**Identity formation among mixed families in a conflictual society: The case of Jewish-Muslim families in Israel**

**Abstract**

Mixed families offer a unique opportunity to explore religion, ethnicity, and nationalism as interrelated aspects of identity. In Israel, intermarriages of Muslims and Jews are particularly interesting because the complex tensions between these identities are intertwined with the national conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. However, such mixed families have rarely been studied. This study investigates the ways in which mixed families construct their identities in the context of a conflictual society. It is based on ethnographic work I conducted in sixteen Jewish-Muslim families. The findings indicate two patterns of identity formation: single identity, in which one spouse transitions to the other spouse’s culture, and hybrid identity, in which each spouse takes part in the other’s religious and cultural practices. This article also demonstrates how socioeconomic status affects the choices that mixed families make as they pursue identity formation in the context of a conflictual society.

**Keywords**: Identity construction, Mixed families, Conflictual societies, Intermarriages, Interreligious family, Israel.

**Introduction**

The study of mixed identity and mixed families, as well as of conflictual societies and national conflicts, has flourished in recent years. Nevertheless, studies dealing with mixed families in conflictual societies remain extremely rare (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). This is so even though such families provide an opportunity to explore the complex relationships between groups in conflictual societies and to learn about the processes of identity formation precisely in the context where which they might contribute the most to understanding the tensions between groups. This is because in conflictual societies, every decision relating to family identity formation may have major significance, highlighting ethnic, national, religious, and status boundaries and, as such, creating friction (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017), and these decisions have a major influence on the place of the family within the conflictual society (Smooha and Hanf, 1992). Therefore, in conflictual societies, mixed families must navigate very carefully to avoid conflict within the nuclear family or between the nuclear and the extended family to avoid social exclusion (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

In Israel, mixed families of Jews and Muslims offer a unique example of interaction between conflicted ethno-national groups, where the two populations intersect within the most intimate of social systems. These families, which also reflect macro socio-political conflicts between Muslim and Jews, constitute a significant arena for exploring the identity processes of religious, ethnic, gender, and national identities within a conflictual society.

The objective of this study is to identify the ways in which mixed families construct their identities in the context of a conflictual society. The research questions for the study are as follows: how do mixed families construct their identities, and what factors affect their deliberations as they choose how to construct their identity? Identity construction among mixed families in Israel has not been sufficiently examined. This pioneering study is a contribution to the understanding of identity construction among mixed families in the unique context of a conflictual society. I employ an ethnographic method based on participant observation of the daily lives of the mixed families and in-depth interviews with the spouses and children of these families, as well as relatives from the extended family.

In this study, I identify two patterns in mixed Jewish-Muslim families, namely, families that adopt the ethnic-national identity of one of the spouses and families that adopt a hybrid identity. I argue that the socioeconomic status of the families affects their deliberations in identity formation, considerations that can lead them to choose one of the two patterns. In this article, I present case studies of two families, each representing one of these patterns.

# Identity Formation among Mixed Families

Identity formation within mixed families has received extensive study in the past, as has that occurring in in families consisting of immigrants and natives (e.g., Cerchiaro, 2019; Luke and Luke, 1999; Therrien, 2012) and families consisting of different groups within the same society (e.g., Nelson, 2015; Sagiv, 2017). Such mixed families include interracial, interfaith, interethnic, and transnational families, as well as other types. Although the axes on which the complex identity of the family is determined (cultural, ethnic, national, and others) are important, the specific type of intersection usually relates to the viewpoint of the specific study less than to the ontological differences among the families themselves. Therefore, in this current study, I prefer the general term “mixed families,” which brings together families with differences along national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic axes.

Modern colonialist thought tends to see identity as dichotomous, and it distinguishes between the identity of the colonizer and the colonized in an absolute sense. With the development of post-colonialist theory, more complex perceptions of identity have developed (Luke and Luke, 1999; Sagiv, 2017), seeing it as complex, dynamic, and fluid (Sagiv, 2017). Identity is complex in that it has many dimensions, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, and others (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017; Luke and Luke, 1999). It is also dynamic in that it goes through continual alteration and reformatting throughout the course of life (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010), in response to changes and life events (Le Gall and Meintel, 2015; Nelson, 2015). It is also fluid in the sense that it might be different in different social contexts even within the same period, especially when a hybrid identity is adopted (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012; Sagic, 2017).

In the terminology of Bhabha (1994), these characteristics of identity allow the formation of a third space, where encounter and friction exist between different groups in the society. Mixed families may be the most significant example of those in this space, because within them, the identities of both groups are constructed and formed together in the most intimate way (Luke and Luke, 1999; Sagiv, 2017). The question then becomes, how do mixed families construct their identities?

Collet (2015) identifies three main patterns in the identity construction of mixed families. In the first, the partner from the minority group adopts the culture of the dominant or majority group while still minimally preserving their original culture. The second is the opposite, where the partner from the majority group adopts the culture of the minority group, and the family as a whole joins the minority group. In the third, a balance is struck, in which the identity of the family is jointly organized on a foundation of equality, forging a new identity that may not necessarily be formed on top of the previous patterns (Collet, 2015; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

This new identity, which is built from some combination of the identities of the different groups from which the spouses come, can be called a “hybrid identity” (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Sagiv, 2017). The nature of such an identity is a subject of disagreement, however. On the one hand, a hybrid identity is described as a mosaic of identities, a product of the struggle of the family to construct its identity, and it reflects the tensions that may arise between the differences in identities within the family and society (Sagiv, 2017). Such hybrid identities are the result of mixing and combining elements of different national, cultural, and ethnic identities (Ducu and Telegdi-Csetri, 2018; Erentaitė et al., 2018; Sagiv, 2017). On the other hand, a hybrid identity is characterized as the result of the creation of a new identity (Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012; Sagiv, 2017) that is an articulation and a transformation of the identities from which it is composed and not merely a combination of them (Bhabha, 1994; Miled and de Oliveira Andreotti, 2015). Furthermore, hybridity itself is described as a new mixed identity (Le Gall and Meintel, 2015; Therrien, 2020).

Is a hybrid identity nothing more than the selective adoption of components from the identities of two groups, and if so, how is this selective adoption expressed? Alternatively, is it the creation of a new identity, and if so, what is the nature of this new identity? The current study seeks to deepen and broaden our understanding of the nature of hybrid identity in relation to mixed families in conflictual societies.

**Mixed Families in Conflictual Societies**

A conflictual society is one in which at least two significant groups exist that have significant gaps between them regarding resource distribution, ideological perceptions, identity, culture, policy preferences, definition of state, and other issues (Lerner, 2010; Smooha, 2019). The more that a society is regarded as conflictual, the more central the role of such conflict in the relationship between groups and the more severe the conflict (Smooha, 2019).

Certain conditions characterize conflictual societies and might have an impact on identity formation in mixed families. First, mixed families in conflictual societies have fewer options available when it comes to choices and identity formation strategies are more limited. The national, ethnic, religious, and status boundaries between groups are more salient than in non-conflictual societies, and the identities present have more severity in relation to ethno-national conflict. This requires the members of mixed families in conflictual societies to “walk on eggshells” in their identity formation, to avoid friction within the nuclear family, between the nuclear and the extended family, and between the nuclear or extended family and society at large )Conrad, 2014; Donnan, 1990; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017; Hilker, 2012; Jacobson, Amoateng, and Heaton, 2004; McDoom, 2016).

Second, in conflictual societies, mixed families may be exposed to the threat of physical violence (Donnan, 1990; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). They also run the risk of stigmatization from each opposing conflictual group (Gaines, 2017). Each group in a conflictual society tends to perceive the other group to be an enemy, and marriage to a member of that group might be perceived to be treason or collaboration with the enemy. For their part, mixed families are considered to be a threat to ethnic purity, and therefore, they may be exposed to threats from radical movements that strive to maintain ethnic purity (Donna, 1990; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

Third, in conflictual societies, choices made with regard to identity formation on the future of the family have a crucial impact. For instance, within a conflictual society, many decisions, such as whether to adopt the identity of the majority group or that of the minority group, are not merely decisions concerning cultural style, lifestyle, religious practice, or language but may also have long-term repercussions for the quality of life of the family and its offspring (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

One of the closely studied conflictual societies in terms of identity in mixed families is that of Northern Ireland. Hayes and McAllister (2009) found that attitudes regarding social institutions in Northern Ireland dictated the behavior of that mixed couples display in everyday life. Todd’s (2018b) research in Northern Ireland shows that changes in people’s social identities that occur in the context of mixed marriages are not sustained in divided and conflictual societies. She finds that some individuals begin with a strong sense of group solidarity and, when they marry someone from the another group, this solidarity is challenged for a short period. In a divided society, social structures and symbolic syntax make changes to someone’s social identity more difficult. A main reason for this is that the prevalent language of nationalism can create a taboo that hinders a couple’s communication, making it difficult to form a common moral language because every expression is charged with nationalist interpretations (Todd, 2018b).

# The Israeli Context: Israeli Society as a Conflictual Society

The main conflict within Israeli society is the ethno-national one between Jews and Muslim Arabs (Smooha, 2002). The State of Israel has a population of nearly 9 million inhabitants, where 74.5% are Jews of all backgrounds and 20.9% are Arabs (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Ethnic conflicts tend to be severe, continual, and uncontrolled. Disputes over territory and economic resources are an important part of ethnic conflict, but most such conflicts relate to control of non-economic resources, such as prestige or political authority (Williams, 1994). Where such conflicts continue without resolution, hostility and hatred between the groups accumulates (Kreisberg, 1993). Then, successive generations are raised into a reality of conflict, and as a result of a history of unsuccessful attempts at resolution, the conflicts are perceived to be unresolvable. Where uncontrolled conflicts demand significant material and psychological investment, due to cognitive dissonance, they are accompanied by the generation of an ideology that justifies the conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Kreisberg, 1993). These characteristics well describe the conflict between Jews and Muslim Arabs in Israel, and they have important implications for the understanding of identity within both groups (Smooha, 2019).

One aspect of ethnic conflict in Israel is the ethnic stratification. In Israel, the ethnic Arab minority does not have equal status to the hegemonic Jewish majority. Due to this status gap, the Arab minority faces a dilemma in its identity formation in relation to the Jewish majority, namely, whether it should grant the Jewish majority group the role of a positive reference group or deny it. This dilemma affects the complex identity processes among Muslim Arabs in Israel (Smooha, 2019).

The ethnic conflict in the Israeli society falls between the dominant majority, most of whom arrived in Israel in waves of migration, and the native minority. The state is considered to belong to the Jewish majority and is not identified with the Arab minority, although they are native to the place. The resulting conflict over state and land ownership is upheld by cultural and ethnic differences, which make it difficult for a collective Israeli identity to be developed that can be shared by both Jews and Arabs (Smooha, 2019). The common perception in part of Jewish society that Arabs are enemies makes it even more difficult to construct such an identity (Smooha, 2002). This background is necessary for understanding the complexity of identity formation within mixed families in Israel.

# Mixed Families in Israel

In this study, a mixed family is one in which one of the spouses is Jewish and the other is Muslim. Although this division specifically refers to religion, in the Israeli context, the Jewish-Muslim divide also reflects the Jewish-Arab ethno-national divide, such that Jewish-Muslim families are not only interfaith but also cross the main divide in Israeli society, that of religion. In Israel, there is no such thing as civil marriage, only religious marriage. The authority to wed rests with the authorities of the religion to an individual belongs. This means that individuals of different faiths cannot marry in Israel, but they can do so outside of Israel and then come home to register the marriage (DellaPergola, 2017). Due to these restrictions, mixed couples must choose one of three practices to inaugurate their shared lives:

The first is to live together without marrying. The second is to travel abroad to have a civil marriage and return to have it approved by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior. In the third, one spouse converts to the other’s religion. It is usually the Jewish spouse who converts to Islam because, in Israel, conversion to Judaism requires a long and complex process that can take many years, but conversion to Islam is easier to facilitate.

The first significant study of mixed Jewish and Arab families in Israel was that conducted in 1969 by the anthropologist Eric Cohen. He describes 12 mixed couples with Arab men and Jewish women. The women were in each case of Sephardic origin and had left their parents’ homes at an early age and, in some cases, worked as prostitutes before they married Arab men. The Arab men were also marginalized in their Arab society. Cohen does not conclude that mixed marriages bring Jewish and Arab populations closer together. On the contrary, he indicates that it creates greater hostility between Jews and Arabs and sharpens in-group solidarity, especially in the Jewish community (Cohen, 1969). Cohen’s study (1969) does not focus on identity formation in these families.

Since Cohen, a few researchers, mainly in the social work field (e.g., Nasser, 1993; Kessari, 2001; Cohen-Golani, 2011; Hakak, 2016), have performed studies in this area. These studies largely focus on mixed families from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They usually adopt a therapeutic approach and do not focus on identity formation. Sagiv (2017) centers identity formation among mixed families in Israel but only within families mixed between two ethnic groups in the Jewish population in Israel, so the main divide in Israeli society does not pass within these families.

**Methodology and Participants**

This study is based on ethnographic work I conducted, including in-depth interviews and participant observation with 16 mixed Jewish-Muslim families. Participant observation included taking part in important events in the lives of the mixed families, such as birthdays, Muslim holidays like Eid al-Fitr, Jewish holidays like Hanukkah, and daily activities inside and outside the home. The participants were located through mutual acquaintances, active searching on social networks and in the media, and snowball sampling.

The inclusion criteria were mixed families, in which one partner is Jewish and the other Arab-Muslim, with at least one child, living together in Israel, and sharing a household. In total, I interviewed 19 members of 16 families. In each family, at least one member of the nuclear family (spouse or child) was interviewed, and other relatives were interviewed as well, such as a sibling of a spouses or one spouse’s parent. Of the total 16 families, 5 had medium-high socioeconomic status, and 11 had low socioeconomic status.

Since these families often experience negative treatment by Israeli society, many expressed wariness of exposure. I assured them that no personal details would be included in the published study, and thus, they would be anonymous. All of the names mentioned in this study are aliases.

**Two Patterns of Identity Formation**

Two patterns of mixed marriage were found. The first is one-way transition of one spouse to the other spouse’s culture, creating a single identity and a monolingual home. These families were, typically, traditional Muslims of low socioeconomic status. Out of the 16 families participating in the study, 11 followed this pattern. Of these, most (eight) chose to adopt an Arab identity, and only three families chose to adopt a Jewish identity. All of the families that followed this pattern adopted the cultural identity of the man. In this article, this pattern is illustrated in the case of the Albi family.

The second pattern is the hybrid-identity family. This type of family was secular, modern, and middle class. They formed a hybrid identity and had a multicultural, multilingual home in which both partners took part in each other’s religious practices. Five families in this study follow this pattern. In this article, this pattern is illustrated in the case of the Hativ family.

**Choosing a Single Identity: The Albi Family**

Khaled and Maya met at a hotel in a resort town in Israel, where they both had menial jobs: Maya worked in housekeeping and Khaled in maintenance. They were both in their mid-twenties. Maya was Jewish and Khaled was Arab-Muslim. After being in a relationship for a year, they moved in together, and one year later, their first child was born. They wanted to get married after their first child but faced difficulties. The following quote from Maya illustrates this clearly:

After Taher was born, we wanted to get married, we had a whole mess after the birth, we wanted to register Khaled as his father but we were told at the Ministry of the Interior we were not married and therefore a paternity test is required. We heard of friends who travelled to Cyprus to get married but since Khaled owes money to National Insurance, he cannot travel out of the country so this was not an option for us […] I did not want to convert to Islam at first but it was the only way we could get married, so I recited a few sentences I was told and then we were considered married.

Maya here described her choice to convert to Islam as resulting from the special legal situation in Israel. Conversion to Judaism by Khaled was not a reasonable option because doing so is a long and a nearly impossible process for Muslims living in Israel; therefore, the couple decided that Maya would convert to Islam, as this is accomplished by reciting a simple declaration wherein the person accepts the Muslim faith them. The option to marry in a foreign country, as Maya says, is unattainable for citizens of low socioeconomic status, as financial limitations could prevent them from doing so.

Three years after they met, the couple were married in a Muslim wedding according to Islamic law, and they continued to live in the same city for another more year until their second child was born. Then, it became difficult for them to sustain themselves financially with two children, and so they moved to Khaled’s family home in an Arab village. Khaled described this in the quote below:

We were living in a one-bedroom apartment when Sami was born and no one was helping us, my wife's sister came to watch Taher when Maya was in labor and during her hospital stay but later she left and we were on our own with two children, one salary was not enough to pay for rent and energy and water bills […] My siblings sent me money […] After some time we understood it is impossible to continue this way and we moved to my family's home, there my mother helped us with the children and we did not need to pay rent, we began to get by.

This was the stage where the process of choosing one identity over another began and the transition of the two partners from a two-identity family to a one-identity family, namely, the Arab one. During the period that I observed the family, they were living on the ground floor of the extended family home of the father, Khaled. His two brothers lived with their families on the floors above, each in their own apartment. The couple had four children at time of observation: three boys (1, 9, and 11 years old) and a girl (7 years old). At home, the couple spoke to their children in Arabic. The children attended Arab kindergartens and schools where Arabic was the language used. The family was living in proximity to the father’s family, meaning that they were always in an Arab environment. Khaled and Maya both had a secular orientation when they met and maintained a secular lifestyle in the first years of their relationship. Over the previous few years, they had been becoming more serious about Islam. Khaled was attending mosque regularly, while Maya has started to wear a head scarf. This is how Khaled described their process of becoming closer to religion:

At first, we came here like tourists, with about two suitcases. We thought we would live here for a short while, save some money and would eventually go back. But life here is convenient close to the family, Maya is happy being with my mother and family, close like this […] She even started learning from the women here about Islam and she always convinces me to fast with her on Ramadan.

Maya and Khaled explained that they celebrated the Muslim holidays with Khaled’s extended family and relied on his members for help in their daily lives and on their joint resources to sustain themselves. Maya and Khaled’s links to the Jewish community were weak; they do not speak Hebrew with their children and, on Jewish holidays, Maya settled for a telephone call to her parents and siblings to wish them happy holidays.

Another dimension of the Arab identity is the language. This is how Maya describes the manner in which she began to familiarize herself with the Arabic language:

We moved North and at first, I knew very little Arabic, maybe just a few words, after some time I began to understand more. Khaled was at work and I often stayed with his mother and his brothers’ wives who also had young children. Their Hebrew is not good so we spoke in Arabic, that was more convenient. Taher (the oldest son) understands a little Hebrew because he remembers we lived in the South, but the rest of the children hardly understand any. Sometimes I speak Hebrew with Khaled so the children would not understand.

Maya specified that she spoke Arabic because it was more convenient. Here, it seems that the choice to speak one language over another is incidental, not planned in advance but simply as part of the development of their lives. In socioeconomic terms, the family belongs to Israel’s lower class; the mother completed 10 years of schooling and was a housewife, while the father completed 8 years of school and was doing menial labor.

Several common patterns can be found in families classified in this pattern. The first of these is the adoption of a single identity and culture, which requires one spouse to transition to the culture of the other. These spouses choose to abandon their native culture and religion to enter a new world. Like immigrants, they learn the language and customs of the culture that absorbs them. Most of these couples live in localities dominated by that same culture, usually in Arab villages.

Traditionally oriented couples or families of low socioeconomic status often choose the identity of only one spouse. Generally, one spouse chooses to convert to the other’s religion. Due to these couples’ precarious economic circumstances, they usually join the Arab spouse’s family, as these families are more traditional and culturally more supportive, and they usually welcome the couple into their home.

The story of the Albi family demonstrates the casual relationship between socioeconomic status and adopting one identity and, out of the two possible ones, the Arab one. In this pattern, the spouses live in the city at first and lead a secular lifestyle. Financial difficulties cause the spouses to wish to be closer to their family. To do so and to become better integrated into its life and obtain its support, they have to choose a single identity and adopt it. In this pattern, the choice of Arab identity is made because in Arab society, family support is more wide-ranging, including providing help with the children, is stronger than in Jewish society. It was also found that in case of financial limitations, the only option for the spouses to marry may be if the wife converts to Islam.

For families who adopt Arab identity, the children study in the Arab educational system and sometimes speak only Arabic. These children construct an Arab identity. This is a total transformation, in which the spouse from outside the community, who is often but not always the woman, assumes an Arab identity.

**Forming a Hybrid Identity: The Hativ Family**

Abbas and Natasha met at a college in Israel. Abbas was a young lecturer, and Natasha was a student who was taking one of his courses. Their relationship, at the time, was very superficial. They only began to get closer when they met again a year later at the home of a mutual acquaintance. After being a couple for one year, they were married in a civil wedding in Cyprus and began to share a joint household. Soon afterwards, they had their first son, Omer (today 22 years old) and two daughters (today 16 and 19 years old). Both parents had an academic education and earned good salaries, making them part of Israel’s middle class.

The family chose to live in a Jewish town that was geographically close to Abbas’s family’s village. Because of this, the children attended Jewish kindergartens and schools where the Hebrew language was used. On the one hand, the family was living in a Jewish environment, and many social links were formed with this population. On the other hand, their proximity to Abbas’s family home and the close relationship with them meant that the family spent much of its free time with the extended Arab family. The nuclear family led a secular lifestyle but celebrated both Jewish and Muslim holidays. The Muslim holidays were passed with their extended Arab family, and the Jewish ones were within the nuclear family. Sometimes, Natasha’s brother would join them. After 18 years of marriage, Abbas died. Following this, Natasha and their children moved to a town with mixed Jewish and Arab populations, where they still lived in a Jewish environment. Omer, the eldest son, described their relations with their extended family in this way:

My mother has one brother, on holidays he used to visit us, and we visited him once or twice. He lives in the center of Israel and it is far. My father has many siblings, large Muslim family, sometimes it seems like half of the village are my family, everyone is connected […] It is practically adjacent to the town where I grew up and we spent every holiday there with the cousins and grandmother, it was important for him [Abbas] that we know his side, the family […] After he passed away, my sisters had disconnected almost all ties with his family, they felt they were constantly criticizing how they dress and act, it is a conservative society. When my father was alive, the family did not intervene, he was an academic and secular and they never told him what to do and how to act […] I also disconnected ties with them for about a year but now I have good relations with them, because I’m a man so they do not mind how I dress and act, and it is fun to have such a large family.

Omer described the different attitudes that he and his sister experienced from their extended Muslim family. In Israel, the Muslim population is patriarchal and traditional. This mixed family was secular and therefore less patriarchal and traditional; however, they still treated men and women differently. Omer did not need to adhere to codes of modesty, unlike his sisters, who were expected by the extended family to act differently by the extended family. He characterizes the topic of identity and language as follows:

We always spoke three languages at home, my mother immigrated from Russia so she spoke with us in Russian, my father insisted we speak Arabic, and my parents would speak Hebrew between them. We also learned Hebrew at school and around the neighborhood, I can clearly remember how I would be made fun of as a child when I would be using words from three different languages to construct sentences […] I do not feel I am Russian because of my skin color, no one would think I am Russian but I do feel I am half and half, I can be Jewish and I can be Arab Muslim, I am both.

Between themselves, the parents spoke Hebrew because Abbas did not speak fluent Russian and Natasha did not speak fluent Arabic. In addition to Hebrew, the father insisted on speaking to the children in Arabic, while the mother spoke to them in Russian.

This family lived between the Jewish and the Arab-Muslim worlds. This second pattern, in this study, is generally associated with middle class couples and families who are more secular and modern. In this pattern, each spouse maintains their own culture and performs everyday practices related to their culture and religion.

This pattern of identity formation influences the children in such groups, who take on components of both spouses’ identities, forming hybrid identities. These children do not see their parents’ situation as a contradiction. In Arab environments, they speak Arabic and eat the food served by their Arab grandparents, while in Jewish communities, they speak Hebrew and eat the food served by their Jewish grandparents. For their middle-class parents, this is an ideal situation.

The case of the Hativ family demonstrates the casual relationship between socioeconomic status and the family’s choice of a hybrid identity. First, such families do not need require the help of the extended family, can continue living in the city, and can follow a secular lifestyle that maintains a connection to tradition. This lifestyle enables such families to get together often with their extended family but does not enable them to adopt the identity of one of the families. Second, the academic status of the spouses (especially the Arab man) is honored by the extended family and helps them accept the members of the mixed family in spite of the cultural differences. Third, the improved economic status enables them to get married abroad so that the wife does not have to convert to Islam and can maintain her Jewish identity.

The families, and especially their children, learn to live with and develop a hybrid identity. Such a hybrid identity is perceived as subversive because it challenges the established and assumed integrity of the social world. It breaks down the primordial unity of the whole and defines it across two systems at the same time (compare Therrien, 2020). This process exposes contingency by its very existence.

In Israel, these families threaten the binary categories of Jew and Arab, and many of the children in these families present an identity that does not meet one of these categories but rather creates a flexible, hybrid identity. This hybrid identity is manifest in the fact that in everyday life, the children choose which of their identities will be to the forefront in any situation. Therefore, they can cross borders, both physical and symbolic, to alternate between being Jewish or Arab.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The objective of this study is to identify the ways in which mixed families construct their identities in the context of a conflictual society. The study’s findings indicate two patterns in which members of mixed families construct their identities in the context of the conflictual society of Israel. The article also shows how the socioeconomic status of the family can affect the ways in which the members of the family choose to construct their national and family identities.

The findings demonstrate how the characteristics of a conflictual society affect the ways in which mixed families choose to negotiate their identities. One characteristic of Israeli society as conflictual is, as noted, the lack of any collective Israeli identity and the perception of individuals as only having a Jewish or an Arab identity (Smooha, 2019). As a result, mixed families cannot adopt or generate an Israeli identity (Sagiv, 2017, compare Collet, 2015) and must adopt a Jewish identity, an Arab identity, or both (a hybrid identity). This situation strongly affects identity processes within mixed families in this conflictual society.

It is interesting to note that most of the families in this study who chose to adopt one of the identities chose, surprisingly, the Arab one. This choice is not immediately obvious because, in Israeli society, the Arab identity is that of a discriminated-against minority (Smooha, 2019). In the abstract, where the family has the option to choose one or the other of the two identities, it might be expected that they would choose the privileged one. The choice made by families to adopt the Arab identity demonstrates the importance of family support within these families and the effect of the marriage laws in Israel, which, in practice, allow mixed marriages only if the woman converts to Islam.

In general, the findings support the model of Collet (2015), showing that in a conflictual society, the mixed family tends to choose one of two patterns: adoption of the minority identity, adoption of the majority identity, or adoption of a hybrid identity. The findings elaborate her model, in that they suggest that in a conflictual society, families may prefer to adopt a minority identity for the reasons detailed above, and they show that socioeconomic status might explain the choice made by the families of the different patterns.

With regard to gender, as noted, most of the families who chose to adopt one identity chose to adopt the man’s identity. It is tempting to say that male dominance is the reason why the couple chose the man’s identity and that the woman gave up her original ethno-national identity. However, this is not the only possible explanation. In most mixed Jewish-Muslim families, the man is Arab, and the woman is Jewish; therefore, the fact that most families choose the man's identity could arise from the fact that the families made the explicit choice to adopt the Arab identity, as noted above. An analysis of the families’ perceptions of choosing the Arab identity strengthens the second explanation, although it does not rule out the first.

The findings show that changes in identity among individuals in mixed families in a conflictual society can be stable and long-lasting, especially (but not only) among women of low socioeconomic status who adopt Arab identity. These findings differ from those of Todd (2008b), who claimed that changes in a person’s social identity in a mixed marriage are not sustained in conflictual societies. However, similar to the case of Todd’s work, in Israeli society, every expression is loaded with nationalist interpretations. The difference may be because the tensions between Jews and Arabs in Israel are larger than those that exist between the Catholic and Protestant societies in Northern Ireland, so one of the spouses must entirely give up their original identity and adopt a completely new one, such that the family unit does not experience an identity conflict that could disturb the stability of the identity change (comp. Collet, 2015).

Previous studies dealing with hybrid identity among mixed families have not reached an agreement on the nature of the hybridity. Some researches refer to hybrid identity as an integration of elements from existing identities (Ducu and Telegdi-Csetri, 2018; Erentaitė et al., 2018; Sagiv, 2017). Other studies have highlighted hybrid identity as a new identity and even an independent one, based on mixedness (Le Gall and Meintel, 2015; Miled and de Oliveira Andreotti, 2015; Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012). This study supports the former and suggests that hybridity is not a new identity in itself but one that could switch identities depending on the situation. That is, its articulation would not be expressed through the creation of a new identity, but through flexibility of the use of the existing identities.

Studies of mixed families that have been conducted in Israel (e.g., Cohen, 1969; Nasser, 1993; Kessari, 2001; Cohen-Golani, 2011) have so far only studied families in a low socioeconomic class and therefore present a very partial understanding of mixed families in Israel. This study completes this understanding by examining mixed families from a middle socioeconomic class as well, therefore showing an alternative way for mixed families to navigate their lives in a conflictual society. A study of families from low socioeconomic class only does not allow the identification of the whole range of patterns of management of ethnic and national gaps within a family, and therefore, it is important to study mixed families from all layers of the population. Identifying hybrid identity patterns invites us to study the processes of construction of a hybrid identity in a conflictual society in more detail. Future research could study the ways in which various identities are negotiated within a hybrid family unit.

**References**

Amara M (2016) Language, identity and conflict: Examining collective identity through the labels of the Palestinians in Israel. *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 15(2): 203-223.‏

Arweck E and Nesbitt E (2010) Close encounters? The intersection of faith and ethnicity in mixed‐faith families. *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 31(1): 39-52.‏

Bhabha HK (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bar-Tal D, Oren N and Nets-Zehngut R (2014) Sociopsychological analysis of conflict-supporting narratives: A general framework. *Journal of Peace Research* 51(5): 662-675.‏

Cerchiaro F (2019) ‘In the name of the children’: mixed couples’ parenting analysed through their naming practices. *Identities* 26(1): 51-68.‏

Cohen E (1969) Mixed marriage in an Israeli town. *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 11(1): 41-50.

Cohen-Golani S (2011) *“… And I didn't know anything about Arabs at all… I was new to those things…”: A phenomenological study of the experience of Jewish Girls who engaged in relationships with Arab men*. Unpublished MSW dissertation, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel.

Collet B (2015) From intermarriage to conjugal mixedness: Theoretical considerations illustrated by empirical data in France. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 662(1): 129-147.‏

Conrad HK (2014) *A thorn in the eye: Bosnian mixed-ethnicity families in a polarized land*. Los Angeles, CA: The University of California.‏

DellaPergola S (2017) Ethnoreligious intermarriage in Israel: an exploration of the 2008 census. *Journal of Israeli History* 36(2): 149-170.‏

Donnan H (1990) Mixed Marriage in Comparative Perspective: Gender and Power in Northern Ireland and Pakistanxyf. *Journal of comparative family studies* 21(2): 207-225.‏

Ducu V and Telegdi-Csetri Á (2018) Children of Global Families. *Romanian Journal of Population Studies* 12(1): 23-36.

Erentaitė R, Lannegrand-Willems L, Negru-Subtirica O, Vosylis R, Sondaitė J and Raižienė S (2018) Identity Development Among Ethnic Minority Youth. *European Psychology* 23(4): 324-335.‏

Fogiel-Bijaoui S (2017) A Rising Tide? Mixed families in Israel.‏ *Israeli History* 36(2): 103-123.

Gaines JSO (2017) *Identity and interethnic marriage in the United States*. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis.‏

Guelke A (2012) *Politics in deeply divided societies*. Madlen, MA: Polity.‏

Hakak Y (2016) Battling Against Interfaith Relations in Israel: Religion, Therapy, and Social Services. *Journal of marital and family therapy* 42(1): 45-57.‏

Hayes BC and McAllister I (2009) Education as a mechanism for conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. *Oxford Review of Education* 35(4): 437-450.

Hilker LM (2012) Rwanda's ‘Hutsi’: intersections of ethnicity and violence in the lives of youth of ‘mixed’ heritage. *Identities* 19(2): 229-247.‏

Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2019) *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2018*. Jerusalem: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

Jacobson CK, Amoateng AY and Heaton TB (2004) Inter-racial marriages in South Africa. *Journal of comparative family studies* 35(3): 443-458.‏

Kachuyevski A and Olesker R (2014) Divided societies and identity boundaries: a conflict analysis framework. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 25(3): 304-321.

Kessari O (2001) *Choosing a partner from a minority group (Bnei-Miutim) among girls at risk as a result of their attachment style and risk taking tendency*. Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan university.

Kreisberg L (1993) Ethnicity, Nationalism and Violent Conflict in the 1990s. *The Peace Studies Bulletin* 2(1-2):24-28.‏

Le Gall J and Meintel D (2015) Cultural and identity transmission in mixed couples in Quebec, Canada: Normalizing plural identities as a path to social integration. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 662(1): 112-128.‏

Lerner H (2010) Constitution‐writing in deeply divided societies: the incrementalist approach. *Nations and Nationalism* 16(1): 68-88.

Luke C and Luke A (1999) Theorizing interracial families and hybrid identity: An Australian perspective. *Educational Theory* 49(2): 223-249.

McDoom OS (2016) *Horizontal inequality, status optimization, and interethnic marriage in a conflict-affected society*. Helsinki: The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research.‏

Miled N and de Oliveira Andreotti V (2015) Seeking home beyond borders: incomplete journeys. In: Cristaldi M (ed) *L’approche interculturelle de la cognition et de la thérapie*. Catania: Studio Interdisciplinare di Scienze Sociali e Umane.

Murphy-Shigematsu S (2012) *When Half Is Whole: Multiethnic Asian American Identities*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Nasser A (1993) *Intermarried between Arabs and Jews in Israel*. Unpublished MSW dissertation, Tel Aviv University, Israel.

Nelson JK (2015) Racism and Anti‐Racism in Families: Insights from Performativity Theory. *Sociology Compass* 9(6): 487-498.‏

Sagiv T (2017) On the Faultline: Israelis of Mixed Ethnicity. *Journal of Israeli History* 36(2): 249-269.‏

Smooha S (2002) The model of ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. *Nations and nationalism* 8(4): 475-503.‏

Smooha S (2019) *Arabs And Jews In Israel: Conflicting And Shared Attitudes In A Divided Society*. London: Routledge.‏

Smooha S and Hanf T (1992) The diverse modes of conflict-regulation in deeply divided societies. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 33(1-2): 26-47.‏

Therrien C (2012) Trajectories of mixed couples in Morocco: a meaningful discursive space for mixedness. *Papers: revista de sociologia* 97(1): 129-150.‏

Therrien C (2020) It’s More Complex than “Black” and “White:” Symbolic Boundaries of Mixedness in the Moroccan Context. *Hespéris-Tamuda* 55(3): 275-304.‏

Todd J (2018a) Reflexivity and Group Identity in Divided Societies. In *Identity Change after Conflict*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.‏

Todd J (2018b). Identity Politics and Social Movements: Flags, Same-Sex Marriage and Brexit. In *Identity Change after Conflict*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.‏

Williams RM (1994) The sociology of ethnic conflicts: comparative international perspectives. *Annual review of sociology* 20: 49-79.