

Social structure vs. self rehabilitation: IDF widows forming an intimate relationship in the sociopolitical discourse¹

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Abstract

The public discourse pertaining to IDF (Israel Defense Forces) widows, especially those cohabiting with a partner out of wedlock, is presented by means of a study that analyzes competing representations in the sociopolitical discourse in Israeli society. The social representations give expression to collectivist-republican perceptions that accord centrality to the widows' national role of preserving the country's collective memory in exchange for monetary compensation, and individualist-liberal representations that accord centrality to the individual and do not dictate her conduct in accordance with the role designated for her by the state. The present study analyzed the Internet talkback discourse that appeared in response to a media report presenting the demands of IDF widows for the state's continued acknowledgement of its obligation toward them, even after they form a new intimate relationship. The study's findings corroborate the existence of hegemonic representations that reflect a republican-nationalist discourse advocating that the widows should serve the national values of commemoration in order to gain state recognition, alongside emancipated representations of a liberal discourse that accords centrality to the widow as an individual and views her rehabilitation as a private and personal matter. The study also found polemical representations that confront the two perceptions, which can no longer coexist. The study found that respondents belonging to the liberal-individualist group will be inclined to support recognition and state support for the widows irrespective of their personal status, whereas respondents belonging to the republican-collectivist group will be inclined to precondition state recognition and support for the widows on their personal status.

Keywords

IDF widows, hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical social representations, liberal discourse, republican discourse, talkback

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Purpose of the study

The present study examines competing representations of a socio-political discourse in Israeli society, by means of the public perception of IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship as a test case.

In recent years IDF widows have started to protest against the law whereby they lose their entitlement to rehabilitation once they remarry and their new relationship is formalized. This stipulation led many widows to refrain from formalizing their new relationship in order not to lose state support and the state's symbolic recognition of their situation. By means of this stipulation the state conveys a message that the widows' continued entitlement to state support is contingent on non-rehabilitation of their personal life should they choose to formalize their new intimate relationship. Today, many of the widows view this policy as one that is focused on the needs of the collective, and consigns them to the role of 'widows on duty' in accordance with the perception of the establishment. The public organization that emerged with demands for the removal of this stipulation presents a clear position that the state should advance the widows' personal rehabilitation. Adjusting to the difficult reality of loss and bereavement is also manifested in their emotional-psychological ability to form a new intimate relationship. Numerous studies conducted during the past twenty years describe bereavement by means of the Two-Track Model of Bereavement, which comprises an individual's coping along two separate tracks: returning to functional routine and adjusting to the new situation, alongside inner and psychological grieving in which an ongoing attachment to and dialogue with the deceased is maintained and attended by profound pain, grief, and an experience of loss and absence (Rubin, 1999a).

The perception of the widows living with grief and loss while at the same time returning to function, as far as possible, in normative society, including forming a new intimate relationship, originates in the recognition that the effects of loss do not end with a marriage ceremony, and that different aspects of ongoing mourning are part of an inner experience that continues throughout the widows' life (Witztum, 2004).

The public discourse that developed in the wake of the public confrontation between the widows and the state institutions can be viewed as part of a social bargaining in the postmodern era (Yatziv, 2003). The struggle is between a republican-collectivist perception, whereby social policy should support a civil-social order that serves collective interests, and a liberal-individualist perception, whereby the role of social policy is to enable every individual to realize his or her needs, whatever they may be (Rosenhek, 2007).

The present article will focus on identifying the competing social value systems in Israel at the beginning of the twenty-first century on the issue of the state's responsibility and commitment toward IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship. The public discourse will be examined by means of the Social Representation Theory developed by Moscovici (1961; 1976; 1984).

Theoretical review

Bereavement, and factors influencing the adjustment process

Although bereavement processes are essentially similar in different people, they are highly complex. The Two-Track Model of Bereavement describes a large number of factors involved in the process, such as anxiety, depression, worry, familial and interpersonal relationships in general, self-image, and self-worth. While the components describing the functional track include adjustment, returning to work, and social functioning, the inner track reflects the resolution process the individual undergoes with regard to the deceased. This track includes components such as imagination and memory, emotional detachment, positive and/or negative affect toward the deceased, preoccupation with the loss and the deceased, idealization, conflict, effects on self-perception, and memorialization and transformation of the loss and the deceased (Rubin, 1999a; Rubin, Malkinson & Witztum, 2003; Fachler, 2009).

The question of the variables associated with IDF widows' adjustment to life after their loss has engaged the Israel Ministry of Defense Rehabilitation Department and researchers since the end of the 1960s. An early study on problems in the rehabilitation of IDF widows (Avituv, 1971) describes the argument presented by the social workers attending widows from the 1967 Six-Day War, to the effect that the very act of remarrying and building a normative life constitutes a form of rehabilitation. Kfir (1989; 1975) claims that rehabilitation begins at the point where new creation begins, and in their rehabilitation the widows are expected to rebuild their life. A pioneering study on this subject (Amir & Sharon, 1979) found that emotional and social factors are the best predictors of the widows' adjustment. In their study the researchers refrain from explicitly indicating that forming a new intimate relationship is one of the adjustment factors. In their comprehensive study that examined the adjustment and coping of IDF widows in the context of their perception of the aid provided to them, Malkinson and Kushnir (1987) emphasize that in addition to the instrumental aid provided to the widows, emotional support is of paramount importance. The first explicit reference to the issue of the widows' new intimate relationship was found in the study conducted by Dovi (1993) that examined the level of emotional adjustment in widows who had remarried. The findings indicate that the level of emotional, functional and interpersonal adjustment of widows who had remarried was higher than that of widows who had not. The main factor in advancing the widows' adjustment was found to be the success of their second marriage. In summary, researchers are in agreement with regard to the significant importance of the social and emotional systems in respect of the widows' ability to adjust to their life after the tragedy, and that the two systems are interwoven and strongly interconnected.

Social representations in Israeli bereavement discourse

The term 'social representations' was coined by Moscovici (1961; 1976; 1984; 1993) to describe what he terms 'social thinking'. Moscovici postulated that people living together within a society share a system of shared representations that serves as the foundation for shaping their worldview, a basis for communication between them and for transforming them into a unified social body typified by similar value codes, common objectives, and identification of the aims and values of society as a whole. Social representations are constructed by means of the social discourse, but as soon as they are formulated they acquire a life of their own, and they circulate, merge, attract and repel each other, and give birth to new representations, while old ones die out (Moscovici, 2007 [1984]).

Three central concepts from Social Representation Theory constitute the foundation for examining the issue of IDF widows in Israeli society: hegemonic representations, emancipated representations, and polemical representations.

Hegemonic representations are representations shared by most members of a society whereby they define their civic identity. These are the seminal ethos and dominant narratives that are congruent with the zeitgeist as it was when the society was shaped and established, usually when the nation-state was established. These representations serve as the principal interpretive framework for perceiving and examining the social reality (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In Israel these values also include the central value of sacrificing one's life for the state, and the state's commitment to care for its wounded and the bereaved families. The Ministry of Defense, which represents the national policy, is responsible for taking care of those who join the 'family of bereavement', and thus brings practical expression to the representation of the social ethos of the 'IDF spirit' that constitutes the contract between enlisted soldiers, their families, and the state (Ben-Asher & Goren, 2006; Lebel, 2008).

Emancipated representations are the new information, or 'winds of change', that appears in the media or the social discourse differently to the traditional view. These representations are shaped as an alternative narrative, which Kuhn (1997) calls a 'competing paradigm', and they emerge in the margins of the social body, among individuals who do not block themselves from information or subversive modes of thinking (Gelber, 2008). In the case of IDF widows forming a new intimate relationship, this is, for example, the knowledge that this relationship benefits the widow in her rehabilitation on the functional bereavement track, coupled with the understanding that bereavement does not end on the inner-psychological track.

Polemical representations emerge in the wake of a public debate between individuals holding hegemonic representations and others holding emancipated representations, since the latter are incongruent with, and at times even contradict, the traditional perceptions. In this instance, the emancipated representations (forming a new intimate relationship is beneficial for the widow) raise representations that make it impossible for some members of the group to continue holding the 'self-evident'

hegemonic representations (compensation will only be provided on condition that the widow remains unmarried or without a partner).

Social processes and their influence on Israeli bereavement discourse

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the military bereavement arena has been linked to the hegemonic representations adopted by the various groups comprising Israeli society. Within the 'hegemonic bereavement model' (Lebel, 2009b) it was specified that those who suffered loss in the military context should be perceived as the 'family of bereavement', a group entrusted with patriotism and sacrifice, and worthy in public terms of serving as a 'social aristocracy' that represents and reflects society's values of sacrifice and enlistment, and whose members are the 'ultimate superior citizens' (Lebel, 2008). However, concomitant with social rewards, such as preferred cultural status and material benefits (monthly pensions and psychological support), the establishment made it abundantly clear to the bereaved families that they are bound to 'role demands' formulated for them by the state. As part of these demands they were required to shape their public discourse and behavior repertoire as such that would gain the approval of the state establishment.

In the wake of the Yom Kippur War (1973), and even more so during the First Lebanon War (1982), many bereaved families began to adopt a subversive polemical approach that presented their sacrifice as unnecessary and marked the heads of the Israeli establishment, rather than the concrete attacker, i.e., the enemy in the war, as the 'aggressor'. It was because of them, they claimed, that their 'unnecessary' inclusion in the 'family of bereavement' was forced upon them. These polemical representations were manifested in numerous demonstrations, joining protest movements, and anti-hegemonic politicization of the public behavior of loss.

IDF widows are an inseparable part of the Israeli political bereavement model. Since the establishment of the state, and especially after the Six-Day War, the widows' public status, their presence at memorial ceremonies and prominence in the public discourse existed due to their being 'agents of commemoration' and part of the commemoration, heroism, and patriotism discourse (Berwick, 2001). The widows' remarriage led to their exclusion from the commemoration and memorial arena concurrently with termination of the compensation awarded to them by the state. In effect, since a widow's marriage resulted in her removal from the widows' list, the majority of widows refrained from formalizing their new intimate relationship and even kept their public presence beside a new partner to a minimum – fearing public criticism over what was perceived as a 'desecration of the fallen' and rebelling against the role demands placed on them. Shamgar-Handelman (1986) explained this articulately in her description of the widow being turned into a client who is obliged to maintain certain behaviors in exchange for her public status and entitlement for support from the bureaucratic-establishment arena.

The winds of change in the public discourse also gained expression in an internal struggle that took place in 2006 within the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization. The traditional perception represented by the first chair of the organization held that the

widows' role was to preserve 'national memory'. A group of widows challenged this perception and demanded continued compensation irrespective of whether the widow formed a new intimate relationship. They gained the support of the majority of IDF widows, which led to a change in the organization's leadership. This process took place concurrently with the demand made by bereaved parents (especially whose sons had died in military and operational accidents and disasters) to personalize their sons' headstones in the military cemeteries with special inscriptions, and actions that indicated lack of confidence and trust in the military establishment. Moreover, bereaved families even 'dared' to function as a financial pressure group by emphasizing personal hardship and publicly making financial demands pertaining to their personal welfare – demands that ran counter to their traditional public appearances that were restricted to collective issues such as commemoration, memory, values, heritage of the fallen, or defense policies (Laron, 2003). Although these polemical representations, which emerged in the public discourse, did not express delegitimization of the military experience, or the demand for the bereaved families' sacrifice and public prominence, they did make them conditional upon the level of public consensus on the objectives of wars and policies.

In November 2006, in an apparently unrelated process, the prime minister, the minister of defense and the minister of finance appointed an expert committee whose purview was defined as reassessing the defense budget allocations and helping with the difficult task of reducing Israel's defense budget. The committee was headed by Brigadier General (Res.) Brodet, who at the time served as head of the Ministry of Finance Budget Division. The committee submitted its preliminary report in May 2007, which addressed, among other issues, the Ministry of Defense rehabilitation policy, including the issue of IDF widows cohabiting with 'common-law husbands' (Brodet et al., 2007: 110-117). This was the first time an official state document presented this issue for debate. The committee members raised a question concerning widows who were ostensibly benefiting from pensions 'unjustly', i.e., not within the republican equation that conditions the pension on adherence to hegemonic representations.

At around the time the committee was appointed, a debate was held in the Knesset⁴ on the proposed state budget, which included a debate on the Arrangements Law, which enables budget transfers between government ministries. In the debate it was proposed that the law include the suspension of pensions and compensation to IDF widows cohabiting with a partner. Although this proposal did not gain government approval, it served as the 'opening shot' of polemical representations concerning IDF widows being introduced into the public space. The widows' reaction was not long in coming, and their struggle against the proposed amendment gained the characteristics of a legal battle when in March 2008 a bill was proposed to amend the Fallen Soldiers' Families (Pensions and Rehabilitation) Law, as follows:

“Relative', in respect of a soldier fallen in battle, means: the person who was the wife of the fallen soldier on the day of his death, including a woman who was cohabiting

⁴ Israel's parliament.

with him on the day of his death and was commonly known as his wife, even if she has married another person”.

As we can see, in effect the social processes described above call for a reexamination of the hegemonic representations, at the center of which stands the principle of convertibility, according to which entitlement to a resource provided by the state is conditional upon behavior that the state perceives and labels as valued and desirable (Levy, 2003). The emancipated representations that emerged in the social discourse express liberal perceptions in which a distinction is drawn between the personal and public spheres, which can no longer coexist with the hegemonic representations, and therefore possess the characteristics and emotional content of polemical representations.

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study was to empirically examine how hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical social representations are simultaneously manifested in the social discourse in Israel with reference to the issue of continued state compensation for IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship.

1. Three types of representations (hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical) will be found in the public media discourse on the issue of the state's continued commitment toward IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship.
2. Respondents belonging to the group advocating liberal-individualist positions will support recognition and state support for the widows irrespective of their personal status, and respondents belonging to the group advocating republican-collectivist positions will be inclined to precondition state recognition and support for the widows on their personal status.

Methodology

The sample

A questionnaire was administered to 219 respondents in a nonprobability sampling employing the voluntary sampling method. The sample did not include unique minority groups such as ultra-Orthodox Jews, new immigrants, and Arabs, which are exposed to a lesser degree, and at times not at all, to the studied issue. This is an accepted method in administering questionnaires discussing delicate and sensitive issues (Beyth-Marom, 1990). The nonprobability sampling is also manifested in the disparity between the number of male respondents (one third) and the number of female respondents (two-thirds). The subject matter addressed by the study required social understanding and involvement, and consequently the respondents' average level of education is relatively high – fourteen years of schooling. The respondents represented a wide age range (twenties to early sixties, with the average being thirty-five years of age). 61.8% of the

respondents live in cities, and 38.2% in rural settlements (moshav, kibbutz, or community settlements).

Data collection process

The questionnaires were distributed in a process resembling the ‘snowball’ method in order to resolve problems of locating and communicating with respondents who present a positive stance to completing a questionnaire. This point of departure was necessary since the questionnaire is based on Internet talkback statements (see details in the description of the research tools), some of which are liable to be offensive and annoying, or even repulsive. In the first circle the questionnaire was administered to a group of students completing their BA studies or beginning their MA studies, who were asked to distribute the questionnaires to a second circle of people (usually in their locality) who are at least twenty years older than themselves. The questionnaires collected from the two circles constituted the material analyzed in the study. Of the 240 questionnaires distributed, 224 were returned. Five were disqualified since they were only partially completed. After classification of all the returned questionnaires, 219 remained at our disposal for analysis.

Research tools

The study employed Internet talkbacks as expressing an authentic, uninhibited public discourse. Talkback research has not yet matured into an accepted tradition in the social sciences and media research, but reference to it in the academic arena indicates that it is worthy of study and can be methodologically used to identify and examine voices in public discourse (Goldschmidt, 2006).

Meikle (2002) predicted that in the future talkbacks would be studied just as letters to the editor, political journalism, and opinions aired on radio listener programs are studied today. According to Meikle, the advantage of talkbacks for research lies in their accessibility, for in this discourse analysis the participants are not blocked by access or censorship barriers of any kind whatsoever. Jucker (2003), too, claimed that the media in the twenty-first century would not only lead to the proliferation of talkbacks, but would also be shaped by them. He postulates that talkbacks will place issues and opinions on the agenda, and will be read in the same way as the articles in the wake of which they are posted. He asserts that talkbacks should be researched not merely as byproducts of journalistic articles, but as part of the articles themselves, since, as opposed to readers’ letters in newspapers, talkbacks are posted next to the articles and read as a direct continuation of them. In her writing about the aims of political media research, Mutz (2001) has provided appropriate validation for talkback research. According to her, future media research will not be possible without reference to it, for in contrast with traditional media research, this will be the appropriate methodology for exposing all social voices and strengthening the validity and reliability of media research that aspires to draw the boundaries of public discourse repertoire (Naveh, 2008).

For the purpose of the present study a self-reporting questionnaire was constructed that expresses the level of personal agreement with statements. The statements were taken from the Internet talkbacks that were written and posted in close proximity to the publication of an article on the Ynet website (Heruti-Sover, *IDF Widows Struggle: 'The State is Debasing Us'*, May 1, 2006), in which the IDF widows leading the struggle confronted the state's demand to suspend pension payments and other budget allocations to IDF widows cohabiting with a partner. At the time of the present study, 294 talkbacks were written and posted in close proximity to the publication of the article. In the first stage the researchers sorted through the statements and omitted talkbacks that constituted personal attacks between the writers (e.g., Widow 234 responds to 251: "Are you prepared to trade places with me? I'm prepared to, right now.") The statements were then classified into groups with similar content, e.g., the statements "A land that eateth up its inhabitants" and "Jews don't need enemies – give them peace and they'll eat each other", were classified in the same group of statements. Finally, a few representative statements were chosen from each group. Thus for example, from this group the statement "A country that sends its sons into battle and doesn't take care of the widows and orphans is a land that eateth its inhabitants" was chosen. A total of 36 talkbacks were chosen that represented a broad spectrum of the posted responses. These statements were presented in the questionnaire in their **original wording** without the researchers' intervention. Level of agreement with the statements was presented in the questionnaire, which was constructed according to the Likert scale: respondents were asked to indicate the level of their agreement with each statement on a scale of 1-6. The questionnaire included an open section in which respondents were invited to state their opinion on the issue addressed by the talkbacks, or make any other reference to the discussion itself. It should be noted that the social representation approach, which constitutes the basis for the theoretical analysis in the present article, emphasizes the importance of public discourse data being collected without researcher processing. The researchers' intervention is limited to the selection or preference of certain statements over others. The statistical analysis, the results of which will be presented below, enables observation of the internal validity of each group, and confirms or rejects the classification of the selected statements into a common group.

Statistical processing of the questionnaire

Factor Analysis – the structure validity of the statement questionnaire was tested by means of factor analysis, calculating internal reliability for each scale, and the correlations between the scales. Factor analysis was carried out with Varimax rotation. The criterion for deciding on the number of factors was determined by an eigenvalue greater than 1 and a Scree test (Cattell & Vogelmann, 1977). The reliability of the scales was tested by means of Cronbach's alpha index. After initial analysis of the findings, a decision was made to exclude nine items, since no correlation was found between them and the other items on the questionnaire.

An additional analysis tool, namely plotting the items in space according to Guttman's Singular Spectrum Analysis (SSA), was employed in the present study to observe the intensity of statement presence and the distance or proximity between the statements. SSA is a multidimensional, nonparametric method that provides a structural analysis of data, whereby each variable is represented as a symbol on a two- (or multi-) dimensional space (Guttman, 1968; 1988). The SSA method was employed in addition to factor analysis for the purpose of providing a visual illustration of the findings obtained.

Findings

Social representations in the public discourse

The first research hypothesis was that three types of social representations would be found in the public media discourse on the issue of the state's continued commitment toward IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship: hegemonic, emancipated, and polemical. The hypothesis was corroborated.

The factor analysis identified three factors with high correlations (0.75-0.79) and two factors with medium correlations (0.56-0.62). The five factors identified are as follows:

1. The contract with the widows is conditional upon them remaining widows – $\alpha=.79$ (7 items).
2. Widows are widows for the rest of their life irrespective of their personal rehabilitation – $\alpha=.75$ (6 items).
3. Demonization of the state – $\alpha=.78$ (6 items).
4. The widows are violating a contract of trust when they form a new intimate relationship – $\alpha=.61$ (7 items).
5. The importance of the widows' personal rehabilitation – $\alpha=.56$ (3 items).
6. Details of each of the factors will be presented in the following section, together with examples of representative statements, and the significance of the content of statements grouped together to the common factor.

Hegemonic representations expressing a republican discourse

1) Conditional widows

“The contract with the widows is conditional upon them remaining widows”, “An IDF widow who gets married or lives with a partner is no longer a widow. She has someone to provide for her and the state is exempt from taking care of her”.

This group includes statements expressing the argument that financial support for the widows should be provided on condition that they do not have a partner.

2) An intimate relationship amounts to a breach of trust

“The widows are violating a contract of trust when they form a new intimate relationship and continue to receive support from the state”, “The widows’ pensions is a cash cow in the guise of bereavement”.

This group also includes statements to the effect that the widows are manipulative.

Emancipated representations expressing a liberal discourse

1) Widows for life

“The widows will remain widows for the rest of their life irrespective of their personal rehabilitation”, “IDF widows should be compensated for the loss and pain they endure throughout their life. Financial compensation is an expression of society’s appreciation of their permanent suffering”.

This group includes statements expressing the argument that the state should be responsible for the widows for the rest of their life, irrespective of their personal status.

2) Rehabilitation

“The best thing for the widow, her children, and the State of Israel is for the widow to live again and even marry, and we should not stand in her way”, “The widows should be free to engage in their rehabilitation and not their livelihood”.

This group includes statements expressing a positive attitude toward widows forming a new relationship as part of their rehabilitation.

Representations expressing a polemical discourse

Criticism and demonization of the state

“While corruption in the country is on the rise, the state leaders are looking for ways to make life hard for those who have already suffered more than enough”, “A country that sends its sons into battle and doesn’t take care of the widows and orphans is a land that eateth its inhabitants”.

This group includes statements expressing critical positions toward the state in general, and regarding the state’s attitude toward IDF widows in particular.

The ratios and differentiations between the different representations were examined by means of Guttman’s Singular Spectrum Analysis spatial map.

Figure 1 shows that the space is clearly divided into two separate areas: support for IDF widows and their rehabilitation, expressing a liberal representation, in contrast with negative attitudes toward IDF widows who form a new intimate relationship and violate the republican equation of rewards in exchange for national representation, expressing a republican representation. Criticism of the state and its leaders has a positive correlation with the factors presenting positive attitudes toward IDF widows.

In the division between representations expressing a republican discourse and those expressing a liberal discourse, we can see that the statements expressing a view of IDF widows as violating a contract of trust when they form a new intimate relationship, are clustered in the center of the statements presenting negative attitudes regarding the

state's responsibility toward IDF widows who have formed a new intimate relationship (“*The widows’ pensions is a cash cow in the guise of bereavement*” – q28), and the negative attitudes toward the widows also appear in declarations of distrust toward them (“*IDF widows are not all saints, many of them cynically exploit their situation. There’s no smoke without fire*” – q6).

The rehabilitation statements (e.g., “*The best thing for the widow, her children and the State of Israel is for the widow to live again and even if she marries we should not stand in her way*” – q23) appear adjacent to statements expressing lifelong support for IDF widows (“*The widows gave their husbands to the state and the state owes them*” – q1, “*IDF widows should be compensated for the loss and pain they endure throughout their life. Financial compensation is an expression of society’s appreciation of their permanent suffering*” – q32).

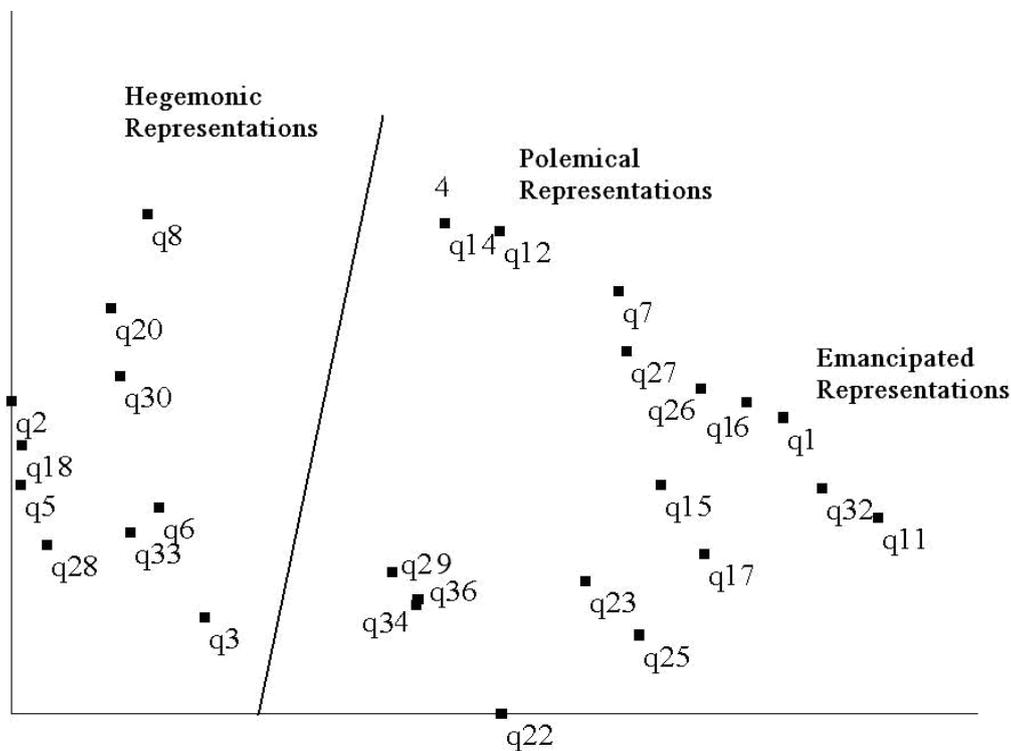


Figure 1: Division of the surface into hegemonic, polemical, and emancipated statements

Figure 2 is a verbal adaptation that illustrates the five groups identified on the SSA map by means of a schematic diagram, which shows a division into five factors comprising similar discourse representations. Three factors are located next to each other: ‘rehabilitating the widows’, ‘widows are widows for life’, and ‘criticism of the state’. The two other factors are located within the same space: ‘continuing to receive a pension constitutes a violation of trust’ appears **inside** the space where statements expressing that ‘the contract with the widow is conditional upon her remaining a widow’ are clustered. Thus for example, q2 “*IDF widows should not be given a blank check for the*

rest of their life”, which in the original map appears in a field identified with republican representations, appears in Figure 2 within the schematic diagram of the statement group expressing that ‘the contract with the widow is conditional upon her remaining a widow’, which appears on the left side of the diagram. In contrast, q32, “IDF widows should be compensated for the loss”, which belongs to the liberal discourse, also belongs to the statement group clustered under the common factor of ‘widows are widows for life’, which appears on the bottom right of the diagram.

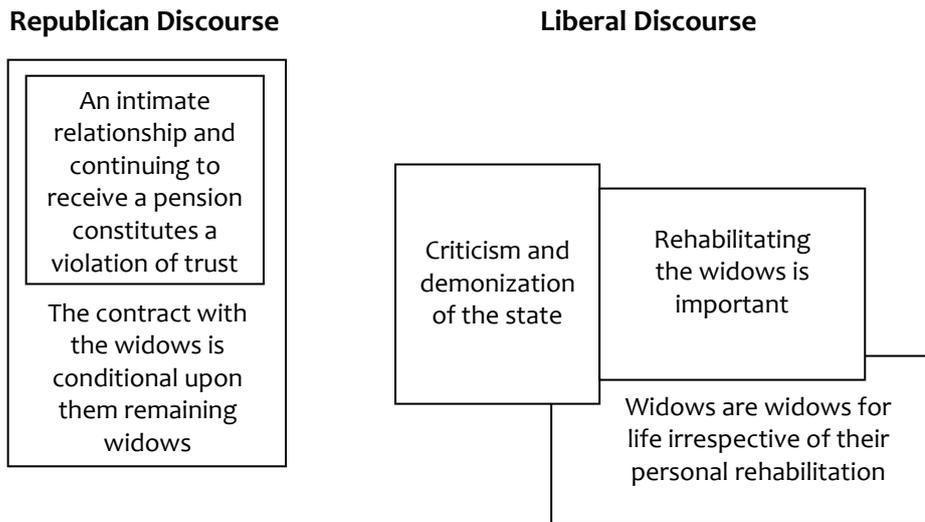


Figure 2: Schematic diagram of the statement groups identified in Singular Spectrum Analysis

As we can see, the research hypotheses that the three types of representations will be found in the public media discourse on the issue of the state’s continued commitment toward IDF widows was corroborated.

The test case of IDF widows as exposing a struggle in Israel between groups holding republican social perceptions and liberal groups

The second research hypothesis was that respondents belonging to the liberal-individualist group will be inclined to support recognition and state support for the widows irrespective of their personal status, and respondents belonging to the republican-collectivist group will be inclined to precondition state recognition and support for the widow on her personal status.

An examination of Table 1 corroborates the hypothesis regarding the connection between the factors (republican and liberal).

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient of the Connection between the Two Groups of Factors Identified

	Widows for life	Demonization	Intimate relationship is a violation of trust	Rehabilitation
Conditional widows	-0.35**	-0.16*	0.48**	-0.20**
Widows for life		0.49**	-0.36**	0.37**
Demonization			-0.24**	-0.22*
Intimate relationship is a violation of trust				-0.22**

* P<0.05 ** P<0.01

It was found that the higher the level of a respondent's agreement with the hegemonic-national representations discourse, the more inclined he is to agree with the representation of 'conditional widows', i.e., agreement that IDF widows are entitled to state support so long as they have not remarried or formed a new intimate relationship, and to object to the representation of 'IDF widows are widows for life' who are entitled to state support irrespective of their personal status. These respondents agree to a lesser degree with the assertion that IDF widows should be helped with their rehabilitation, and to a greater degree with the assertion that widows who receive pensions and cohabit with a partner are manipulative.

It was also found that the higher the level of a respondent's agreement with the emancipated representations, whereby the individual is the point of reference rather than the state ('IDF widows are widows for life'), the more inclined he is to have reservations regarding the assertion that widows are manipulative when they cohabit with a partner and continue to receive a pension from the state.

It was further found that that the higher the level of a respondent's objections to the state controlling the lives of its citizens, and his identification with the relevant statements on demonization of the state, the lower the level of his agreement with the assertion that the widows are entitled to receive a pension on condition that they remain widows, and even lower with the assertion that the widows are manipulative.

With regard to the rehabilitation of IDF widows it was found that the higher the level of a respondent's agreement with the assertion that widowhood is for life, the higher the level of his agreement with the assertion that the widows should be rehabilitated. It was also found that the higher the level of a respondent's agreement with statements expressing demonization of the state, the higher the level of his agreement with statements supporting the widows' rehabilitation. In contrast, it was found that the higher the level of a respondent's agreement with the assertion that the widows are manipulative, the lower the level of his agreement with the assertion that they should receive support for their rehabilitation.

Discussion

The present study revealed trends in Israeli public discourse expressing an attitude toward IDF widows who choose to form a new intimate relationship by examining social perceptions of the subject, which until recently remained unaddressed since it is identified with representations of the 'National Pantheon' (Lebel, 2007). It appears that the social discourse can no longer continue to ignore the fact that many IDF widows cohabit with a partner out of wedlock, and that this situation runs counter to the principle of convertibility, which is also termed the 'republican equation' (Levy, Lomsky-Feder & Harel, 2007), according to which entitlement to a state-provided resource is contingent on behavior that the state deems worthy.

The public discourse gives expression to the hegemonic representations, whereby IDF widows serve a national ethos, and accordingly the pension they receive should be conditional upon them not remarrying. At the same time, also heard are voices expressing the emancipated representations of a liberal discourse, which views social welfare as the right of the individual that is not conditional upon his adherence to the 'republican equation'. Together with these two types of representations, which until recently coexisted without conflict between them, polemical representations were found that confront them with one another and demand an ideological decision that accords preference to one of the two discourses. The polemical representations are characterized by intolerance and are frequently charged with broader content than the issue that served as the point of departure for their formulation (e.g., demonization of the state beyond the case of IDF widows).

The present study employed a unique tool that was constructed on the basis of spontaneous, authentic statements posted on the virtual Internet discourse. We shall examine the use made of Internet talkbacks with the aim of identifying different types of social representations in the public space. We shall then discuss the findings of the factor analysis that presents social representations expressing postmodern liberal-individualist thinking, as well as republican social representations that continue to lean on organizing principles identified with the state from the time of its establishment. Berwick (2001) terms the talkback era the 'New New-Media Blitz'. She claims that by means of the active writing of talkbacks every reader can become an active writer and instantaneously express his feelings on the issue being discussed. She predicts that the talkback era will see a sharp rise in oppositional voices, which in the past were unable to find expression in the newspapers, and will now be posted on the Internet and provoke a public debate. Lievrouw (2001) expresses this position and contends that the talkback arena is the triumph of the opposition. In the present study the understanding that talkbacks serve as a 'mouthpiece' for new voices that are not necessarily congruent with the national consensus was examined with reference to a delicate issue that seldom gains legitimate public expression, namely the representative status of IDF widows. The traditional role of the widows was to commemorate the battle heritage of the IDF and the heroism of personal sacrifice for society as a whole, and consequently they are entitled to the rewards they receive. The media space that has opened up by means of talkbacks

indicates that there is no dichotomy here, i.e., a division between a discourse that leans on a republican-nationalist ethos versus an emancipated representations discourse that leans on an individualist-liberal ethos, but rather discourse spaces that Moscovici termed the 'polemical representations discourse'. This is no longer an expansion of hegemonic representation into emancipated representation, but a struggle for change, albeit not absolute change, of the hegemonic worldview. The public willingness to recognize the widows as a group whose members are entitled to a preferential welfare policy, even after they remarry, leans on their local-hegemonic perception. This discourse raised polemical representations, which began competing in the national-hegemonic discourse. The widows' arguments can be seen in the context of the postmodern discourse that adopted Foucault's critique of the perception of the individual as a reflection of the hegemonic institutions' system of values (Foucault, 1994), as a continuation of the liberal schools of thought that began to emerge in Western Europe and the United States at the end of the 1970s, advocating that the aim of welfare policies is to act toward the rehabilitation and empowerment of the individual rather than the collective (Canterbery, 1974).

The study of the public discourse on the issue of state pensions for IDF widows showed a clear social-public division into two competing discourse types. The first is a collectivist-republican discourse advocating that social welfare, institutional rewards, preferred cultural status, and other state 'rewards' be awarded preferentially to those who are prepared to meet 'national' role demands as they were formulated by the state. The second, an individualist-liberal discourse, focuses on the personal rehabilitation of the widow as an individual, rather than as representing a state role. This position advocates that these resources (welfare, rehabilitation and so forth) should be awarded to any citizen who needs them without making them conditional upon role demands, and in efforts to empower and rehabilitate the individual without linking it to 'state advantages' and the symbolic-political economy of the establishment. One of the notable findings in the present study was the appearance of a powerful conservative republican discourse that stipulates entitlement to state benefits on the individual's committed to it. Inglehart and Baker (2000) claim that even in the global era, despite the introduction of 'new' post-national values into conservative societies, the founding core values remain solid. We can therefore state that the polemical discourse indicates the introduction of global elements into the local discourse (Ram, 2004; Shimshoni, 2006), rather than an anti-hegemonic global discourse taking place in the Israeli public space.

The present study did not separately examine different groups in Israel with regard to the characterization of the social representations they express on social issues that are controversial in Israeli society. In this regard we rely on an extensive body of research on the splits and schisms in Israeli-Zionist society from its establishment to the present day. Thus for example, Arian and Shamir (1983), Cohen (1995), Levy (2008), and Lebel (2008) describe groups with a medium to high affiliation with religion or nationalism, whose members belong to the traditional-revisionist right, as well as members of the middle-lower class, residents of the outlying areas, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and Jews of Eastern extraction. These groups continue to hold, even more

strongly, the republican-nationalist perceptions that typified the 'founding elites' from the time of the state's establishment. Facing them is a group whose members are primarily non-religious Israelis of Ashkenazi origin, members of the middle-upper class, who in the early 1980s began to withdraw from the republican discourse toward the liberal discourse, i.e., the human and citizen's rights discourse. Members of this group advanced up the hierarchy of the state and society irrespective of their participation or involvement in national projects. They began to abandon engagement in settlement, the army, education, or immigrant absorption, and to focus on developing their careers, amassing wealth, acquiring academic education, and joining the legal and media arenas, becoming established and gaining strength in society and the public discourse unhindered by their abandonment of national needs. This conveyed a message that the conditions comprising the republican equation are no longer valid and certainly not mandatory. In terms of army-society relations, this message resulted in more and more parents refraining from encouraging their sons to serve in the army in general and in combat units in particular (Almog, 1997; Zrubavel, 2004). It was Peled and Shafir (2005) who identified the beginnings of the decline of the republican discourse and emphasized that this was a process that would lead to the emergence of a 'language of liberal citizenship', in which individuals claim an autonomous space for themselves as a private space existing outside of state interference, and within which state support to which the individual is entitled is not contingent on his contribution to the nation (Rosenhek, 1999).

The present study corroborated the experience that IDF widows have frequently articulated in recent years, whereby Israeli society conveys various, and at times even contradictory, expectations, namely requiring them to maintain their widowhood status as part of the 'National Pantheon', as well as embarking on a new path of personal rehabilitation. In this regard, Nutman-Schwartz, Leichtentritt and Rubin (2005) contend that the over-appropriation of national mourning to the needs of society isolates and excludes the bereaved, and limits their ability to reenter the societal fabric. Moreover, categorization of bereavement results in inefficient distribution of resources and therapy intervention, which is oftentimes incongruent with the needs of the bereaved individual, but is generalized for the group as a whole. The social censure IDF widows experience when they seek to form a new intimate relationship leads them to adopt a wide range of actions – from concealing the relationship to embarking on an overt public and media struggle. These choices indicate that the widows are highly sensitive to the messages conveyed to them by Israeli society. It is the incongruence between the different social representations expressing competing perceptions that leads to the emergence of a polemical discourse wherein the widows find themselves in the eye of the storm, and find it difficult to direct their emotional resources to their rehabilitation in a social environment that is not experienced as containing and supporting.

Limitations of the study

Various groups are not represented in the studied sample, including peripheral groups in Israeli society. Additionally, the present study examined the voices heard in the public

discourse by means of the modern 'marketplace', as talkbacks are frequently referred to (Elkin-Koren, 2002; Goldschmidt, 2006), and despite its advantages, as described in this article, we are also aware of its limitations. We would recommend that voices from different platforms be examined as well, e.g., public leaders, intellectuals, and researchers, that will give expression to a wider range of social discourses in the context of the representation and perception of the status of IDF widows in Israeli society in general, and in the context of forming a new intimate relationship in particular. Additionally, more comprehensive research is evidently called for in order to methodically examine the experience of the widows themselves in light of the conflicting social perceptions presented in the present article. We would also recommend an examination of the social representations the Ministry of Defense workers bring with them into the rehabilitation meetings with the widows, who on the one hand possess professional rehabilitation knowledge regarding the long-term rehabilitation and adjustment processes that continue throughout the widows' life, and at the same time represent the state's position with regard to the currently-held republican representations.

Social structure or self rehabilitation: social implications derived from the study findings

It is precisely because the present study did not examine public opinions on issues at the top of the national agenda, which directly touch upon the overt political schisms (e.g., evacuation of occupied territories, or war and peace policies), that made it possible to identify and neutralize (as far as possible) the values organizing Israeli society that are not influenced by the Israeli-Palestinian or Israeli-Arab conflicts. With regard to IDF widows, the present article seems to indicate that the emerging trends in current social discourse mandate reexamination of what was 'self-evident' in the past. It should be noted that the present study did not seek to examine state policies or actions that are implemented by the Ministry of Defense. Nor did it examine the positions, beliefs, values, and action scenarios of the widows themselves, who overtly articulate their hardships and their demand for personal rehabilitation in accordance with the principles expressed by the liberal streams.

Exposure of the social representations can facilitate rethinking both by government leaders on the scope of the state's obligation to provide IDF widows with financial support, and by many of the widows on the preconditioning of their entitlement to this support. At the same time, the fact that the over-appropriation of national mourning to the needs of society served as a mechanism to exclude the widows, limiting their ability to reenter the societal fabric, has appeared on the Israeli research agenda. It has also been argued that since the welfare and rehabilitation policies associated with support for bereaved families and IDF widows were formulated within republican equation frameworks, they are oftentimes incongruent with the needs of the bereaved individual, but rather with social-hegemonic dictates, that are beginning to be perceived as anachronistic and even non-legitimate. Not only does this policy not advance personal

rehabilitation, but it may even diminish it by favoring national over individual interests. This is apparently a far broader process than that expressed in the Israeli bereavement arena, and expresses demands by citizens for the state to be removed from its role of shaping 'social facts', alongside a demand for the state's continued commitment toward its citizens, and delegitimization of this commitment being bound up in or contingent on what happens in the private domain (Lebel, 2009a).

In summary, the findings of the present study reinforce the perceptions regarding the latent depth structure of Israeli society; a structure that sustains confrontation and dialogue between the republican discourse of contribution and obligation, and the liberal discourse of rights; between national myth and personal ethos.

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