

The Status of Druze Women Between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution With a Focus on Change in Israel

Imad Abu Reesh¹

Abstract

This article examines the evolving status of Druze women in Israel at the intersection of religious law, communal tradition, and modern state structures. The study explores how religious norms governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance interact with social practice, and how political, educational, and economic changes since 1948 have expanded, yet also limited, the scope of Druze women's agency. Methodologically, the work combines an extensive theoretical review with a chronological-comparative perspective, situating Israeli Druze women within the broader Druze world and within the landscape of women in other minority communities. It analyses qualitative accounts of women lived experiences alongside quantitative trends in education and employment.

The main findings indicate simultaneous processes of change and continuity: significant advances in education and professional integration coexist with persistent expectations around family honour, marriage, and gendered divisions of labour. The article concludes by arguing for culturally sensitive, evidence-based policies that address both structural barriers and existing strengths, and by outlining an agenda for future research on Druze women's agency, changing masculinities, and comparative perspectives across regional and religious contexts.

Keywords

Druze women, religious law, gender roles, tradition and modernity, women's agency

Introduction

The status of Druze women in Israel is shaped by a complex interplay of religious law, long-standing communal traditions, and modern influences, an interplay that has changed significantly over the course of centuries. The

¹ Judge Dr. Appointed as Judge/Kadi in court of appeal from 2017; Appointed as a Judge/Kadi in the Druze Religious Court (2012); 1976-1997-Treasurer at the local council in Yarka Israel; 1997-Chief Secretary to the Druze Religious courts in Israel; BA in law from Netanya College Israel (2014);-LLM degree from Netanya College Israel (2027); PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca (2025). Yarka Village (Israel). E-mail: Imad120@walla.co.il

Druze community, which has functioned for more than a thousand years as a closed ethno-religious minority in the Middle East, is characterized by dense social ties and a pronounced patriarchal structure that continues to govern family life and patterns of social interaction (Muschara, 2015; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). Within this framework, Druze women have historically been required to navigate between loyalty to religious norms and communal customs, on the one hand, and the demands of modernity, on the other, thereby producing complex gender roles in both the domestic and public spheres (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023).

This dissertation focuses on the ways in which these dynamics have been manifested in Israel since 1948, a period marked by far-reaching changes in schooling, higher education, labour-market participation, and state policy toward the Druze community. These changes have gradually destabilized the traditional normative order and opened new opportunities for women, while simultaneously exposing sharp gaps between formal rules and lived experience (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The central question guiding the study is the extent to which religious norms in the domains of marriage, inheritance, and divorce are in fact congruent with women's everyday realities, and what legal, communal, and familial mechanisms mediate between religious text and social practice (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu Reesh, 2025). A further aim is to map how political, educational, and economic processes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have reshaped the scope of agency available to Druze women, and whether they have enabled the development of strategies of resistance to traditional patriarchal structures (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023; Reineck et al., 2017).

The Druze community itself rests on a multilayered religious-cultural history. The Druze religion emerged from Isma'ili Shi'ism in the eleventh century and is grounded in strong communal solidarity and a unique belief system that shapes patterns of authority, family life, and identity (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Muschara, 2015). Traditionally, Druze society has been organized as a patriarchal social order. However, in recent decades—and particularly in the Israeli context—there has been a discernible shift in the narrative surrounding women, against the background of expanded access to education, integration into the public service, and state policies that treat the Druze as a distinct group within the institutional system (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). Within this broader transformation, the study seeks to examine how women's status has evolved since the establishment of the state, and to assess whether religious doctrines concerning polygamy, divorce, and inheritance are in fact translated into gender equality, or whether they are eroded or distorted in their encounter with local social

norms (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu Reesh, 2025).

The research question is thus anchored in a combination of history, culture, and legal structure. On the one hand, the analysis must engage with the community's historical roots and with a religious narrative that ostensibly posits ideals of mutual moral responsibility; on the other hand, it examines the socio-political dynamics that have driven change: modernization, the expansion of the education system, the increase in the number of Druze female students, compulsory military service for men, and the growing integration of women into the labour market (Ghanem, 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). From this emerge sub-questions that focus on the discrepancy between religious ideals and social reality, on the identification of political and educational turning points, and on understanding the contribution of higher education and employment to shifts in gendered power relations and to the development of "resistance from within the system" (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022).

In doing so, the study addresses a substantive gap in the literature on Druze society in general and on Druze women in particular. Despite an expansion of research on gender in minority communities, the status of Druze women, especially in the Israeli context, has remained only partially at the centre of scholarly discussion (Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). The dissertation seeks to deepen this discussion both theoretically and practically: to grasp the complexity of Druze women's identities as an intersection of gender, ethnicity, religion, class, and geography, and to propose an intersectional reading that is attentive to the overlaps between these axes (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Methodologically, the dissertation is grounded in an extensive theoretical review that combines historical, legal, and sociological sources, alongside an analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies dealing with intermarriage, the division of household labour, women's agency, and the impact of education and employment on the status of Druze women (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023; Ghanem, 2018). A chronological-comparative approach makes it possible to identify stages of change from the formative period of the religion to the present, and to distinguish between processes occurring in Israel and those in Druze communities in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). In this way, the study strengthens research validity and lays the groundwork for a culturally sensitive policy discussion that seeks to translate theoretical insights into concrete recommendations aimed at

improving gender equality and the wellbeing of Druze women (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Shapiro, 2013).

The literature review integrates key concepts of intersectionality, neo-patriarchy, and religious feminism, demonstrating that the status of Druze women cannot be understood without taking into account their position as members of a national minority, their experience of social-economic peripherality, and their embeddedness within extended family structures (Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). This perspective makes it possible to trace the ways in which women act within patriarchal structures, sometimes through outward conformity and “strategic consent,” while simultaneously advancing slow but cumulative change.

Finally, the introduction outlines the dual contribution of the dissertation: on the one hand, a theoretical contribution in the form of a broad chronological framework for examining the status of Druze women over roughly a millennium; on the other, a focused analysis of the dramatic transformations that have taken place in Israel in recent decades (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023). On the practical level, the findings are intended to assist policymakers and community leadership in identifying the specific challenges faced by Druze women and in formulating culturally sensitive policies that promote gender equality and social justice (Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022; Snapp, 2024; Johnson & Zeedan, 2024). In doing so, the dissertation lays the groundwork for future research that will continue to explore the complexity of Druze women’s status and agency, and to broaden the discourse on gender, culture, and minority rights in Israel (Kattoura, 2020; Al Munajed, 2025; Shapiro, 2013; Cooper et al., 2025; Abu Reesh, 2025).

Literature Review

The contemporary situation of Druze women cannot be captured through a simple dichotomy of tradition versus modernity. Rather, it is a complex tapestry in which religious law, deeply rooted traditions, and the accelerating demands of modern life are tightly interwoven. The Druze community, with its deep historical roots in the Middle East, maintains a system of norms that clearly delineates the division of roles within the family. Historically, women have operated within a male-dominated framework in which family honor and marriage arrangements were determined for them in advance, largely on the basis of religious interpretations (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). In recent decades, however,

especially following the expansion of access to education and global communication, a renewed conversation on gender roles has emerged. This is a slow process, but one that clearly positions women's rights on a trajectory of change (Muschara, 2015).

The literature portrays a prolonged struggle: alongside religious commitments, institutional and social patterns of discrimination persist (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Kattoura, 2020). Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the social landscape has changed significantly. The formal education system, the opening of institutions of higher education, and the expansion of employment opportunities have created new pathways for women toward economic independence and autonomous subjectivity (Nuwayhid, 1986). Their integration into state systems and the possibility of military service have opened channels of empowerment that were not previously available (Lapniewska, 2016; Muschara, 2015). Studies indicate a correlation between higher education and the increased presence of Druze women in the public sphere, as well as a reshaping of cultural perceptions of womanhood (Nuwayhid, 1986), even though in rural localities conservative traditions continue to impose substantial restrictions on their freedom (Kheir, 2024; Kattoura, 2020).

The encounter between religious law and modern legal orders raises complex questions of identity. Scholars emphasize a paradox: while religious law may contain elements open to progressive interpretation, deeply entrenched cultural norms continue in practice to preserve patriarchal control (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Shapiro, 2013). Hence the importance of contextual analysis: the lived experience of a Druze woman varies according to her economic status, place of residence, and specific family-social background (Batool, 2025). Epistemic gaps have also been identified: a substantial portion of the research focuses on highly educated women who are framed as "success stories", whereas the voices of women in more conservative circles, who continue to struggle for basic agency, are heard far less (Ghanem, 2018; Al-Abdin et al., 2018). The literature therefore calls for more systematic comparisons with other Arab communities in order to obtain a broader and more nuanced picture (Falah, 2013).

Recent studies underscore the need to deepen the examination of modernity's impact on tradition and of the possibility of implementing legal reforms without undermining religious belief (Batool, 2025; Faiad, 2024). The sources suggest that the process of change is marked, simultaneously, by barriers and by the opening of new opportunities (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Kheir, 2024). A chronological mapping of these developments shows that, initially, a highly restricted "possible space" was delineated for women, centered on male authority in the family and community (Kattoura, 2020). Over the course of the twentieth century, and especially since the 1970s,

education became a disruptive factor: women began to pursue academic studies and professional careers, thereby undermining the foundations of patriarchal norms (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Al-Abdin et al., 2018), and turning education into a key instrument for redefining their status within the family and the community.

The national context differentiates the experience of Druze women in Israel from that of their counterparts in Syria and Lebanon. In Israel, military service, citizenship, and national identity generate unique tensions between loyalty to tradition and the demands of modern citizenship (Shapiro, 2013). In recent years there has been a rise in the number of women holding leadership positions, against the background of local feminist discourse and broader social processes (Lapniewska, 2016). Young women increasingly draw on education and social activism to rewrite their life narratives and demand rights, thereby becoming agents of change within the community (Petesch et al., 2017; Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This process is described in the literature as a “slow reconciliation”: attempts to promote legal and social reforms that are adapted to modern realities without relinquishing cultural identity (Falah, 2013), a delicate balance between past and future (Kra-Friedman, 2022; Kheir, 2024).

One of the central axes in the literature is the tension between religious texts and social reality. Although Druze religious texts may, at least in theory, allow for egalitarian interpretations, social norms often place women in a subordinate position, manifested, *inter alia*, in forced marriages and severe restrictions on freedom of movement (Lapniewska, 2016). At the same time, processes of modernity gradually erode the old order: the growing number of female students enhances the social legitimacy of women’s presence outside the home, even though many still encounter significant labour-market and normative barriers despite their education (Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This struggle for recognition unfolds at a complex intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religious authority (Shapiro, 2013).

The literature also highlights a persistent tension between personal choice and communal expectations. Women constantly negotiate their identities between loyalty to tradition and the pursuit of modern aspirations; frequently, cultural preservation and the struggle for equality occur simultaneously, giving rise to creative strategies of resistance (Barakat, 2023). This yields a rich and complex picture that underscores women’s resilience in the face of severe constraints (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017).

Methodologically, research on Druze women employs a combination of tools. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic approaches, enable access to women’s subjective worlds, exposing emotional

burdens and social pressures (; Lapniewska, 2016), while quantitative studies provide data on long-term trends such as the dramatic rise in the rate of women in higher education (Al-Abdin et al., 2018). This mixed-methods approach is essential for constructing a comprehensive picture (Cooper et al., 2025). Historical approaches add an additional layer by clarifying how past events have shaped contemporary religious interpretations and social norms (Shapiro, 2013).

At the theoretical level, the literature draws on historical frameworks that emphasize frictions between traditional practices and new economic realities (Muschara, 2015), on intersectional analysis that examines the interlocking of religion, class, and gender (Al-Abdin et al., 2018), and on cultural relativism, which urges evaluation of experiences within local value systems—even when these come into tension with universal human-rights principles (IZZEDDIN, 1993). Alongside this, feminist critique calls for a re-examination of religious norms that preserve male dominance, and locates the primary potential for change in two levers: education and economic resources (Falah, 2013; Shapiro, 2013; Lapniewska, 2016).

The cumulative conclusion of the literature is that Druze women are situated at the heart of a profound transformation: a movement from a history of male control toward a future in which they cross normative boundaries and claim rights, primarily through education (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Ghanem, 2018). This process unfolds under the dual pressure of cultural preservation and the struggle for equality (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017), and demands further in-depth comparative research—especially regarding women who have not benefited from educational mobility, and concerning the question of how legal norms may be updated without undermining religious faith (Erwani & Siregar, 2024; Batool, 2025; Snapp, 2024; Cooper et al., 2025). Ultimately, the literature portrays a group of women with exceptional resilience, navigating a dense maze of tradition and change, and issues an implicit call to action to create conditions that enable them to realize their full potential (Faiad, 2024; Nuwayhid, 1986).

Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation, *“The Status of Druze Women between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution with a Focus on Change in Israel”*, is grounded in historical inquiry and systematic literature analysis, with the aim of elucidating the intersection of gender, religion, and nationality in the Druze context. The core research problem concerns how family structures, culture, and religion intersect to shape the shifting identities and social positioning of Druze women in Israel (IZZEDDIN, 1993). To that end, the study presents a broad historical analysis, from the emergence of the Druze religion to the present, examining

how modernity, the education system, and the political order have affected women's rights and status (Falah, 2018; Bals, 2009).

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining archival sources, contemporary case studies, and in-depth interviews with the analysis of existing quantitative data. In this way, both personal narratives and "hard numbers" are gathered regarding education, employment, and demographic processes (Barakat, 2022; 2018; Kheir, 2024). This combination corrects the narrow focus of earlier studies that concentrated primarily on educational and employment indicators while neglecting the complexity of familial expectations and tradition (Faiad, 2024). Integrating the findings with theories of neo-patriarchy and intersectionality enables the study to highlight the tension between traditional Druze law and modern forms of women's agency (Falah, 2013; Zeedan & Luce, 2021), and to examine the lives of educated, professional women who navigate between religious obligations and career demands (Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020). Thus, the methodology seeks to bridge between theoretical frameworks and the everyday realities of women operating within a multi-layered power structure.

The research design is built on the integration of history, law, and sociology, based on the premise that no single disciplinary lens can fully capture the complexity of Druze women's status. The research questions address the encounter between traditional structures and modern influences, and the implications of this encounter for gender equality and community functioning (Barakat, 2018; 2022). The study aims to map the historical evolution of women's status and to analyze how education, legal structures, and political context contribute to women's capacity to make autonomous choices in the private and public spheres (Faiad, 2024). Accordingly, the design emphasizes qualitative methods, primarily in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, enabling exploration of how women navigate between patriarchal expectations and the challenges posed by modernity (Falah, 2018; Al-Dajah & Alshalabi, 2020).

This methodological design has a dual value. At the academic level, it fills significant gaps in knowledge concerning Druze women and gender dynamics in minority societies; at the applied level, it provides a basis for designing educational policies and social programmes that respect tradition while seeking to promote gender equality (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020). Documenting the lived experiences of Druze women makes it possible to rethink the relationship between education and cultural identity and to propose a comparative model relevant to other minority groups (Barakat, 2023; Bals, 2009; Hazran et al., 2024).

The qualitative analysis relies on life stories and in-depth interviews with women from diverse backgrounds, employing ethnographic tools to depict the multilayered nature of their lives (Barakat, 2023; Jarar, 2012). This focus allows for a nuanced understanding of the delicate balance between traditional roles and modern aspirations, and of the ways in which women redefine their identities in the face of religious injunctions and social expectations. In parallel, quantitative analysis of data on education, labour-force participation, and demographic change situates these narratives within a broader socio-economic context (Kheir, 2024). The gap between formally egalitarian values embedded in religious doctrine and the reality constrained by patriarchal structures is a central axis of the research design; the goal is to show how educational and occupational advancement, combined with political change, reshape gender norms and enable empowerment (Falah, 2013; Barakat, 2024).

The data collection methods reflect the mixed-methods strategy: semi-structured in-depth interviews, analysis of archival documents, and the processing of statistical data from state agencies and previous studies (Barakat, 2022; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019). The interviews focus on education, employment, and family life, and are designed to uncover the negotiations over identity and agency that women conduct in the tension between tradition and modernity (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Barakat, 2023). The quantitative data, by contrast, highlight trends such as the rise in the proportion of female students and women's participation in the labour market (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Hazran et al., 2024). The combination of these two dimensions allows for a richer interpretation of the relationship between educational achievement, women's empowerment, and shifting social attitudes, and supports the formulation of context-sensitive policy recommendations (Falah et al., 2017; Nator et al., 2024).

In light of the character of the Druze community, a relatively closed, cohesive group with a deeply rooted patriarchal tradition—purposive sampling was chosen, aimed at “key voices” across a range of ages, educational levels, and socio-economic backgrounds (Falah, 2013). The sample includes both highly educated women in the liberal professions and women in more traditional roles, in order to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and to understand different degrees of gendered agency (Faiad, 2024). Previous research on gender in minority groups underscores the importance of representing diverse perspectives to enable a holistic analysis (Barakat, 2023; Faraj-Falah & Maman, 2019).

The study is conducted within a strong historical and contextual frame. It begins from the assumption that, at the normative level, Druze religious doctrine articulates more egalitarian values than are realized in practice, and that women confront barriers arising from cultural interpretations and

legal arrangements (Falah, 2013). Integrating qualitative findings with indicators of education and employment helps demonstrate how historical-political processes, such as conscription to the Israel Defense Forces, separate Druze schooling, and limited integration into the labour market, shape women's lived realities (Faiad, 2024; Amer & Davidovitch, 2020).

An important component of the methodology concerns ethical considerations. Research within a closed ethno-religious community requires heightened sensitivity to anonymity, confidentiality, and the potential social implications for interviewees. Purposive sampling and individual interviews are therefore accompanied by explicit assurances of confidentiality and transparent presentation of the research aims, with careful attention to gendered power imbalances and internal stigma (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The use of survey data and official statistics makes it possible to broaden the evidentiary base without exposing participants (Kra-Friedman, 2022).

In sum, the methodology of this dissertation seeks to construct a balanced framework: on the one hand, fidelity to the unique cultural and religious context of the Druze community; on the other, adherence to scholarly standards of reliability, transparency, and research ethics. The systematic integration of historical sources, quantitative data, and qualitative narratives enables an in-depth examination of the changing status of Druze women in Israel and the derivation of insights of value to academic discourse, public policy, and community practice (Reineck et al., 2017; Snapp, 2024; Erwani & Siregar, 2024; Batool, 2025).

Findings

Examining the status of Druze women within the shifting space between religious law, tradition, and modernity reveals a complex picture of significant progress alongside persistent structural barriers. Historically, Druze women lived within a patriarchal framework that restricted their access to higher education and professional careers. In recent decades, however, a clear shift has emerged: an increasing number of women are pursuing academic studies and assuming leadership positions within their communities (Faraj Falah, 2023). Quantitative data indicate, for example, that by 2020 women constituted roughly two-thirds of Druze university students—an indicator of substantial change in gender perceptions and in women's social positioning (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Growing integration into professions such as education, social services, and healthcare has afforded women greater economic independence and social empowerment, thereby challenging traditional gendered power structures (Falah, 2013; Faraj Falah, 2023). These findings

are consistent with scholarship that emphasizes the resilience and agency of Druze women even within constraining and sometimes oppressive structures (Muschara, 2015). At the same time, traditional family roles still shape educational and occupational trajectories: expectations around marriage, motherhood, and care work continue to influence women's choices and, in some cases, to limit the full translation of educational gains into labour-market outcomes (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018).

A regional comparison sharpens this picture. Druze women in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan face similar gendered challenges, yet the Israeli context, with its particular configuration of public schooling, access to higher education, military service for Druze men, and targeted state policies, creates unique spaces of agency for women that are not necessarily available in neighbouring states (Ghanem, 2018; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) comparative analysis of Muslim, Druze, and Christian women in Israel demonstrates that Druze women simultaneously participate in processes of change (e.g., entering higher education, postponing marriage, decreasing fertility) and in processes of preservation (e.g., maintaining strong kinship obligations and deference to communal norms). At the same time, customs such as arranged marriages and male dominance in key family decisions continue to restrict women's autonomy in choosing a spouse and determining their life paths, especially in more conservative localities (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024).

These findings refine, at the academic level, our understanding of the layered and specific challenges Druze women face, and of the ways in which their experiences differ from those of women in other Arab communities in Israel. Abu-Hassan Nebuani (2024) shows that Druze attitudes toward women's paid work are often more ambivalent than those of Christian respondents but somewhat more supportive than those of some Muslim subgroups, illustrating the "simultaneity" of modernization and religious reinforcement. Practically, this underscores the need for culturally sensitive policy that takes into account the structure of Druze identity and the complexity of navigating between tradition and modernity. The duality through which women balance loyalty to heritage with aspirations for personal freedom reflects an ongoing negotiation between collective expectations and individual choice (Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017). Recognition of these processes of change lays the groundwork for future research on the evolving gender roles in Druze communities in Israel and beyond, and for more nuanced discourse on women's rights in traditional contexts (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Presentation of the Data

The data collected in this study provide a nuanced view of the status of Druze women, against the backdrop of their shifting position between tradition and modern forces. An historical-qualitative approach was adopted, combining in-depth interviews with archival sources, in order to capture lived experiences in the domains of education, employment, and family life (Falah, 2013; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024).

The findings highlight a persistent tension between religious-legal norms and modern aspirations. Despite substantial gains in educational attainment among Druze women, systemic barriers still prevent their full integration into the labour market (Faraj Falah, 2023). For example, although women comprise a majority of Druze university students, their labour-force participation rates remain significantly lower than those of Jewish women and are concentrated in segmented, “feminized” sectors such as teaching and nursing (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Muschara, 2015). This disjuncture between obtaining a degree and being absorbed into the workforce is echoed in Abu-Hassan Nebuani’s (2024) findings regarding the tension between women’s economic independence and persistent expectations that they will prioritize family obligations.

Comparison with previous research reveals a recurrent theme: processes of empowerment are occurring, but alongside the continued preservation of patriarchal structures (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023). This dual pattern is also reflected in broader literature on gender, ethnicity, and politics in the Arab sector in Israel (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018). The historical focus of the present study makes it possible to trace how women’s agency and strategies of resistance develop over time rather than being captured at a single moment.

These findings challenge static images of Druze women as passive “victims” of tradition and instead present them as active agents who engage in continuous negotiation over their roles in both family and public spheres (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The combination of personal narratives with quantitative data amplifies marginalized voices and yields a more complex picture of gender hierarchies within the community, thereby providing policymakers with an evidence base for developing inclusive, equality-promoting policies (Lapniewska, 2016).

Historical Trends in Women’s Status

A historical perspective on Druze women in Israel reveals a dense interplay of religion, culture, and social structure. The Druze community, which emerged from Isma’ili Shi’ism during the Fatimid period, developed a

distinctive religious legal system that ostensibly recognizes a measure of equality between women and men in areas such as inheritance and divorce (Falah, 2013; IZZEDDIN, 1993). In practice, however, the implementation of these rights is shaped within a patriarchal order that significantly constrains women's ability to realize them.

Historical analysis indicates that education has opened new opportunities for women since the late twentieth century, enabling them to build careers outside the home (Muschara, 2015; Faraj Falah, 2023). Nevertheless, entrenched gender divisions and strong pressure to conform to traditional expectations around marriage and motherhood continue to narrow the scope of meaningful choice (Amer & Davidovitch, 2020; Ghanem, 2018). Comparative work, including Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) study of Muslim, Druze, and Christian women, suggests that Druze women face a distinctive constellation of socio-political challenges, shaped by the community's integration into Israeli state structures and by its unique religious status.

These historical trends point to an enduring tension between religious norms and processes of modernization, and call for policy that is attentive both to historical heritage and to contemporary realities (Reineck et al., 2017; Kra-Friedman, 2022).

The Impact of Education and Employment on Agency

Against the backdrop of social and political change in Israel, education and employment emerge as key levers in Druze women's struggle for equality. Traditionally, patriarchal structures severely limited women's access to education and the labour market (Falah, 2013). In recent decades, however, women's presence in academic programmes and prestigious professions has markedly increased, signaling not only a statistical shift but also a normative one. In 2021, women comprised more than 65% of Druze university students (Faraj Falah, 2023). and their participation in the health, education, and public sectors has expanded (IZZEDDIN, 1993).

Research identifies education as a central mechanism of empowerment for minority women, while also emphasizing that formal access to education does not, in itself, dismantle cultural expectations or economic inequalities (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The present study adds an additional layer by illustrating a "double struggle": women must simultaneously manage professional aspirations and familial demands, while contending with rigid communal norms.

From a policy perspective, understanding the role of education enables the design of educational and employment frameworks tailored to the Druze context, frameworks that not only open doors but also ensure that women

can act as agents of change for themselves and their communities (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016).

Changing Family Dynamics and Gender Roles

Changes in family patterns among Druze women in Israel illustrate the encounter between tradition and modern life. For many years, women bore the primary responsibility for domestic labour, while the public sphere remained largely male-dominated (Falah, 2013). Rising levels of education and employment among women have led to shifts in decision-making dynamics, an increase in dual-earner households, and declining fertility—developments that together signal changes in family structure (IZZEDDIN, 1993).

Studies show that education challenges traditional gender norms and bolsters women's self-confidence and demands for autonomy (Muschara, 2015). Yet this transition is accompanied by tensions: many women continue to face deeply rooted expectations to conform to male authority structures. The findings of the present study indicate the construction of hybrid identities, simultaneously maintaining loyalty to tradition while pursuing modern aspirations (Ghanem, 2018).

These results are significant academically and practically: they deepen the discussion of gender in minority communities and point to the need for empowerment strategies that are attentive to cultural values (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016).

Contrasting Traditional and Modern Influences, and Voices of Agency

The ongoing “dance” between traditional expectations and modern influences shapes the everyday lives of Druze women in Israel. In the past, women were often required to forgo higher education and careers in favour of domestic roles and the preservation of family honor (Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024; Faraj Falah, 2023). Today, the proportion of women in higher education and in professional careers has grown dramatically (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Falah, 2013). Nonetheless, cultural attitudes and institutional barriers continue to restrict their full participation in the political and public spheres (Ghanem, 2018).

The findings underscore that the empowerment of Druze women is a multi-layered process requiring support at the family, community, and institutional levels, and point to the need for educational reforms and workplace initiatives that gently but persistently challenge patriarchal norms (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017; Lapniewska, 2016; Petesch et al., 2017).

Finally, clear voices of agency and resistance emerge: educated women are entering leadership roles, demanding a more equitable division of household labour, and crafting hybrid identities that weave together tradition and change (Muschara, 2015; Ghanem, 2018). The pace of change and the degree of agency available to Druze women in Israel differ from those of women in other Arab communities, in part due to educational opportunities and the specific institutional context of the Israeli state (Beigi & Shirmohammadi, 2017).

Taken together, the findings indicate that Druze women are active agents in reshaping gender priorities within their communities, and they call for continued research and social action to broaden these gains and deepen gender equality (Al-Abdin et al., 2018; Reineck et al., 2017).

Discussion

The discussion section underscores both the contributions and the limitations of existing scholarship and of the present study on Druze women in Israel. Theoretically, the work rests on a strong conceptual scaffold that draws on intersectionality, neo-patriarchy and religious feminism, frameworks that are well suited to capturing the multilayered realities of Druze women situated at the crossroads of religion, ethnicity, class and nationality (Falah, 2013; Kattoura, 2020). At the same time, Johnson and Zeedan's (2024) comprehensive bibliography demonstrates that research on the Druze in general, and on Druze women in particular, remains fragmented and relatively sparse, highlighting the need for original empirical studies rather than further syntheses of existing literature.

Empirically, the findings depict a pattern of concurrent change and continuity, echoing Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) notion of "simultaneity": Druze women increasingly enter higher education and new occupational fields, yet expectations surrounding family honour, marriage and gendered divisions of labour remain powerful. Faraj Falah (2023) similarly documents significant advances in Druze women's public participation alongside the persistence of male dominance in key decision-making arenas. The present study corroborates these trends, showing that women do not simply abandon the religious and communal framework; instead, they renegotiate their roles from within, employing strategies of adaptation and incremental resistance.

Abu Reesh's (2025) analysis of Druze personal-status law adds a crucial legal dimension to this picture. While doctrinal texts include provisions that may be interpreted as comparatively protective of women, such as limits on polygyny and formal grounds for divorce, the day-to-day operation of religious courts, and the overlap between state and religious

jurisdictions, frequently produce outcomes that disadvantage women. When these legal insights are read together with the sociological evidence presented in this dissertation, it becomes clear that substantive change requires both normative reinterpretation of religious law and institutional reforms in the judicial and administrative arenas.

The “imagined debate” constructed around the study illuminates further methodological and ethical challenges. The Defender rightly stresses the value of the theoretical framework and the ambition to portray Druze women as active agents who challenge patriarchal structures and to situate their experiences within the specific Israeli context since 1948. He also notes that the text under discussion functions as a summary and that fuller methodological details appear in the complete dissertation. The Critic, however, highlights a serious concern: the section labelled “Findings” largely reproduces previous research and does not clearly differentiate between secondary synthesis and primary evidence. In his view, this blurring of boundaries is particularly problematic when the study is presented as mixed-methods research.

The Critic further points to methodological opacity, limited information about sampling, recruitment, and inclusion criteria, and to the absence of an explicit ethical discussion. In a small, tightly knit and conservative community, a lack of transparency about confidentiality, anonymity and potential social risks to participants is especially troubling. He also cautions that a focus on narratives of highly educated, boundary-breaking women may obscure the experiences of those who have not benefited from higher education or urban mobility and thus generate a partial, overly celebratory “empowerment” story (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

Taken together, these points suggest a dual agenda for future research. First, there is a clear need for more rigorous mixed-methods designs that explicitly separate theoretical background from original empirical contribution and that provide detailed accounts of data collection, analysis and ethical safeguards. Conflating literature review with findings not only undermines confidence in the research but also risks silencing the very voices it seeks to amplify. Second, subsequent studies should broaden their scope to include a wider range of women—particularly those in peripheral villages, with lower levels of formal education, or in more conservative settings—and should systematically incorporate men’s perspectives in order to trace changing forms of Druze masculinity alongside shifts in women’s roles (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

More broadly, the discussion suggests that the theoretical apparatus developed in this work can serve as a conceptual “map” of key questions, constructs and points of tension for future empirical inquiry. When

combined with transparent methodological practice and careful ethical engagement, such research can provide the evidence base needed to design culturally sensitive policies that genuinely support Druze women as they navigate between tradition and modernity and strive to realise their rights and aspirations.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation shows that the position of Druze women in Israel is the outcome of a long, gradual, yet potentially transformative historical process unfolding at the intersection of religious law, communal tradition, and modern social change. The analysis traces a trajectory from a rigid patriarchal order, within which religiously grounded norms and community expectations sharply constrained women's mobility, educational opportunities, and legal standing, to a contemporary reality in which schooling and employment increasingly reshape both individual life courses and collective gender imaginaries (Faraj Falah, 2023). The central research question, how specific social, cultural, and legal factors structure Druze women's status, was examined through the lenses of educational advancement, community dynamics, and personal-status arrangements governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Abu Reesh, 2025).

Framed conceptually by intersectionality and neo-patriarchy, the study delineates multiple layers of constraint while also foregrounding women's agency and the boundaries of the space within which they can claim recognition and initiate change (Falah, 2013; Kattoura, 2020). The empirical picture aligns with Abu-Hassan Nebuani's (2024) account of "simultaneity," whereby processes of change and preservation occur in parallel, and with Faraj Falah's (2023) documentation of Druze women's expanding educational and professional roles in the twenty-first century. Women do not merely exit traditional structures; rather, they renegotiate their roles from within religious, familial, and state institutions.

From a policy perspective, the findings underscore the necessity of culturally attuned, evidence-based interventions that recognise both the vulnerabilities and the resources of Druze women. Recommended measures include gender-sensitive educational reforms that challenge stereotypes, the expansion of high-quality employment opportunities in Druze localities, and the provision of welfare and legal services that address women's specific needs, particularly those of widows, divorcees, and rural residents (Bals, 2009; Faraj-Falah, 2009; Reineck et al., 2017). Abu Reesh's (2025) legal analysis makes clear that meaningful progress also requires institutional reform of the personal-status system, so that doctrinal provisions that are potentially protective of women's rights are not eroded in practice.

The dissertation also delineates a broad agenda for future inquiry. It calls for systematic comparative studies of Druze women in Lebanon and Syria; in-depth research on young women entering high-status professions and emerging fields such as technology and entrepreneurship; and sustained analysis of shifting forms of Druze masculinity alongside changes in women's social roles (Faiad, 2024; Faraj-Falah, 2009; Abu Reesh, 2025). Such work is needed not only to refine theoretical understandings of gender in minority settings, but also to inform a normative discourse on gender equality and social justice that is grounded in the lived realities of Druze communities (Nuwayhid, 1986).

Taken together, the body of literature reviewed and the empirical evidence presented here portray Druze women not simply as subjects constrained by tradition, but as active agents who navigate a dense mesh of religious, cultural, and state structures and, in doing so, gradually reconfigure gender relations in their communities (Faraj Falah, 2023; Abu-Hassan Nebuani, 2024). The challenge for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers is to sustain and deepen this momentum through research and action that clearly distinguishes theoretical background from empirical contribution, maintains methodological and ethical transparency, and supports Druze women's efforts to secure a more just and equitable future.

Summary of the Main Findings

The dissertation *The Status of Druze Women between Religious Law, Tradition, and Modernity: A Historical Evolution with a Focus on Change in Israel* depicts a gradual yet far-reaching transition from a context of severe social, legal, and familial constraints to one in which Druze women have, in recent decades, gained markedly broader access to higher education and paid employment. These expanded opportunities have altered women's economic and social positioning and opened new avenues for articulating their voices, claiming visibility in the public sphere, and contesting entrenched patriarchal norms (Faraj Falah, 2023).

A central aim of the study was to illuminate the gap between the rights that religious doctrine ostensibly accords women and the realities they encounter in their daily lives, while foregrounding the tension between an accelerating modern world and traditions that are difficult to relinquish (IZZEDDIN, 1993). By examining a wide range of contexts, including schooling, military service, and economic restructuring, the research shows how Druze women renegotiate their identities, develop a more autonomous voice, and confront gender discrimination and communal pressures (Falah, 2013; Faraj Falah, 2023).

In theoretical terms, the findings contribute to broader debates on women in minority communities situated between national belonging and modernity, and in practical terms, they suggest several directions for community- and state-level intervention. These include revising curricular materials so that they reflect women's historical and contemporary contributions to Druze heritage; expanding employment opportunities in peripheral Druze localities; and designing culturally sensitive welfare and legal services, particularly for widows, divorcees, and other women in vulnerable positions (Falah, 2016, 2018; Faraj-Falah, 2009). At the same time, the study underscores the importance of a balanced approach—one that respects communal and religious traditions while actively advancing the structural changes needed for Druze women to flourish in Israeli society (Bals, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

The Evolution of Druze Women's Status and the Implications of Education and Employment

A key component of the dissertation is the historical reconstruction of the shift from a rigid, normatively patriarchal order to a social context in which education and employment function as primary engines of change. The data indicate a sharp rise in the number of Druze women pursuing tertiary education and entering professions that were previously coded as male, such as law, medicine, and certain public-sector leadership roles. This trend destabilizes traditional gender expectations and reshapes local patterns of power and authority (Faraj Falah, 2023).

The study emphasises that the gap between religious doctrines that, at least in principle, promise gender equality and the lived experiences of women remains pronounced, although it is neither static nor one-dimensional. Socio-economic transformations and educational gains emerge as central drivers of expanded agency and of resistance to oppressive structures (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Falah, 2013). In concrete terms, education not only improves women's chances in the labour market, but also strengthens their capacity to negotiate within the family, to delay marriage or childbearing when they wish, and to participate more fully in community decision-making (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faraj Falah, 2023).

On the policy level, the findings point to the need to acknowledge these changing gender roles and to support them through institutional means: targeted educational reforms, removal of overt and covert barriers in the labour market, and programmes that extend women's presence and influence in public and communal arenas (Falah, 2018). The dissertation also calls for further empirical work on the factors that shape career paths among Druze women, on generational differences in attitudes and aspirations, and on cross-group comparisons with other minority populations in Israel so as to better understand the complex interplay of

tradition, modernity, and empowerment in the Druze context (Faraj-Falah, 2009; Faiad, 2024).

Cultural, Social, and Normative Implications

A central conclusion of the dissertation is that education and employment must be understood not only as socio-economic indicators, but also as cultural and normative mechanisms through which deep change is produced. As Druze women attain higher levels of education and enter the paid workforce, recognition of their social and economic contribution grows, and with it the legitimacy of their participation in intra-family and communal decision-making processes (IZZEDDIN, 1993; Faraj Falah, 2023).

The study makes clear that this transformation does not take place in isolation from tradition. Rather, it unfolds alongside powerful religious and cultural norms, which continue to shape expectations regarding modesty, marriage, and family honour. Consequently, the findings call for nuanced policy responses: reforms that do more than simply “open doors” and instead signal a gradual, context-sensitive challenge to patriarchal norms, all while maintaining respect for communal values and identities (Falah, 2013; Bals, 2009). In this sense, the dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on women’s rights in minority communities and offers a model for implementing culturally sensitive policy that engages, rather than ignores, local cultural logics (Faraj-Falah, 2009).

Challenges, Barriers, and Future Directions

Alongside the advances it documents, the dissertation also highlights persistent challenges. These include gaps between rights that exist at the normative or doctrinal level and their uneven realization in practice; structural barriers in the labour market that restrict women’s occupational mobility; and strong familial and communal pressures that limit the scope of autonomous choice, particularly around marriage, fertility, and residence (Nuwayhid, 1986; Falah, 2013).

Yet the analysis also shows that Druze women are not passive in the face of these constraints. Rather, they actively redefine their identities and rights within a changing social and political context, demonstrating a high degree of resilience and strategic adaptability (Nuwayhid, 1986; Faraj Falah, 2023).

Building on these insights, the dissertation proposes several directions for future research and action. It argues for expanded regional comparisons with Druze women in Lebanon and Syria to clarify what is specific to the Israeli context and what reflects broader Druze patterns (Faraj-Falah, 2009). It calls for studies that explore the integration of younger generations into technology, entrepreneurship, and other emerging sectors, as well as for systematic analyses of shifting male roles and masculinities within the

Druze community, based on the understanding that a full account of gender relations must consider both women's and men's changing positions (Faiad, 2024).

In sum, the dissertation presents a narrative of resilience and transformation: Druze women are portrayed not merely as objects of social forces, but as active agents reshaping gender relations within their families, communities, and institutions. The findings underscore the need for ongoing scholarly attention and for concrete, context-aware policy interventions to sustain this momentum and to help pave the way toward a more equitable future for all members of the community (Falah, 2018; Nuwayhid, 1986).

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