and we tell ourselves, "The Jews are the majority", and we have to go with the flow [...] we'll never stop fearing.

Still other interviewees described a sense of double marginalization – feeling disloyal to both parties and failing to identify with either due to being rejected on both sides. Daoud, 62-year-old, who lives in the north and volunteers in the National Insurance Institute for four years says:

Just as Arab society in Israel finds it difficult to accept Arab youngsters who join the army or Arab volunteers in government organizations, such as the police or National Insurance, so does Jewish society find it difficult to contain and help minority member, Muslim Arabs, allies who want to be full partners in decision making, in the defense systems and in Israeli society. [...] But ultimately I remain an Arab. Whatever I do, I will eventually be seen as disloyal.

Some interviewees experience dissonance due to their desire to belong to Israeli society, as opposed to the message the state conveys regarding its Jewish identity. They find that all their attempts to become assimilated as equal citizens have failed, and that they have been rejected by that society:

So it's like I serve the country, I volunteer in firefighting [...] and I don't care if the fire is in [the Jewish community of] Zichron Yaakov or in my village [...]. For me all towns and communities are my village [...]. But what do I get in the end? They see my 1948 tattoo [...] and they start describing me as a minority member who's disloyal

[...] and I can never be part of Israeli society [...]. One of my colleagues once told me, “No matter what you do, you’ll remain an Arab, an enemy.”

Coping Strategies

“Let them say what they want:” Reconciliation with reality. This strategy is used when the participants realize that they can do little to change their threatening environment. Fadi chose to accept the racist statements he hears from the Jewish people, and to deliberately do things that make him feel good. Deciding to go on volunteering as a firefighter was such a choice:

You suddenly get to the point where you start telling yourself, I don’t care, let them say what they want. I live for myself, not for others. Let them say what they want – I decide, and I do what I like [...]. Volunteering as a firefighter does good to me, and that’s what counts. You think I’d give it up, because, oh my God, my neighbor said I was a collaborator?!

Fadi is aware of the challenges he faces as an Arab volunteer in a state organization, but he also emphasizes his empowerment in taking part in Israeli society, and is not willing to give it up.

“I find myself in the ladies’ room:” Avoiding reality. Some volunteers choose not to confront their challenges, but to escape them. This can be manifested in emotional detachment or mental avoidance, as well as in physical distancing and somatic symptoms, as described by Aman:

I try as much as I cannot to be in those places [...]. I swear to you, every time they start showing hatred or attacking me [...] I find myself in the ladies’ room. [...] It’s funny, but that’s just what happens to me [...]. I don’t escape... I just feel I need to go to the bathroom, and that’s what happens.

“Can’t change it now:” Facts on the ground. The third coping strategy adopted by the participants is to state a fact and make others accept it. The volunteers say, “That’s the way it is,” and insist there is no problem with their national or religious identity. This strategy does not ignore reality, but shuts out the emotional aspects of the challenge:

That’s reality. Can’t change it no. I was born here – this is my land, and I know no other country. I’m not begging for the right to be an equal citizen, but the way I see it I’m a citizen, and the government has to give me all that I deserve [...]. And at the same time I volunteer and serve the country, I fulfill my obligations. And that’s it.

Discussion

This study examined the experience of Palestinian-Arabs with nominal Israeli citizenship volunteering in various state institutions, the challenges they face, and their coping with those challenges. The choice of Palestinian-Arabs to volunteer in government organizations is personal and free. The participants interviewed for this study view volunteering as a way of belonging to the Israeli society. They emphasized their desire to improve their conversational fluency and skills in Hebrew. This finding is consistent with Said's (1993) claim, according to which orientalism is first and foremost a discourse: a particular and forceful regime of political and linguistic behavior.

Mastery of Hebrew is essential for being admitted to and studying in major institutes of higher education in Israel (Flum & Kaplan, 2016), and for integration in the Israeli job market (Zeira et al., 2012). Partial fluency in Hebrew undermines young Arabs' confidence, and causes them to avoid searching for lucrative jobs that require high Hebrew skills. Studies show that language and cultural gaps represent a major barrier for both the minority members, who are afraid to emerge from their ethnic enclave, and for the employers, who tend to prefer job candidates from the majority population (Coles et al., 2010; Neumark, 2002). Indeed, according to Israeli data, the lower the mastery of Hebrew, the lower the rate of Arab employees, particularly among those with conversational difficulty (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). As the level of mastery increases, on the other hand, the employment rate of Arab women in particular rises (Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services, 2019).

The participants' volunteering was also motivated by a desire to belong to Israel and be integrated in it. The interviewees who expressed this desire acknowledged that Israel was the nation state of the Jewish people and accepted their status as an ethnic minority within it. Their characteristics were biculturalism, mastery of spoken Hebrew, and a Western lifestyle. In other words, they sought to become acculturated in Western, individualistic Jewish society. Studies show that the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel face an inner tension between competing identities (Yaish, 2001). Whereas some undergo an "Israelization" process, other becomes "Palestinianized" (Nabil, 2005; Smooha, 2004). Other studies found that in general, the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel experience a growing process of bilingualism and biculturalism, which promotes their adjustment to Jewish-Israeli society (Al-Haj, 1989). Among these participants, volunteering seems to be a way of expressing loyalty to the state – a way of proving to the Jewish majority that the Arab minority has a positive contribution to make to Israeli society. Some of the young interviewees in this study described volunteering

as a way of taking part in civil duties, and felt a sense of belonging to Israel and a duty to contribute to its welfare and security.

In some of the interviews a different voice was heard, that of volunteers who expressed a need to get to know the Jewish sides. These participants sought to shatter common stereotypes of Arab society in Israel. Studies have found that young Jewish Israelis' attitudes towards Palestinian-Arabs are informed mainly by prejudices (Kupfermintz et al., 2007), because the latter are often presented in the mainstream media in a negative, threatening, and prejudiced light (First & Inbar-Lankari, 2013), and against a general background of segregation in the education system, the military, and the labor market, that affords little opportunities for informal ethnic encounters (Smootha, 2014). It is thus justifiable to expect that encounters in state organizations between Arab and Jewish volunteers can play an important role in combatting prejudice.

Whatever their motives for volunteering, all participants have faced various challenges. Usually, these were internal challenges due to the tensions in the volunteers' social environment, which reflect on the construction of their identity as Palestinian-Arabs and cause a crisis of belonging or loyalty, which involves significant stress and requires constant coping. With regard to the national identity of Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, Eisenstadt (1989) argued that due to their unique historical and political situation, the construction of individual's ethnic identity became a problem of balancing conflicting forces. On the one hand, they feel part of the Arab world, and on the other, they have become Israeli citizens, at least to some extent. The deeper their identification with the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and a nation state, the stronger their political activism against the Jewish-Zionist character of the State of Israel (Luz, 2004). In volunteering, participants try to span a bridge between the two conflicting identities.

Mattis et al. (2008) proposed that the salience of individual's identity in a specific context might affect the salience of their other identities. With regard to the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, this would mean that their identity definition might change with time and according to the speakers' discourses (Haidar, 2018). The identity of the participants comprises three main elements: Arabs, Palestinians and Israeli citizens. When they fail to balance the three, they experience internal tension and identity confusion.

Most of the participants had a strongly hybrid identity. Hybrid identities are characterized by combining difference and similarity simultaneously, in a way that might seem impossible to outsiders (Young, 1995). By constructing such an identity, the volunteers tried to cope with the challenge of adjusting to, reconciling, and balancing the norms,

expectations, and pressures of their various audiences in Palestinian-Arab and Jewish-Israeli society. On the one hand, as citizens, they argued that it was their duty to serve the country by volunteering in its various institutes. On the other, they feel discriminated against, in not enjoying the rights that Jewish citizens take for granted. In addition, they are part of Palestinian society and identify with its national struggle (Ellis & Ybema, 2010). Hybrid identities enable the participants to navigate different audiences successfully and cope with the challenge of volunteering.

Several participants considered themselves to be full-fledged citizens, and saw their future in belonging in Israel. They have adopted Hebrew as a second language and Jewish-Israeli culture as part of their lives. They seek fully equal rights and want to share in the obligations of Israeli citizens, and have therefore chosen to volunteer. This situation may be a result of the psychology of loss and subordination and the way minorities cope with this, particularly as a result of colonialism (Memmi, 1982). Memmi (1982) claims that the colonized have two answers to the colonial system. The first, assimilation, is impossible because the colonizer will not allow it. Because the colonial system has not provided a democratic process, the other option is revolt. By revolting, the colonized reject the colonizers, as well as their language, but they must find identity first. In this context, it seems the volunteers seek to acquire their status in Israeli society under the guise of volunteering, but, in fact, in their volunteering, they highlight the failure of dealing with the imperialism in which they live (Viswanathan, 2005).

In conclusion, Palestinian-Arabs volunteering in state institutions in Israel can be seen as a strategic approach to dealing with both the identity conflict they are experiencing, and the conflict between the two groups: the high-status and the low-status group. By volunteering, the Palestinian-Arab demonstrates a preference for the other group and seeks to belong to the high-status group (Hog & Abrams, 1990). Hence volunteering can be seen as a means of dealing with the situation in which they live, both as individuals and as a Palestinian-Arab society (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The article may contribute in understanding the complexity of minorities who choose to volunteer in government institutions that are in conflict with them. In addition, its contribution may be in the field of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

Limitations and Future Directions

The first limitation of this study has to do with language. As mentioned, all interviews were conducted in Arabic, enabling the participants to express themselves freely and accurately. However, the process of translating their words into Hebrew and English may

have missed some of the nuances of their statements or even led to misunderstandings. Second, all the interviews were conducted before July 2018, when the Nation-State Law was passed in the Israeli parliament – a basic law stating that the State of Israel is the Nation State of the Jewish People. Since most interviewees spoke about their obligations to the state as citizens, and about the state’s obligations to them, we wonder whether the findings would have been different had the study been conducted on a later date.

We recommend studying the community’s point of view by interviewing people assisted by Palestinian-Arab volunteers and examine how they perceive these volunteers and their contribution to government organizations. We also recommend conducting a quantitative study that relies on a large and representative sample of all Arab volunteers.

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