

# Music and Gender as Expressed in the Lives of Two Women Who Belong to an Arab-Christian Minority

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**Abstract:** This article describes the place of music in the lives of two women, mother and daughter, in the context of their socio-cultural environment. The study presented here addresses the role of social and cultural elements in determining the musical lives and musical identities of women in a minority group. The paper will explore this issue by presenting a case study of two women – a mother and her daughter that are part of the Arab Christian minority in the north of Israel. Music has always played an important role in the lives of both women but there are differences in the way the two women treat music in their lives.

The paper examines the social norms of the different generations of mother and daughter that are reflected in their musical lives. These social norms are explicitly linked to the status of these women in their community.

**Keywords:** gender, musical life stories, minority, identity, cultural norms

## 1. Introduction

This article describes the place of music in the lives of two women, mother and daughter, in the context of their socio-cultural environment. The mother, V., who passed away in November 2017, was an elderly woman when I met her, and she was a retired schoolteacher. Her daughter, J., is a piano teacher and a music teacher. Music has always played an important role in the lives of both women and the article will show the differences and similarities in the way they were able to realize their musical aspirations. The study examines the musical life stories of the two women in the context of the role of social and cultural norms in their society. The two women discussed here belong to a small Christian-Arab minority living within a large Muslim Arab minority, but also live in Israeli society that since the 1940's has consisted of a large Jewish majority<sup>1</sup>. Their musical world is explored here mainly from the point of view of gender, but also in the context of being part of a small minority living within two larger ones.

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<sup>1</sup> The Arab minority in Israel constitutes about 20% of the Israeli population and is located in three main geographic areas: the Galilee (60%), the east-center rural area (20%), the south (10%) and in mixed cities (10%). This minority differs from the Jewish Israeli majority in their Arabic language and their religions - Islam, Christianity and Druze. Christians in Israel are 7% of the Israeli Arab minority and 2% of all Israeli citizens.

### *1.1 Music and Gender in Ethnomusicology*

Ellen Koskoff is considered a pioneer of feminist ethnomusicology. In the 1970s, when Koskoff started her career as a researcher, she noticed that most ethnographies focused on women's initiation rites, birth or childcare, and women's musical activities associated with these events formed the usual field of study. Many of these studies did not address issues of women's status, inter-gender relations, or the effects of societal gender norms on women's musical behavior<sup>2</sup>. Koskoff posed two main questions in the context of music and gender that continue to be relevant today:

- 1) To what degree do a society's gender ideology and resulting gender-related behaviors affect its musical thought and practice?
- 2) How does music function in society to reflect or affect inter-gender relations?

Koskoff describes the developments in the field of music and gender in her book "A Feminist Ethnomusicology"<sup>3</sup>. She surveys the development of feminist ethnomusicology from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The book is divided into three parts: 1976-1990, 1990-2000, 2000-2012. In each part Koskoff describes her studies within the context of developments and changes in the feminist movement and ideology.

Diamond & Moissala claim that in the field of ethnomusicology in recent decades, gender in music is discussed more often than before<sup>4</sup>. The reason for this change is that many societies all over the world have undergone social, political and technological changes. Within these processes of change, music in general and gender have played a significant role in redefining the places of individuals, groups and nations<sup>5</sup>.

Magrini addresses the issue of gender in music by studying the differences in the performance practices of men and women of the Italian ballad. She argues that these differences reflect the fact that music making had very different goals and meanings for men and women in the past<sup>6</sup>. She also claims that studies carried out in recent years in the field of ethnomusicology have shown that gender roles strongly affect musical behavior all over the world<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Koskoff, Ellen (Ed). *Women and Music in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987, pp. 1-24.

<sup>3</sup> Koskoff, Ellen. *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writing on Music and Gender*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Moissala P. & Diamond B. (Eds.) *Music and Gender*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Magrini, Tullia. "Ballad and gender: Reconsidering narrative singing in Northern Italy." In *Ethnomusicology Online*, 1995, vol. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Magrini, Tullia (Ed.). *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 1.

Herndon argues that there are three topics we should consider regarding the issue of gender<sup>8</sup>: 1) Gender roles are self-organizing dynamic systems that respond to the amount of specificity of labor by sex in any given society. 2) Any given gender role acts in relation to other gender roles within that society. 3) Gender identities are contested identities.

Diamond argues that music is a domain in our lives through which we can express desire, establish relationships, and actualize self. In musical life stories, we can see more than the individual. These stories reflect values and beliefs that are socially repeated and therefore performatively reinforced as “normal” cultural values and beliefs. Oral narratives must be heard or read not in terms of what subjects accomplished but in terms of what they wanted and desired<sup>9</sup>.

Musical preferences or associations, the community of friends with whom one seeks to relate not only when joining a performing group but when idolizing one star performer or another, disliking one style or another, or even passively permitting a certain kind of sound to fill one’s space – these are potent modes of expressing desire, establishing relationships, and actualizing the self. Music and gender are both sites for negotiating an individual space within communities that tend to reinforce certain values and behaviors as normative. Musical life stories enable us to understand the relationship between these value systems<sup>10</sup>.

Diamond asks in what circumstances and by what means does gender emerge as an important issue; When an individual narrates his or her musical life, where is gender explicitly referenced to music, and is the discourse gendered in unconscious ways; What produces gender consciousness and what maintains gender blindness.<sup>11</sup>

### *1.2 Women’s Education in The Middle East in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

During the nineteenth century, Cairo and Istanbul served as the centers of influence in the Middle East, but from the middle of the nineteenth century, due to the legal and economic status given to Western missionaries and Catholic orders, Christian institutions started to establish schools all over the Middle East. These Christian organizations regarded the education of girls one of their most important missions. In the beginning, the schools served

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<sup>8</sup> Herndon, Marcia. “The place of Gender within Complex, Dynamic Musical Systems.” In Moissala & Diamond, *Music and Gender*, p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> Diamond, Beverley. 2000. “The Interpretation of Gender Issues in Musical Life Stories of Prince Edward Islanders.” In Moissala & Diamond, *Music and Gender*, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Diamond, “The Interpretation of Gender Issues,” p. 107.

the European populations in the region, but gradually local Arab Christians families began to send their daughters to these institutions<sup>12</sup>.

American missionaries were mainly those who controlled the education of girls in Istanbul and other central places in the Middle East such as Lebanon and Palestine. They established Christian elementary and high schools. These schools became the focus of attraction for many girls, since the local religious communities, especially those of the Arab villages, did not meet the needs of the Christian residents<sup>13</sup>.

These schools provided food and clothing for poor families but also aspired to attract elite girls because of the impact their families had on society. The schools attracted the top Arab-Christian strata because of class divisions that characterized Arab societies at that time. One of the main goals of missionary schools was to educate the girls in accordance with Western social norms. From various autobiographies, we learn that many of the girls who attended these schools and adopted Western values and norms moved away from the socio-cultural norms of the society from which they came and even criticized them<sup>14</sup>.

### *1.3 Arab Women's status in the State of Israel*

With the establishment of the State of Israel (1948), Arab women in Israel received equal legal rights, but their political and social achievements until today remain far inferior to the achievements of Jewish women in Israel. Gender inequality in Arab society in Israel is still prevalent, and this is due to a clash between modernization and tradition in Arab society in Israel<sup>15</sup>.

For minority groups in a multinational and multicultural society, education is of special importance. The education system can be a progressive factor aiding development and advancement or a conservative factor that fosters social stagnation. In the modern state, university and education have always been seen as a means of raising the professional and social status of the minority group<sup>16</sup>. Despite the improvement in women's status which has taken place in Israel in recent decades, particularly in the fields of professional training, employment and women's higher education, the status of women in the Arab minority in Israel is still problematic in comparison with that of women in the Jewish population or of

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<sup>12</sup> Grinberg, Ayala. "Women's Education between Cairo and Istanbul at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century." In R. Roded, & N. Efrati (Eds.). *Women and Gender in the Middle East in the Twentieth Century*. Jerusalem: Magnes Pub, 2009, pp. 7-26. (In Hebrew)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Nohad, Ali. "Women in the Arab World from an Historical-Sociological Aspect." In *Women in the Arab Society in Israel*. Tel Aviv University: Moshe Dayan Center, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Nohad, Ali. *Minorities and Higher Education. In Representation of Arab Citizens in the Institutions of Higher Education in Israel*. Haifa and Jerusalem: Tira Press, 2013, pp. 13-17.

women in the Western world<sup>17</sup>. The percentage of women in the Arab minority who are employed outside their home or who acquire a career is about 22%. This is very low compared with the Western world; but, in the context of this article, it is important to note that the proportion of employed Arab-Christian women in Israel is much higher, about 42%. Thus, the situation of Christian-Arab women is different from that of Moslem Arab women, but nevertheless, Arab society, including the Christian minority in Israel, is still considered conservative and generally does not encourage women to develop a career that requires a long absence of the woman from her family and children<sup>18</sup>.

Among recent studies that investigate young female Arab artists that are part of the visual arts scene in Israel, Marnin-Distelfeld studied the work of three women artists who by her definition are ‘double-minority’. Their ‘double-minority’ status comes from being Arab women, raised in patriarchal-conservative communities, together with living and working among a Jewish majority in the Western-based environment of Israel. Through analysis of their art, the study explored the artistic strategies, topics, and styles used for negotiating their identity as a ‘double-minority’<sup>19</sup>.

Dekel discusses the ways in which a female Arab artist in Israel relates to the subject of perception. Employing the senses, she seeks to undermine such notions as the feminine and the masculine. She problematizes essentialist attitudes and highlights the political intersections of perception and gender, and includes other categories of identity such as class, race, and religion<sup>20</sup>.

Studies of the musical lives of women in Arab society in Israel are almost nonexistent. There is one study of the musical life of an Arab Christian female singer in Israel that the author of the current article published. This study explored the performance of this singer in expressing aspects of gender and cultural identity<sup>21</sup>.

The study investigated three main questions: what the role of gender in is shaping the musical lives of the two women; does the fact that they are part of a religious and cultural minority matter in the musical life stories of both; How significant is the fact that the two women belong to different generations in the context of their musical life stories.

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<sup>17</sup> Haidar Aziz, *Arab Society in Israel: Population, Society, Economy*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2009, pp. 252-279. (Hebrew)

<sup>18</sup> Kaufman, I, Khaul, A.B, & Sa’ar, A. *Arab Society in Israel*, Vol. 2 – “Social Fabric: Ethnicity, Family, Gender.” Tel Aviv: The open University Press, 2012, pp. 252-291. (Hebrew)

<sup>19</sup> Marnin-Distelfeld, Shahar. “A Space of Their Own: Arab Women Artists in Israel: Identity of a ‘Double-Minority’,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 19 (2018), pp. 65-83.

<sup>20</sup> Dekel, Tal. “Subversive Uses of Perception: The Case of Palestinian Artist Anisa Ashkar,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 40, no. 2 (2015), pp. 300-308.

<sup>21</sup> Marks, E. “Music and Identity: Varied Aspects in the Singing of an Arab Israeli Singer,” *Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, 2010, pp. 57-71.

#### *1.4 Methods of Collecting Data*

The study presented here is based on the qualitative-ethnographic theoretical framework and consisted of interviews with the two women presented here, observations and written documents.

### **2. The Mother V. (1933-2017)**

V. was born in 1933 in the Arab village of Rame in the northern Galilee, and she was the eldest of three sisters<sup>22</sup>. The father was a dominant figure during her childhood. “My father had a major impact on my life as a child, especially with regard to my education and music. He was the driving force in my education and my development in music”. V. talks about her father as “very educated and liberal in his views”. He led a very enlightened life and his house was a meeting place for Arab and Jewish scholars in the 1930s and 1940s. V. was the eldest daughter and had two younger sisters. She said that the three of them received a lot of attention and were given the best education available in the area at that time.

Music had been an important component of her life since early childhood. In our interviews, I asked V. about the musical culture in her environment, and she said that music came from various sources. Her earliest memories were the Arab lullabies and children’s songs her mother used to sing to her. A second source of music was Arab folk songs and dances at family events like weddings. She remembered that she had loved this music because it was very lively, and the melodies were simple and rhythmical. She also remembered that all the performers in these parties were male. When she was about twelve, a cousin of hers came to visit from Chile and she sang in a party. V. was very surprised that a woman dared to sing in public: “This was very unusual for us; we were not allowed to sing in public even when we were young”. In the many conversations with V., she often talked about the situation of women in the Arab society in which she grew up. The picture that emerges from her words is that the immediate family, especially her father, was educated and had cultural contacts with the British government that ruled Palestine at the time, and with Jewish cultural figures as well. But, despite this, there were clear restrictions on what was permitted to both women and girls.

Another source of music in V.’s childhood was the Greek Orthodox chants in her church. Her father was the main cantor, and she remembers that his singing was very

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<sup>22</sup> Rame is an Arab village in the Galilee in northern Israel. This village was founded in the 17th century during the Ottoman rule. It is a mixed village that consists of Christians, Druze, and Muslims. In the 1930s, most of the inhabitants were Christians and a few were Druze. At that time, the area was under the rule of the British Mandate.

impressive to her as a child. She loved the chants and she wanted to sing in the church choir, but women participated only in the communal singing, and they were not allowed to be part of the choir that consisted only of men.

Arab popular music was another component of her musical world as a child. The family had a radio set and they used to listen to Arab music on the Arab radio stations of the Middle East. She loved Arab music and listened to the “Great Arab music”<sup>23</sup>. V. said that she was especially impressed by the female figures of Arab music. She admired these female singers as a little child and later as a young woman, because the Arab society she was part of did not accept women as performers. She regarded these singers as brave women that managed to overcome the social and cultural obstacles of their society.

When V. was a child, in the 1930’s, it was customary to educate girls only up to fifth or sixth grade. Her father decided that his daughters would not stop their education like the other girls in their village. At first, she attended the elementary school in her village, but when she was eight years old her father managed to get a position as headmaster of the Catholic school for boys in Tiberias. Thus, the family moved to Tiberias and V. was sent to the Catholic school for girls in which the language of instruction was Arabic. Her family belonged to the Arab Christian communities in the Middle East that sent their daughters to Christian schools for better education<sup>24</sup>. In this school V. started to play the piano: “I immediately fell in love with the piano”.

She had private lessons, and her teacher was an Italian nun that spoke only Italian, so they communicated by hand signals and in Italian, a language that V. did not know so well. Despite these difficulties, V. says that she learned a lot from this teacher, and she became quite good on the piano. This was also her first encounter with Western classical music. “At first the Western music sounded foreign and strange to me but very soon I loved it”. V. spent many hours playing the piano and it became a central element in her life.

When she was 12, the family moved back to Rame, since her father had been appointed headmaster of the boy’s school in the village. The transition back to the village was very difficult for V.. First, there was no educational framework for her, as education for girls was only up to fifth grade. Her father decided not to stop her education, so she continued to study at home under her father’s guidance. Another important reason for the difficulty she experienced in leaving the school in Tiberias was that she had to stop her

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<sup>23</sup> This term refers to the music of a group of singers and musicians that was active from the 1920s until the 1970s. The prominent figures of this group in Egypt were Muhamed Abdel Wahab, Um Kulthum, Farid Al Atrash, Abdel Halim Hafez, Riad a-Sinbati and Zakaria Ahmed. In Syria and Lebanon, the renowned figures were Sabah Al Fakri, Wadi a-Safi and Feiruz.

<sup>24</sup> Grinberg, Ayala. *Creating the Newly Educated Arab Women and their World: Girl’s Education in Mandate Palestine*. PhD Diss., Hebrew University, 2004.

piano lessons because she did not have a piano at home or in the village, and there were no piano teachers in the whole area.

After they had been in the village for two years, and at the age of fourteen, her father decided to send her to Lebanon to the American high school for girls in the city of Sidon. The school was allied with the American Protestant Church. In our conversations, V. described her new school in Lebanon as “a whole new world for me”. She discovered a new world in many areas: a new way of life that included independence, responsibility, new lessons like sports and sports clothes, music, choral singing, prayers in a different style and “electricity all the time”. Her favorite subjects were the music lessons, the school choir and of course the renewed piano lessons. She progressed greatly in her piano playing: “I reached a high level and played advanced compositions by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and others. My teachers told me that I had reached an almost professional level.” The teachers who taught her expected her to continue learning and become a professional pianist. This was also the first time she was allowed and encouraged to sing. The choir introduced her to Western harmony, and the piano continued to be a central component of her studies. The language of instruction at school was English, and V. mentioned that she became so proficient in English that she eventually considered it her second language.

What V. describes when she talks about her school in Lebanon is exposure to Western culture, and through her own description of her experience in the American school it seems that she experienced a significant process of change in her cultural values.

In 1952, V. graduated from high school and returned to her family in the village. Her father bought her a piano as a graduation gift. This was the first piano in her village. She said that the piano was an unfamiliar instrument in her environment and the classical Western music that V. played on it was not at all welcome to her family and friends. People in her village wanted to hear the Arab melodies but the piano cannot produce the quarter tones typical of Arab music, and anyway, she preferred Western classical music. V. was very disappointed by this reaction and told me that her music became just a private hobby. For 10 years after her graduation, V. lived with her parents in Rame, refusing to marry men her parents tried to match her with.

In 1953, when she was only 19, the Israeli ministry of education appointed her as a schoolteacher. She was the first female teacher in her village, and she continued to be a teacher in Arab schools in the Galilee for many years. During her teaching years, V. said, music was so important to her that she used music as part of her teaching. She taught the children to play the recorder and integrated Arab children’s songs into her lessons. She said, “music was so important to me that I thought my pupils should have music as part of their lives too”.

In 1960, when she was 28, V. married C., a banker. V. herself mentioned that this was a late age for a girl in her environment to get married. Immediately after the marriage,



the couple moved to Naharia, a Jewish city in the northern coast of Israel<sup>25</sup>. V. explained that she wanted to live and raise her children in a “cultural environment that I liked”.

The couple continued to live in Naharia for the rest of their lives and had three children, two sons and a daughter, J. Although V. continued to play the piano at home, she explained that lack of free time to practice and the many obligations as a wife and a mother affected her music and her level of performance. She added “but I insisted that my daughter would learn to play the piano”.

### **3. The Daughter J.**

V.’s daughter, J., was born in 1969 in Naharia, the Jewish town her parents had chosen as their home. She grew up in a bilingual and bicultural environment – at home and within her larger family the language was Arabic, but in the Jewish neighborhood and in the Jewish kindergarten she attended, she spoke Hebrew. When she was six years old, her parents decided to send her to an Arab school in the nearby Arab village Mazra’a, where her mother was part of the teaching staff and where the language of instruction was Arabic. She remembers that her friends were mostly the Jewish children of her neighborhood, so the Hebrew language continued to be part of her life.

The main figure in J.’s early life was her mother, and she was the main influence on J.’s musical life. J.’s musical environment in her childhood consisted mainly of classical Western music. She heard Arab music only at family events like weddings, family gatherings during holidays and family meals. Her mother had a large collection of Western classical music records, and she used to listen to these records together with J. in the evenings. J. also remembers that in her early childhood her mother played the piano almost every day and she used to sit near the piano and listen to her. “I loved her playing and used to watch her fingers on the piano”. V. kept all her sheet music books of compositions by the main Western classical composers.

The community in Nahariya consisted mainly of German immigrants who had arrived in the 1930s, so the culture in the city was based on German and European culture. J. remembers that her mother used to take her almost every week to a concert of European classical music. “From my early childhood I listened to live concerts of classical music, and this is the music I love and prefer to this day.”

When J. was seven, her mother sent her to a piano teacher in Naharia, a Jewish-Hungarian lady. After four years the teacher told V. that J. was very advanced, and she should start studying at the conservatorium in Naharia. Her new teacher in the conservatorium was Tamara, a Jewish-Russian lady who taught her until graduation. J. was

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<sup>25</sup> Naharia is a Jewish town in the Western Galilee. The town was established in 1934 by German Jewish immigrants who fled the Nazi regime.

encouraged by her mother to expand her musical education, so in addition to her weekly piano lessons, and she started to study Western music theory, harmony, ear training and solfège. She continued her studies at this institution and eventually received her diploma from the conservatorium when she finished high school.

J. began teaching piano when she was still at high school at the age of 17. A relative of the family from a nearby Arab village asked her to teach his daughter to play, and since then she has been a piano teacher. She taught both Jewish and Arab children. “I think I was the only Arab piano teacher in the whole of the northern Galilee”. She mentioned that her mother was very surprised that Arab families sent their children to learn Western piano music; “it was different from when I came back to my village from Lebanon, and nobody wanted to study Western music”.

After graduating from high-school, J. wanted to continue her piano studies at an academic institution, but both her parents wanted her to have “a practical profession”. Her mother explained that she thought J. should have a profession that would give her some security so she would not be completely dependent on her husband. J. thinks that the real reason behind her parent’s refusal was the fact that the academic institutions she wished to be accepted to were in Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem, far from the town where she lived. That meant she would have to leave her home and live in one of these two cities. She explained that within her family and the Christian-Arab society she was part of, a young unmarried woman is not supposed to live alone. She is expected to live at her parents’ home until she is married. Although her wishes were different, J. accepted her parents’ decision and studied to be an optometrist, but in her words: “I hated it”. She has never worked as an optometrist.

In 1989 when she was 20 years old, J. married and had to move from Jewish Naharia to Kfar Yasif – an Arab village that like Rame consisted of Christians, Druze and Muslims. She confessed that this change was very hard for her. The social and cultural environment of the Arab village was very different from her Jewish environment in Naharia - “I especially missed the concerts of Western music that were part of the cultural life in Naharia”. When I asked why she did not insist on staying in Naharia, she explained that she had to follow the social norms of her husband’s family and move to her husband’s house. Despite these changes, J. continued playing and teaching piano at home. Eventually, she accepted a position as a music teacher in Arab schools in the Galilee.

When she was 21 her first daughter was born, and she explained that now it was completely impossible for her to think of continuing her academic studies since she lived in the north of Israel and to do that, she would have had to live outside her home for a few days every week. She felt that she could not leave her family to study in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. “I knew that my family and the society around me would not accept my leaving my child. In my culture, a mother cannot go to study if she cannot live at home”. When asked if she resented that situation, she said that although she wanted to continue studying

music, she accepted the fact that in her cultural surroundings it was not possible. “It is not like in Jewish society in Israel. My female friends from Naharia continued their academic studies and married after they finished their studies. Some of them even studied abroad. Two of my friends who studied with me in the conservatorium of music became professional pianists”. She mentioned that she continued to practice playing the piano every day and maintained her piano teaching. In that conversation J. added that she did not think she would have had the courage to become a performing pianist “I think it is impossible for a woman to become a real pianist if she wants a family and children”.

In our conversations, J. stressed that all those years she had felt the lack of academic education in her life. She said that she tried to enhance her musical knowledge by reading academic materials but that was not enough for her. In 2011, when she was 42, J. decided to complete her academic studies in the new music department in Zefat College in the upper Galilee. Zefat college is situated less than an hour’s drive from J.’s home, so she could study without disrupting her family life<sup>26</sup>.

J. graduated in 2014, and in 2019 she completed her master’s degree in musical education. Today she is chief instructor of musical education in the Arab schools of the Galilee. She continues to play the piano at home and teach piano lessons, and plans to complete her Ph.D. in music.

#### **4. Discussion**

The musical lives of the two women presented here were described in terms of three issues: the gender issue; the issue of belonging to a minority group<sup>27</sup>; and the issue of the different generations of the two women and the influences of these differences on their musical lives.

V.’s father was special in that he considered the education of his daughter to be important even though around him in the Arab village it was not acceptable. It should be noted that this was possible due to the establishment of Christian missions in the Middle East and the founding of schools for girls by these missions. Sending V. to a boarding school in Lebanon was a brave step on his part. But this openness nonetheless had its limits; he did not allow V. when she graduated from high school to develop a career as a musician and pursue academic studies, because it was related to leaving home. As V. said, “An unmarried woman cannot leave her parents’ house”.

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<sup>26</sup> The publicly funded academic colleges in Israel were established in the nineties of the twentieth century with the aim of enabling people living in the periphery of Israel (the Galilee and the South) to acquire academic degrees. One result of this was that women from the Arab minority in the South and the Galilee began studying in these colleges without leaving their families.

<sup>27</sup> These two issues are interrelated because the status of these two women is connected to the fact that they belong to a minority that is traditional and conservative.

Diamond argues that oral narratives must be heard or read not in terms of what subjects accomplished but in terms of what they wanted and desired.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the mother, her love for the piano and for music is obvious from her stories and from her daughter's stories about her mother. She worked hard to reach a high level of performance on the piano, especially during her time in the American boarding school in Lebanon. Her father did encourage her to study and play the piano. But there were still social restrictions concerning the opportunities for a young woman to become a performer. V. could not pursue her professional desires and wishes. She was aware of the differences between her musical ambitions and the reality of the situation of women in her social environment. She refers to her circumstances as a girl and as a woman in many of the interviews and conversations. On one hand she acknowledges that her father was exceptional within his social environment in his efforts to enable her to get a general education and musical training as mentioned above. V. said that education more than a hundred years ago was a rare thing. In addition, a woman had no control over her life and could not make important decisions about her fate. In V.'s words "women really had a hard life in those days". The father in the past had full control as head of the family over his wife and children and they obeyed him in everything out of awe and respect. This is how the families behaved at the time". She considered her father to be advanced in his ideas compared to the other men in their society. But despite this, she was forbidden by her father to pursue a professional life as a musician. When V. finished her education in Lebanon, in the early fifties, the society she returned to was still traditional and conservative, and as a woman, the option of becoming a professional pianist was not open for her.

V. left her parents village and the society in which she grew up after her marriage. She raised her children in a Jewish-Israeli city. But when her three children, including J., reached school age, she sent them to the Arab school in the village where she taught, thus not completely disconnecting them from their Arab society and culture. Her daughter J. was very much encouraged by her mother in her piano and music studies, but, when she wanted to leave home and continue her academic music studies, her parents did not agree. The reasoning was similar to that in V.'s father's words, "a daughter does not leave her parents' home until her marriage." It should be noted that J.'s two brothers were allowed to pursue academic studies and live outside their parent's home. Even though the daughter belonged to a different generation than her mother and she grew up outside the Arab village and society, some of the restricting norms for women were still a factor in her musical life and ambitions. J. was born in the state of Israel as a citizen with legal rights including education opportunities for women. Yet the fact that her parents changed their place of residence to a Jewish community did not change her family's fundamental cultural beliefs about women's status and rules of conduct.

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<sup>28</sup> Diamond, "The Interpretation of Gender Issues," p. 100.

The different generations of the two women are reflected in the attitude of the surrounding society toward piano music. When V. returned from the American boarding school in Lebanon, the immediate environment of her family and the village was not interested in her music. However, the daughter's music was received by the immediate family and by the society in the Arab village that J. moved to after her marriage, in a very positive way. The village families asked her to teach their children how to play the piano and she was treated with respect and appreciation as a musician. The new generation, J.'s peers, have grown up like her in a multicultural society with access to Western music in addition to Arabic music.

The musical culture of J. differs from her mother's in that Arabic music, which was a part of the mother's musical culture, plays a very small part in J.'s musical culture, both in the past and in the present. The music she listens to or performs on the piano is almost entirely Western classical music. In addition, as a music teacher J. uses Western music in her curriculum and not Arabic music, even though all her students are from the Arab minority.

Unlike her mother, J. managed to continue her connection with the piano by becoming a piano teacher in the village she moved to after her marriage. Together with the teaching, she continued to practice and maintain a high level of performance on the piano. J. eventually achieved academic success and a successful career in music, but this was only possible when the conditions of study and career did not conflict with the norms of the family and the Arab society in which she lived. It should be noted here that J. encouraged and helped her two daughters to continue their academic studies in institutions outside their home, one in Germany and the other in Jerusalem.

## **5. Conclusions**

Gender emerges as an important issue in two women's descriptions of their musical life. The mother refers to her situation when, as a girl, she was not allowed to sing in her church because "only men could be in the choir", and later when she was not allowed to leave her home and follow her wish to be a pianist and a musician, she was conscious that this was because she was a woman. It was obvious from the conversations with the daughter that she was aware of her mother's difficulties as a girl and as a woman in her musical life.

The daughter, J., was also aware of the norms she had to follow as a woman regarding her musical ambitions and although she did not like the situation, she accepted the fact that she had to follow her husband to his village, and she could not study in an academic institution because she was not allowed to leave her family.

Both women are part of the Christian-Arab minority in Israel, which is still a conservative and patriarchal society, but the different generations in which the mother and daughter lived resulted in certain changes in the context of music in their lives. Because of

the limitations in the environment of the Arab village where the mother grew up, she decided to move to a Jewish town and raise her children there. Although the daughter J. could not fulfill all her musical ambitions, she grew up in a different generation and a in a different environment than her mother and this led to fewer restrictions, and eventually she was able to develop more professional capacities in music than her mother.