The Israeli Druze Community in Transition

The Israeli Druze Community in Transition:

Between Tradition and Modernity

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2011 the Israeli Ministry of Education issued a call for researchers to investigate the cultural, religious and national identity of Israeli Druze, and the developing generation gap between young adults and those of their parents' generation in this community. Among many proposals that were submitted, ours was chosen. The original call for research was expressed as "The Generational Divide in Israeli Druze Society," and this was the title of the report we submitted to the Ministry. However, we did not find a simple "divide" between the identity, values, opinions and aspirations of the younger and older generations; what we found was more complex and nuanced, and we have thus chosen to give the current project a different name. This will become clear in the chapters to come. The focus of our research was Druze identity in changing times.

Identity is understood to be the bridge between cultural context, personality of the individual, and the individual's personal and collective values and behavior (Simon 2004). Exploring identity means employing identity theory, which "seeks to explain the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to each other for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts and feeling or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large" (Burke and Stets 2009, 3). Following this broad definition, our research aimed to understand how Druze young people, in their late teens and early twenties, define their identity in terms of ethnicity, religion, nationality and language, how those of their parents' generation define their own identity, the differences between the self-definitions of these two age groups, and the implications of the generational transition this society is undergoing. As part of understanding changing Druze identities in changing times, we sought to understand the differences between young people and adults of their parents' generation in terms of their views on the purpose and importance of education, for the individual and the community, as well as the differences between the two generations in terms of people's values, their relationship to the Druze religion, and their views on the status of women. We did not always discover differences; some characteristics were stable and shared.

During the year 2012 we conducted the research presented in this book. Driving the winding mountain roads in the Galilee Hills, sometimes through fog or pouring rain, we went from village to village, welcomed into people's homes, sitting with young adults and their parents and hearing the stories of their lives. We sat with families in beautifully decorated homes, rich rugs on the floors and walls, pictures of Druze saints and heroes displayed, shelves full of books. Etiquette often required that we bring a present, and sometimes that we sit with the family for a full meal before moving on to the interviews. All in all we conducted sixty semi-structured, in-depth interviews, thirty with young people and thirty with adults of their parents' generation. Some of these were within families (young people and their parents); some were not. In addition, we conducted sixty structured interviews with different participants, thirty young people and thirty of their parents' generation. Thus the research population included one hundred and twenty people, sixty young adults and sixty adults aged forty-five to sixty. Participants were selected from five different Druze villages in the north of Israel. We consulted with a village leader in each case, in order to identify a range of participants through criterion sampling (Patton 2015), according to the following criteria: age, level of religiosity, education level of parents, and parents' professions.

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed us to capture participants' personal narratives in a natural setting. The structured interviews enabled us to check in a more measurable way, specific points that arose during the in-depth interviews.

One interesting aspect of this research is the backgrounds of the researchers. Randa Khair Abbas is an Israeli Druze, born and raised in a Druze village, educated in local schools, and finally breaking the barriers of tradition imposed upon Druze women to achieve a PhD and a high-level role in academia. She is an insider researcher, an Arabic speaker who was accepted into Druze families' homes without question (although a few of the more traditional, older people judged Randa's non-traditional choices harshly), connected to the participants in multiple ways, intimately understanding their language, culture, values and way of life. Deborah Court is a Canadian immigrant to Israel, an English and Hebrew speaker, an outsider to Druze culture in every way. This combination of insider and outsider researcher enabled far richer and more subtle understanding of the data than would have been possible with only one or the other. We described in an article about this process (Court and Abbas 2013) how Randa's analysis worked to both advance and protect the culture she loves, and how Deborah's outsider questions about the data sharpened Randa's own insights. For instance, most

of the interviews were conducted in Hebrew, a second language that most Israeli Arabs speak well, but a very few were conducted in Arabic, with older participants whose stories did not flow well in Hebrew. In these cases Randa did a kind of simultaneous translation for Deborah, so that Deborah could participate and add questions that arose. The translation into Hebrew was carried further as we listened later to the taped interviews. In a few other instances a participant would, in the middle of a Hebrew interview, say something to Randa in Arabic, something that the person could not express in Hebrew or did not want Deborah to hear. Choosing which parts of the things said in Arabic to translate was in itself a kind of screening. In explaining a particular point or expression, Randa saw what and how she had chosen to translate or not, and Deborah, the outsider, gained insight into Randa's insider role, and to things that were obvious to Randa, but completely new to Deborah. The asides directed only to Randa in Arabic were sometimes personal, and we tried to understand why the participant (in each case this was one of the older participants) wanted to keep this information private. Without revealing the details of anyone's private communication to the outsider researcher, we tried to understand the context and the meaning of things that might be embarrassing or painful. Together the two researchers gained a robust understanding of the data.

After writing and submitting the research report to the Ministry of Education, in Hebrew, we continued to develop this rich bank of data in various articles focusing on specific aspects of the study. Little material is available in English about the Israeli Druze, and we have come to the conclusion that the entire study should be made available in English, updated and expanded for an international audience, in a way that is both academic and highly readable. The result is this book.

A few notes on style

While all names are pseudonyms, to protect participants' privacy, we have chosen Arabic names for all participants. We have translated these names into a reasonable English version of how a name sounds when spoken. Perfect translations are not possible, because some Arabic sounds do not translate with complete accuracy. In addition, there is variation in pronunciation between various dialects of spoken Arabic, even between different villages. To readers who speak Arabic and disagree with our English spellings, we apologize.

We have tried to make it clear in the text whether a male or female is speaking, but when this is not clear we have added 'm' or 'f' after the person's name. Not all names are clearly identifiable as men's or women's names.

We have chosen in each chapter to present findings first, through quotations that exemplify the various categories presented, and then at the end of the chapter to discuss the findings. We thought it was important to preserve and present as many voices as possible, rather than simply presenting summaries. The findings sections in each chapter present a kind of two-generational narrative. The use of verbatim quotes is part of the "thick description" required in qualitative research. Verbatim quotes from participants lend transparency to the interpretation of results, presented here in the discussion section of each chapter. From a sea of data, we found categories through which to organize the findings, and we bring illustrative quotes for each category. And while the use of percentages is controversial in qualitative research, we did find it appropriate to give percentages here. We agree with Maxwell (2010) that "quasi-statistics," or descriptive statistics, add clarity to terms like "some," "more," "most," or "very few." With one hundred and twenty participants, percentages do have meaning, and they support our goal of providing an accurate generational picture of the Israeli Druze.

Square brackets have been used on occasion to clarify a particular point, word, or reference, rather than footnoting. Square brackets in every case present editorial clarifications. Only in the few cases where a longer explanation is required, have we used footnotes.

Finally, it should be noted that Randa Khair Abbas is the same as the Randa Abbas listed in the bibliography.

CHAPTER ONE

WHO ARE THE DRUZE?

Discussion of generational differences between the older and the younger generation that has emerged in the Israeli Druze community in recent decades must be preceded by general background about the Druze society and description of the changes, both marked and subtle, that have taken place and are still unfolding.

Druze society and family

Druze society in Israel is a rural society, though not necessarily an agricultural one. The Druze in Israel are scattered in eighteen villages in four regions around the country: the coastal lowlands of the Western Galilee; the Upper Galilee, especially in the west; the Lower Galilee, and on Mount Carmel. Today, there are approximately 143,000 Druze living in Israel, 1.6 percent of Israel's total population. (Israel Bureau of Statistics 2019). There are also Druze communities in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as smaller communities in Australia, Canada, Europe and Latin America.

The Druze in Israel were recognized as a separate cultural group only after the establishment of the state in 1948. Druze young men have served in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) since 1957. Until 1961, the Druze were registered with Israeli identity cards as Druze by religion, and Arabs by nationality. In 1961, the authorities exchanged the Druze ID card to register "Druze" instead of "Arab" for "nationality," something that has greatly influenced the shaping of their identity. However, since 2002, the Ministry of the Interior has decided to remove the "nationality" clause from the ID card altogether. These factors and others have caused identity confusion among the youth of the community (Frisch 1997).

Druze society is officially divided into two camps. The *Ocal* are the "wise," who are allowed to enter into the secrets of the religion, and the *Jo'al* are the "ignorant" who are not allowed to read and study the scriptures (Abbas 2010). Unlike other religions, the Druze religion is secret, its secrets

guarded by a protective fence of values and loyalties, so that even those who are not allowed inside the fence, because of their behavior (modern dress, women driving a car, etc.) still feel connected to and protective of their religion. We heard a few of the non-religious older generation Druze say that they plan to shed modern dress and behavior after they retire, so that they can enter into the secrets, for which they feel a kind of longing.

To illustrate this point, we bring a quotation from a Druze woman, **Hana,** who spent thirty years as an educator and educational supervisor, a woman with a Master's degree who, because of her life choices, could not be religious. After her retirement she became religious, at considerable cost:

> I sat at home for a year after taking my pension. I thought, I cried. Among the Druze, if a woman drives she cannot be religious. It's stupid! Why? It's just a rule. I need to travel and I have no one to take me places. I could even travel to advance my religion. But no. It was humiliating. (When I decided to become religious) I had to tear up my driver's license in front of the sheikhs, and bring them the letter that showed I had canceled it… Why did I decide to be religious? I knew it would limit me, but I wanted to know what is in the books, what happens at the religious meetings, what happens in the *hilwa* [house of study]. The secular woman can't know this. I wanted this knowledge (Abbas and Court 2015).

The Druze society is considered a patriarchal society, based on a hierarchy of parents, clan and community. The origins of absolute loyalty to family values and family and clan cohesion in the Druze community derive from three main principles: the belief in reincarnation, the principle of *Al-Taqiya* and the history of the persecution of the Druze community wherever they live. The Druze have no native country. They are loyal to the country in which they live, and their close-knit communities and strong, shared beliefs and values sustain them wherever they reside and no matter what level of acceptance their community experiences.

Reincarnation is one of the central pillars of Druze belief. The Druze believe that on the Day of Judgment, every Druze person will be judged according to his or her actions in the various incarnations (Zoharaldin 1994 in Abbas 2007). A Druze person who dies is reincarnated as another Druze, perhaps in another country, but always Druze. This is a closed community of souls. There are male and female souls, and this is consistent throughout all incarnations.

The second principle, *Al-Takiya,* allows members of the community to demonstrate outward belonging to another religion, provided they maintain

their true beliefs in the depths of their hearts. They could act outwardly as Muslims or Christians if survival depended on it, but they would remain Druze in their hearts. This principle has been applied to allow the Druze community members to escape from persecution and life-threatening situations and help ensure the community's continued existence (Dana 1998).

The third principle that has preserved family cohesion and loyalty also springs from the Druze history of persecution, which created a deep solidarity among the members of the community. The *Heft al-Akhwan* (brotherhood) command, which means protecting and maintaining one's Druze brother, gives religious validity to Druze solidarity. This collective religiosity is reinforced by the principle of community preservation. The practical meaning of this principle is to make the Druze one large super family, whose blood ties are strengthened from one generation to the next, since it is impossible for those who were not born Druze to become members of this religion; non-Druze cannot convert and become Druze. It is forbidden to marry a spouse outside the Druze community (Abbas 2007).

The traditional Druze family demands absolute loyalty to the values of the family and the clan, with obedience and respect for adults in the family being a top priority even in the early 21st century. According to the Druze tradition, the adult is seen as a source of authority, a figure that represents wisdom, reason and judgment. Therefore, when a problem or conflict arises, the last arbiters will usually be the elders of the family or the elders of the community. In the past, the clan elder had the last word on a variety of subjects, some of them critical (Hassan 1999). This kind of engagement is diminishing.

The father has control over his extended family, that is, his wife, children, daughters-in-law and descendants, as well as his unmarried daughters. Family members usually live near the head of the family. Over the years, and as a result of modernization processes and the penetration of new conceptions of Western pluralism, the status of the head of the family has been reduced. Some young people decide to live away from their parents, which weakens the basic social structure of clan cohesion. However, Druze society remains quite patriarchal in its views and way of life.

The traditional family functions as an autocratic system that provides relief and welfare services to the individual within the family unit (Abbas 2007). In Druze society, it is not acceptable to cut off the elders from their natural habitat and send them to a nursing home. Anyone who acts this way is

hurting their dignity and status. Therefore, in most cases, the elderly live up to their last day near their children's home. This practice can create problems and dilemmas among children, especially when the elderly become frail and need close support. It should be noted that in the Druze sector in Israel, one nursing home does operate in the village of Yarka. Mostly, the elderly living in this institution are not detached from their family members, who make sure to visit and dine with them frequently.

The generation gap is intensifying against the background of the modernization processes among the younger generation. The elderly, many of whom are religious and not fluent in Hebrew, find it difficult to keep up with the pace of change. Even conversation with the young people is difficult for them, due to the fact that the latter often mix Hebrew and Arabic, and are more interested in issues that are far from the world of the elderly.

Druze religion

The Druze religion was founded in Egypt at the beginning of the 11th century, during the time of the sixth Fatimic Caliph al-Mansour, known as Al-Hakam Bamer Allah (1021-996). According to the Druze tradition, this is not a new religion, but the re-emergence of a most ancient belief in one God, which has existed in secret for many years, and whose believers have lived among the nations without revealing their identity. According to this belief, only in special situations and in rare cases did prophets appear, such as the Prophet Shu'ib, prophets who called people to return to the right path and were not answered. The revelation of faith in the days of El-Hakam gave one last chance for people to join the *Mohadin* religion (that unifies God), to be with its believers, and to accept all the duties and commandments involved (Falah 2000). No one can now join.

The Druze religion is essentially based on a non-ritualistic, neo-Platonic philosophy. However, there are five principles which the *Mohadin* should follow: 1. *Sadak Elsan*-Speaking the truth. 2. *Hafdeh al-Kha'an* - Protecting the brothers. 3. Moving away from idolatry, and ostracism of *Almortadine*, that is, those who accepted the religion and then rejected it. 4. Belief in the uniqueness of God at all times, anytime, anywhere. 5. *Alarda* and *Eltsalim*, which means acceptance of the Lord's authority in all acts of God, in submission and unconditionally (Barakat 2001; Farag 2006; Zoharaldin 1994).

According to the Druze religion, since the physical body is a biodegradable thing, it is expendable. Therefore, one of the tasks of Druze believers is to

try to control the body and its desires (Abu Azaladin 1990). The Druze believe that the soul moves from one person to another person, from one body to another, through reincarnation (Abu Azaladin 1990). Apparently, this belief influences the shaping of the identity of the Druze community (Halabi 2006).

Another characteristic of the Druze religion is that it is secret. The secrecy of the Druze religion is in accordance with an ancient Shiite practice called *Taqiyah* (Firro 1992). *Taqiyah* means in Arabic to exercise caution and prudence in order to protect one's self and the religion (Halabi 2006). Such behaviour as required by the *Taqiyah* has made its mark on the Druze's political behaviour for many generations (Falah 2000).

The Druze religious books *Al-Hachma* are jealously guarded by a relatively small group of clerics and others who abide by all the religious rules, and they are the only ones allowed to read them. Religious books are passed down from generation to generation only by copying them by hand; there is a complete prohibition on reproducing them by technological means, this in order to keep the secrets of religion. According to the Druze tradition, there is an absolute prohibition on reading religious books to or by anyone who is not religious. Today it is difficult to say whether all the young people of the community adhere to this principle, because in the age of technology, religious books or parts of them can be copied and appear on-line and in various libraries in Israel and around the world.

Factors in Druze uniqueness

The question may be asked, how did the community manage to maintain its uniqueness and even its existence in the waves of wars and persecution that were its fate during its thousand years of existence? Falah (2000) lists some of the factors that are of crucial importance in the continued existence of the Druze:

1. The religious factor: Thanks to the Druze religion and its power, the people of the community maintained their lives throughout the years, although only a small number of the community are called *Okal*, the wise ones who know its secrets. Religion has been a source of important elements that emphasize the community's uniqueness and nourish its strength, especially Druze law: marriage and divorce law, inheritance, and more.
2. The social regime: The social regime of most Druze in the Middle East has, to some extent, remained to this day, a patriarchal regime

under which there is a close intra-familial and clan affinity, led by the father of the family and the clan sheikh. The fact that most of the Druze settled in mountainous villages made it difficult for the government to reach them, and gave a strong and powerful feeling of strength and uniqueness of the community.

3. The Druze history is full of persecution: This created deep solidarity among the people of the community. The "protection of brothers" command gives religious validity to Druze solidarity. This collective reciprocity is reinforced by the important principle that forbids marrying a non-Druze spouse. The practical meaning of this principle is to make the Druze into one large family, whose blood ties are strengthened from one generation to the next, since it is impossible for those who were not born Druze to join this religion. This fraternity is given eternal spiritual significance by faith in reincarnation, which gives it strength, justification and continuity beyond time and space.

4. Social value system: The social value system derives its origins from religion. This system has undoubtedly contributed to Druze uniqueness with values that require modesty, truthfulness, courage, hospitality, and courageous connection to the land. The land is one of the three most important values of Druze society: *Al-Din* (religion); *Al-Arad* (the land) and *Al-Ared* (respect for women). To these values must be added the importance of external appearance, which characterizes particularly Druze clerics and Druze women.

5. The literary tradition: In the history of the community, stories have been created about heroic Druze historical figures, together with stories about the exalted way of life of the clergy. The feats and deeds of these story heroes are read on various occasions, thus bringing alive the story of the community and marking its unique traditions and values, linking each generation to the Druze heritage. These stories are studied in Druze schools, and the birthdays of Druze prophets are marked in Druze schools with ceremonies.

The place of the Druze in Israeli society

It is difficult to establish unequivocally when the Druze settled in what is now the State of Israel. It is believed that they have been settled there since their religion began, in 1017 CE, at which time Druze settlement was in the coastal zone and the Upper Eastern Galilee (Halabi 2006). A second period of settlement occurred during the reign of the Emirate of the House of Ma'an, in the 16th and 17th centuries. The third period of settlement has

continued for the last 300 years, with people coming mainly from Syria and Lebanon due to political circumstances.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Druze community has opted for sectarian particularism, this trend fostered and encouraged by the authorities (Oppenheimer 1978). In 1957, the Druze were declared a religious community in Israel and in 1963 the government decided to grant the Druze independent legal status, following a long tradition used by the Druze in the Sharia courts of Muslims (Lish and Falah 1981, 124).

One element of Druze particularism is the fact that the Druze are the only non-Jewish community serving in the IDF, since 1957. Because the Druze believe in reincarnation, they do not have a habit of visiting their cemeteries and holding memorials there. Despite this religious practice, the sheikhs decided that the fallen Druze soldiers in the wars of Israel, those who gave their bodies and spirits for the State of Israel can, like other fallen soldiers, be given a ceremony on the Day of Remembrance. This reinforces the loyalty of the Israeli Druze to their homeland: religious practices were changed in order to lift morale for every soldier or security person who serves the country. It can be said that this change in religious law greatly influenced the development of identity of Druze adolescents regarding the importance of guarding and protecting the homeland (Abbas 2007).

Along with organizational changes, there have also been significant changes in school curricula in the direction of strengthening Druze identity and sectarian particularism (Abbas 2007). Israeli Druze identity is strong and yet complex. Although there is controversy regarding the order of importance of the Druze, Israeli and Arab constituents of Druze identity, there is no doubt that the Druze element is very strong and occupies a very central place in defining the identity of the Druze community and their political behaviour (Oppenheimer 1978; Saleh 1998). Many Israeli Druze feel solidarity with Zionism and express strong patriotism, while distancing themselves to some extent from Arab and Muslim themes (Nisan 2010).

Evidence of change processes

The clan's place as a basic social framework among the Druze community is changing, and today changes are evident regarding the individual's place and power in society. The modern era has weakened certain community characteristics, and the emerging differentiation of the community further exacerbates the difficulties of dealing with the gaps between the old and the new and emphasizes the conflict between the need to preserve the unique

culture and identity and the need to respond to environmental pressure resulting from modernization. These influences often result in intergenerational controversy regarding spiritual leadership and tradition (Saleh 1999).

From here we move to hearing the voices of one hundred and twenty Israeli Druze as they discuss their identities, values and aspirations.

CHAPTER TWO

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION OF IDENTITY

Theoretical rationale: Identity and Druze identity

"Identity" is a much-studied concept in the social sciences and humanities, in psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science, as well as in literature, philosophy and religion. *Social identity theory*, which grew out of the work of Henri Tajfel (1978, 1982), aims to shed light on the cognitive processes that lead people to define their memberships in various social groups, and on the motivational processes that enable people to maintain positive social identity through comparing their social groups to other groups.

The one-dimensional approach to *personal identity*, based on classic variables such as gender, nationality, religion and occupation, today has made room for a more dynamic approach that views identity as multi-faceted. Strongly anchored in the psychology of Erikson (1950, 1968) and the sociological work of Strauss (1959), it also draws from the ideas of Goffman (1959), which formed the basis for the division of identity elements into three: ego, personal identity and social identity. A similar approach is that of Berger (Berger 1963; Berger and Luckmann 1966) based on the theory of social roles, which considers "I/myself" as a dialectic concept that ranges from personal to social .

The current study offers a multidimensional model that distinguishes between three levels of identity: personal identity, relation-based identity, and collective identity. The level of *relation-based identity* will provide information about an individual's relationships with significant figures in their life such as a spouse, relative or friend. This level contains within it many social roles expressed in dichotomies such as mother/daughter, employee/employer, teacher/student, while the *collective level* brings elements of group identity such as "Israeli," "woman," "Druze," "Druze-Israeli" and so on. These representations are present in our environment at

all times, in the social choices we make, in the language we use and, most clearly, in the way we socially label ourselves and those around us.

Our approach to multiple identities, or at the very least, multiple levels of identity, is derived from the French word *champs*, coined by Bourdieu (1991), that means macro-sociological connections such as demographics and culture. In relation to the Druze community in Israel, these connections are reflected in the specific demographic characteristics (villages and urban communities) and the existence of extended families.

While studies examining the integration of social groups generally refer to the group as a unit (Phinney 1990, 1995), our research explored the implications for Druze *social/ethnic identity* of rapid social changes on the individuals in the group. The focus was on the changes (e.g. in values, attitudes, and language) that the individual experiences as a result of the need to integrate into a different culture in relation to how s/he builds his/her ethnic identity (Berry et al. 1989). This study used social identity models based on research among adolescents and young adults (Phinney 1992, 2003) and among adults (Padilla and Perez 2003) .

Theories about social identity are proposed, for the most part, by social psychologists such as Tajfel, approaches which see personal identity as an element of social identity, a subjective sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group (Phinney 1990). Others emphasize the cultural components of the group (Berry and Laponce 1994).

We did not find these definitions completely adequate for our aim of learning about the Druze community in Israel. The concept of "identity" in the current context is much broader than "ethnic identity" and includes a complex system of religious and social components that match the duality of Druze society and captures the negotiations between the desire of the Druze to preserve their unique identity and the desire to integrate into Israeli society and the modern world. Studies that examined the national identity of Druze in Israel found that they have at least three ethnic sub-identities: Druze identity, Israeli identity, and Arab identity (Abbas 2004; Lich 1981).

An important aspect of identity studies is how identity changes when a group comes into contact with another group. Each person belongs in parallel to different social groups, and draws on different elements of identity from their belonging to each group such as family, educational institution, workplace, circle of friends (Tajfel 1978). According to Fishman (1999), the degree of belonging to each group is not permanent, and varies

between different times and situations. The development of a sense of belonging to a number of social/cultural groups requires a person to label him/herself in a complex way, a process that according to Phinney (1990) is the central component of an ethnic identity. Complex identity and self-identification are key elements in the lives of minority groups in general and members of the Druze community in Israel, in particular. Druze often label themselves in different forms that express their cultural tradition, religious background, and desire to belong to the Israeli majority. These national aspirations are reflected in serving in the Israeli army (men) and in academic studies (men and women).

Our research findings related to identity

Content analysis of all the interviews showed that **older adults** of the Druze community, both men and women, identify in three ways in this order: Israeli Druze, Druze, and Israeli Arab Druze. The **young men** identified themselves in the following order: Druze Israeli, Druze Arab Israeli, Druze. The **young women** added a fourth aspect, identifying themselves in the following order: Druze, Israeli Druze, Israeli Arab Druze, Arab.

We will now look at the breakdown of these numbers into differing sub-groups.

Religion and homeland: Israeli Druze

Of all of our participants from both generations, 38% noted that they identify as Israeli Druze or Druze Israeli, with their homeland (Israel) considered an integral part of their own identity. Among the **older adults**, **Zeid** (m), for example, said, "I identify as an Israeli Druze because I belong to the Druze ethnic group and I am part of the State of Israel. I work in a government office. I respect it, make a very good living and am proud of it." **Farhan** noted, "I identify as a Druze man who maintains that identity and is proud of it. This is my main identifying group. I'm an Israeli man who lives in the State of Israel, I'm not Jewish, but I have an Israeli ID and I trust in the state."

Druze **young people** were also found to identify as Druze, with Druze first, and with the homeland an important part of defining their identity. **Nibal** (m) noted, "I identify as a Druze Israeli, because my religion and my faith is Druze. I have respect for the country I live in, but I first and foremost am Druze. To be precise, I identify as a Druze Israeli and not the other way around." **Iman** also referred to the homeland as an important part of

defining her identity. "I identify with the Druze faith and its values regarding honoring women. I honor the homeland and pride myself on living these two sets of values every minute of my life. Which is why I identify very much as a happy Israeli Druze woman."

Religion alone: Druze

In a breakdown of all participants, we found that 32% identify first and foremost as Druze, with religious practice and religious belonging as the source of their identity. This was expressed by the **older adults, both men and women**, in response to our interview question, "How do you identify and why?" **Ramez** (m), for example, noted, "I identify with the principles of the Druze religion that basically rely on very simple commandments, such to speak the truth, and to have faith. It is important for me to identify in such a way in order to contribute to building humanity based on justice." **Khair** regards religion as the core of his identity: "I always identify first and foremost with my Druze community and I am proud of the Druze religion, history and heritage even though there are weeds here and there." **Ezet** also told us that religion and ethnicity are the source of his identity. In his words: "I identify with my ethnic group and am proud of and love my Druze roots. We are a small group in Israel and it is important for us to continue to be cohesive and supportive of each other and to love each other."

Older adult women also expressed that it is important to them to be first of all religious Druze. **Amira** said, "I identify as a religious Druze, and it is very important to me to maintain the religion." **Shafika** said, "I am proud of my own religion and it is important for me to identify that way even though there are many things I don't like, especially about the status of the Druze and the lack of rights they receive." And **Nahill** simply said, "I am a Druze religious woman."

Religion, language and homeland: Druze Arab Israeli

Almost a third of the **older adult participants** said that they identify as Druze Arab Israelis, saying that religion, homeland, and language are all very significant parts of defining their identity, no one of which should be ignored. "I identify as a Druze, Israeli Arab," **Abdullah** said. "I was born in the State of Israel and feel an integral part of it, my nationality is Arab and I'm proud of it, my home is the Druze community and I am a proud Druze." **Salim** said, "I am a Druze Arab Israeli because I was born and will always be Druze. I am an Arab because my native language is Arabic, and finally,

I am an Israeli who belongs to and lives in Israel." Reinforcing this is **Saleh,** who said, "Today I identify as an Israeli Arab Druze. It is important for me to identify this way because I do not forget that my parents are Arabs and have fought together with the Arabs, and we speak Arabic. On the other hand, I do not forget that we live in this country, and according to our religion we are loyal to the country in which we live. I live in Israel so I am loyal."

Among the **younger people**, the element of language is an important part of defining their identity. **Sabach**: "Today I identify as a Druze woman, an Arab Israeli, a Druze, because this is my ethnic group. I am a proud Druze. I am an Arab because I speak Arabic and live in an Arab community (village) and I am Israeli because I am loyal to the country in which I live. Also, I am Arab because my grandfather fought with the Arabs against the English. These are my roots." **Piroz** also referred to the language component of identity: "I identify as an Arab Druze woman living in the State of Israel. I am first of all Druze. This will always be first. I speak Arabic, this is my native language, and I continue the history of the past generations. And I am also loyal to the state." **Dina** said, "I am Druze, Arab Israeli, an Arabic speaker. The Druze religion and traditions are similar to other Arabs in the country and not to those of the Jews. But I feel like I belong to the country and I feel a part of it."

Particular characteristics of the identity of younger Druze

Religion and homeland as the core of defining identity among the young, as opposed to religion alone among adults, is a key difference in identity self-definitions between the two generations.

Among the **young men,** 43% related to religion and homeland together, almost one, inseparable compound, as the key component of their identity. **Raed,** for example, said, "I'm a Druze guy first and foremost, I'm proud of being Druze and always putting on the Druze Star. I love the country that gives me security and rights, I like to serve in the military, so I'm an Israeli Druze." **Sumer** also regarded religion and homeland as an important component of defining identity. "I identify as a Druze guy who lives in the State of Israel," he said. "I live in a Druze village and grew up on Druze values and culture and heritage, proud of being part of my ethnic group and also proud of being a citizen of the State of Israel. They go together." **Seker** said, "I identify as a Druze Israeli guy, I believe that every Druze should be loyal to the country in which he lives. I love the State of Israel and I am Israeli, a citizen of Israel. I identify as a Druze Israeli."

In contrast to the young men, 36% of the **young women** prefer to identify specifically as Druze, the religious component being the most important in their identity. They feel belonging solely to their ethnic group and religion, and not to language or country. For example, **Kawther** noted, "I identify as Druze because this is the ethnic and religious group I belong to. This is my deepest self. Israel is where I live, it is not my source." **Sarin** said something similar: "I identify as a Druze girl, I am Druze and this is my identify. I am neither Arab nor Israeli, I do speak Arabic and I do live in the State of Israel, but I was born here only, and I chose neither language nor country." And **Rima:** "I am Druze. I do speak Arabic, but I am not Arab, I do live in Israel but I am not Jewish, and the State of Israel is for Jews in my opinion."

Another 36% of the **young men** related to religion, language and homeland, in that order, in their self-identification. **Nil** said, "I identify as a Druze, Arab Israeli. Druze because I belong to the Druze religion and ethnicity, Arab because I speak Arabic, and Israeli because I was born here and am a citizen of Israel." **Allah** said, "I identify as a Druze, Arab Israeli. I was born in Israel and I have no other country." Similarly, **Vayaam** said that religion, language and homeland are the elements of his identity: "Today I identify as Druze and I am proud of it. I am Arab because we must not forget our roots. Israeli because we live here and the country gives us more rights than the Arab countries do for their Druze, so I am proud to be part of Israeli society. So I identify as Druze, Arab Israeli."

The **young women** differ in their self-identification, with 33% of them specifying religion and homeland as the main elements of their identity. **Shadiya**, for example, said, "I identify as a Druze Israeli girl, Druze before Israeli. I feel safe and proud to be Druze, a Druze in Israel, and I am faithful to both." And **Lina:** "I identify as Druze Israeli because I love my religion, and I also love our country. I am proud to be a Druze Israeli." **Lorin** said something similar: "I am Druze Israeli, Druze because I love my ethnicity and religion, Israeli because I am proud to be part of the State of Israel."

Another 20% of the **young men** said that religion is the key component of their identity. For example, **Jalal** said, "I identify with my religion, the history and traditions of the Druze people, especially the historical leaders of the Druze community like Sultan Basha. This identity is important to me, in order to feel belonging to my ethnic group." Similarly, **Faadi** said, "I am Druze, because I love my religion and the values of my people. I identify

today as a Druze guy, because of the events of Peki'in[1], almost the majority in the village has stopped identifying as an Israeli, we live in a country but do not feel that we belong to it. I am not a Muslim Arab, or a Christian, so I am only Druze."

In contrast to the young men, 20% of **young women** stated that religion, language and homeland are the main components of their identities. For example, according to **Yia,** "I am an Arab Druze and an Israeli. I belong to the Druze religion, I speak Arabic and I live in an Israeli Jewish state." And **Inbal:** "I am Druze, Arab, and Israeli. I maintain the Druze customs and traditions, I am an Arabic speaker who lives in the State of Israel, a citizen who keeps its laws. I keep the Druze values and customs that I was educated with."

The Arabic language as shaper of identity

Language alone was not considered a staple of the definition of identity among the Druze **young men**. However, 10% of the **young women** said that language alone is the main component of their identity. "I identify as an Arab because my native language is Arabic, there is no such thing as Druze nationality, Druze is belonging to a religion," **Sassar** claimed. "We should identify by our language and our native language is Arabic."

Discussion: The place of identity components in shaping Druze identity

As we saw above, older adults of the Druze community, both men and women, identify in three ways, in this order: Israeli Druze, Druze, and

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[1] Peki'in is a Druze village. There was also an ancient Jewish town in nearly the same place. One Jewish family had been living there continuously for 2,000 years. In 2007, after several more Jewish families took up residence there in order to support the last elderly member of this old Jewish family, Druze youth set fire to the car of one of the Jewish residents. Other confrontations had occurred, the Druze angry at Jews living in their village. A few days later, a hand grenade was thrown into a Jewish house, then another. A few days after this a group of Druze teenagers slaughtered all of a Jewish resident's chickens and torched his chicken coop. They then continued on to torch a security vehicle, vandalize several police vehicles, and steal police communication equipment. The violence continued for several days. The house of the elderly Jewish resident was torched. The violence was finally quelled, but this incident etched itself in the memory of both Druze and Jews, profoundly harming the harmonious relations among them. Such conflict between Druze and Jews in Israel is extremely rare.

Israeli Arab Druze. Among the young people, the young women added an additional aspect, Arab, which was usually tied to the fact that the native language of the Druze is Arabic. It should be noted that not only are there differences between the two generations, but among the young people, there are differences in hierarchical order and identification by gender. The Druze young men identified themselves in the following order: Druze Israeli, Druze Arab Israeli, Druze. In contrast, the young women identified themselves in the following order: Druze, Israeli Druze, Israeli Arab Druze, Arab. One interesting element here is the strength of the Arab component among the young women.

The Druze, both the older adults and the young people, construct their identity from multiple components, and this is not easy. The possession of a number of cultural identities affects quality of life, and dealing with multiple cultural identities can lead to two conflicting possibilities. On the one hand, it is possible to assume that embracing one identity more strongly than the others is necessary in order to prevent internal conflicts. People who make this choice may do so in order to contribute to their sense of personal well-being. On the other hand, some may succeed in holding fairly equally to a number of group identities that they see in a positive light, and this may be a source of social, cultural and material resources (Ben Shalom and Hormonechi 2000).

Some studies have suggested that cohesive cultural identity is important for the adaptation of minorities (Phinney 1995). Apparently, the possession of a number of elements of identity among the Druze community contributes to their social and cultural adaptation in the State of Israel. Rosenberg (1979) also noted that the ranking of identities in the hierarchy is in line with the principle of psychological centrality and the principle of prominence. The ranking of identities in the individual is done by a person's perception of self. In other words, the centrality of a particular identity to the self-concept is based on the individual's assessment of the importance of identity, from the perspective of the individual him/herself. The difference between the principle of "centrality" and the principle of "prominence" is that the first assumes a certain degree of self-awareness, while this assumption does not exist in the principle of "prominence." Our findings showed that the central component of virtually all of our participants' self-defined identity, was the Druze component and the rationale given for this was their belonging to the Druze religion.

It is very interesting to note that approximately 80% of all our older interviewees, and approximately 95% of all the young people are, in fact,

secular and know their religion's system of principles and beliefs only superficially. They do not experience them within the context of their social lives. Nevertheless, the religious component "Druze" was the central and dominant component in defining their identity. The reason interviewees gave for defining themselves first and foremost as Druze was because they were born Druze, and their religion is the Druze religion. It is fair to say that these findings are consistent with the definition of a primordial identity, described in literature as the first and total identity, based on biological and family connections, an identity that connects the individual to his or her unique and special group, to the group's past and their future (Isaacs 1989; Smith 1998). We should also reiterate that "Druze" is an ethnic group that is defined by its religion, so that when participants told us that they are Druze they always mean both: the ethnic identity and the religious identity.

It should also be noted that the Israeli civilian component is seen as a key component and important in defining identity among our interviewees, both older and younger. The strength of Israeli identity is not in conflict with a central Druze identity. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) call this "integrated bi-cultural identity." This prominence is very significant, and it can be explained by the fact that our interviewees were born in the State of Israel, they are an integral part of it and they enjoy full democratic rights. The Druze-Israeli identity complex is harmonious for almost all of these people. As we have said, the Druze are not required to have citizenship in any particular state, and they do not have their own state (Falah 2000); thus, their identification is with the state of their birth. It can also be said that the fact that the Druze greatly contribute to maintaining the security of the state, through compulsory service in the IDF and the fact that many Druze make careers in the security forces, raises to high levels the sense of belonging and love of the state, strengthening this aspect of their identity.

However, it seems that among many of the young people, despite the pride in and emphasis on being Druze and being Israeli, it was also important for them to emphasize the Arab aspect. This can be explained in two ways: First, frustration and disappointment from the homeland. While the status and position of the Israeli Druze is very good, the State has in fact failed to provide opportunities equal to those given to Jews of their age. This is seen in employment opportunities and earning (Khattib 2005). In addition, the fact that the Arabic language is the Druze mother tongue, brings the young to identify to some extent (though not completely) with Muslim Arabs and to share some of their frustrations. In general, minority groups and immigrants may experience various difficulties at the psychological level (Ben Shalom and Horowtiz 2000) such as low self-esteem due to discrimination and

prejudice (Tajfel 1978), a sense of alienation and marginalization or a sense of identity confusion (Erikson 1968). Despite the efforts of successive Israeli governments to create a coherent multicultural state, the larger backdrop of Arab-Israeli conflicts, and the fact that Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, is bound to create Druze identification with other Arabic speakers.

Another factor is the distance of the young people from their religion. The very fact that almost 98% of the young people interviewed for this study were secular means that they have no deep relationship with the Druze religion, which opens the door to different identification, through their language, which is Arabic (Hutnik 1991). Many Druze adolescents perceive their affiliation with Arab culture through the Arabic language. Druze religious books are written in Arabic, and Druze heritage is taught in Arabic. It is vital that young people know the Arabic language in depth so that, should they decide to be religious, they can interpret the religious books in-depth, delving into these books in all their power. Deep knowledge of Arabic will also influence the design of the Arab component of their identity.

These findings suggest that the education system could take greater responsibility for building a cohesive identity among Druze youth. The formation of cohesive identity, according to Erickson (1968), brings about a sense of unity, integration and stability in terms of both personal identity and social identity (Cote 2002). Erikson stresses that identity formation involves a reorganization of disparate identities into a coherent and meaningful whole. This organization allows for a sense of order, imagination, and continuity beyond particular situations. When there is tension, and a confusion of values and perceptions that do not integrate and are not harmonized, the various alternatives must be examined and decisions made about relinquishing conflicting elements, or placing them under a new organizing principle that assimilates the various identities and prevents contradiction between them. This process of restructuring, sorting, or suppressing existing identities is an internal process, which the individual performs to achieve a stable and cohesive identity. The individual with a confused and non-harmonious identity is characterized by difficulty finding direction in life, loose commitments and low self-esteem. To create an individual's commitment to his/her identity, a coherent and stable identity is needed (Cote and Levine 1988).

One of the questions we asked in the interviews was in which language people prefer to converse. The preferred language for all of the older adults