**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 the interrelated aspects of identity such as religion, ethnicity, and nationalism. In Israel, intermarriages of Muslims and Jews are particularly interesting since the complex tensions between these identities intertwines with the national conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. However, such mixed families have rarely been studied. The purpose of this study is to identify the ways in which mixed families construct their identities in the context of a conflictual society. This study based on ethnographic work I conducted among sixteen Jewish-Muslim families. The findings indicate two patterns of identity formation: single identity, in which one spouse moves to the other spouse’s culture, and hybrid identity, in which both spouses take part in each other's religious and cultural practices. The article also demonstrates how socioeconomic status affect the choices mixed families make in the process of identity formation in the context of conflictual societies.

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

**Introduction**

Mixedness and mixed family research, as well as conflictual societies and national conflict research, have flourished over the last few years. Nevertheless, studies dealing with mixed families in conflictual societies are still extremely rare (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). This, even though mixed families in conflictual societies provide an opportunity to explore the complex relationships between groups in conflictual societies and to learn about identity formation processes, precisely in the context in which they might contribute the most to the understanding of the tensions between the groups. This is because in conflictual societies, every decision regarding family identity formation has major significance since it may highlight the ethnical, national, religious, and status boundaries and, as such, create friction (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017), and has a major influence on the place of the family within the conflictual society (Smooha and Hanf, 1992). Therefore, in conflictual societies, mixed families have to navigate their way very carefully in order to avoid conflicts within the nuclear family or between the nuclear and the extended family, and to avoid social exclusion (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

In Israel, mixed families of Jews and Muslims are a unique example of interaction between the conflicted ethno-national groups, where the two populations intersect in the most intimate of social systems. Therefore, mixed families of Jews and Muslims in Israel, which reflect also the macro socio-political conflict between Muslim and Jews, represent a significant arena for exploring identity processes of the 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 are: how do mixed families construct their identities, and what factors affect the considerations of the families when choosing how to construct their identity? To date, identity construction processes among mixed families in Israel have not been examined. Therefore, this pioneer study can contribute to understanding the identity construction processes among mixed families, in the unique context of a conflictual society. I employ an ethnographical method based on participant observations of the daily lives of the families and in-depth interviews with the spouses, the children, and relatives from the extended family.

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

# Identity Formation among Mixed Families

The topic of identity formation among mixed families has been extensively studied in the past, also among families consisting of immigrants and natives (e.g., Cerchiaro, 2019; Luke and Luke, 1999; Therrien, 2012) and among families consisting of different groups within the same society (e.g., Nelson, 2015; Sagiv, 2017). The terms referring to mixed families include interracial families, interfaith families, interethnic families, transnational families, and more. Despite the importance of the axes on which the complex identity of the family is examined (cultural, ethnic, national etc.), in most cases, this is attributed to the viewpoint of the specific study and less to the ontological differences between the families themselves. Therefore, in the current study, I prefer the term ‘mixed families’, which allows the families to be complexed all together on national, ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic axes.

Modern colonial thought tends to see identity as dichotomous, and distinguishes completely between the identity of the colonizer and the colonized. With the development of post-colonialist theory, more complexed perceptions of identity have developed (Luke and Luke, 1999; Sagiv, 2017), which see identity as complex, dynamic, and fluid (Sagiv, 2017). Identity is complex in the sense that it has many dimensions, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, culture, and more (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017; Luke and Luke, 1999). Identity is dynamic in the sense that it keeps changing and reformatting throughout the course of life (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010), and in the face of changes and life events (Le Gall and Meintel, 2015; Nelson, 2015). Identity is fluid in the sense that it might change in different social contexts even in a given 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 in which encounter and friction exist between the different groups in the society. Mixed families are maybe the most significant example of this space, because they create a space in which the identities of both groups are constructed and formatted together in the most intimate way (Luke and Luke, 1999; Sagiv, 2017). So, how do mixed families construct their identities?

Collet (2015) describes three main patterns that mixed families tend to adopt regarding their identity construction. In the first pattern, the partner from the minority group adopts the culture of the dominant or majority group while still preserving their original culture to a minimal degree. The second pattern is the opposite one, in which the partner from the majority group adopts the culture of the minority group, and the family joins the minority group. The third pattern is a balanced pattern in which the identity of the family is equally and mutually organized, so that a new identity that is not necessarily built on the previous patterns, is constructed (Collet, 2015; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

This new identity, which is based on some form of a combination of the identities of the different groups from which the spouses come – is also called ‘hybrid identity’ (Erentaitė et al., 2018; Sagiv, 2017), but there is disagreement about the nature of this hybrid identity. On the one hand, hybrid identity is described as a mosaic of identities, a product of the struggle of the family to construct its identity, and reflects the tensions between the different identities in the family and in the society (Sagiv, 2017). Hybrid identities are described as result of mixing and combining elements from 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 described as 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 a mere combination of them (Bhabha, 1994; Miled and de Oliveira Andreotti, 2015). Furthermore, hybridity itself is described as a new identity of mixedness (Le Gall and Meintel, 2015; Therrien, 2020).

So, is the hybrid identity nothing more than a selective adoption of components from the identities of two groups and if so, how is this selective adoption expressed? Or 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 the hybrid identity when it comes to mixed families in conflictual societies.

**Mixed Families in Conflictual Societies**

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

Some conditions characterize conflictual societies and might affect identity formation among mixed families. First, the options available to mixed families in conflictual societies when it comes to choices and identity formation strategies are more limited. The national, ethnic, religious, and status boundaries between the groups are more salient compared to non-conflictual societies, and the identities have a more severe meaning in relation to the ethno-national conflict. Therefore, members of mixed families in conflictual societies need to ‘walk on eggshells’ in their identity formation processes, in order to avoid friction within the nuclear family, between the nuclear and the extended family, or between the family and the society )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). Members of mixed families run the risk of stigmatization from both groups in a conflictual society (Gaines, 2017). In conflictual societies, there is a perception that the other group is the enemy, and therefore marriage to a member of the other group might be perceived as treason or collaboration with the enemy. Furthermore, mixed families are perceived as 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, there is the crucial impact of choices made with regards to identity formation on the future of the family. For instance, in a conflictual society, decisions, such as whether to adopt the identity of the majority group or the identity of the minority group, are not only decisions about cultural style, lifestyle, religious practice, and language, but may also have a long-term effect on the quality of life of the family and its offspring (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

One of the most studied conflictual societies regarding identity among mixed families is the Northern Ireland society. For example, Hayes and McAllister (2009) found that the attitude of social institutions in Northern Ireland dictated the behavior of mixed couples in everyday life. Todd (2018b) also conducted her research in Northern Ireland, and argues that changes in people's social identity, that occur in pursuance of mixed marriages, are not sustained in divided and conflictual societies. She asserts that some individuals begin with a strong sense of group solidarity and when they marry someone from the other group, this solidarity is challenged for a short period of time. In a divided society, the social structure and the symbolic syntax make changes to a person's social identity more difficult. One main reason for this is that the prevalent language of nationalism creates a taboo that hinders the 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 in Israeli society is the ethno-national conflict between Jews and Muslim Arabs (Smooha, 2002). The State of Israel has a population of nearly 9 million inhabitants – 74.5% are Jews of all backgrounds and 20.9% are Arab (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Ethnic conflicts tend to be severe, continual, and uncontrolled. Fighting over territory and economic resources is important in ethnic conflicts, but most ethnic conflicts are based on non-economic resources, such as prestige of political authority (Williams, 1994). Since such conflicts are continual, hostility and hatred between the groups accumulates (Kreisberg, 1993). The new generation is raised into a reality of conflict and as a result of a history of unsuccessful attempts, the conflicts are perceived as unresolvable. Since uncontrolled conflicts demand a lot of material and psychological investment, due to cognitive dissonance, they are accompanied by generation of an ideology that justifies the conflict (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Kreisberg, 1993). These characteristics of ethnic conflicts well describe the conflict between Jews and Muslim Arabs in Israel, and they have important implications on the identity processes within both groups (Smooha, 2019).

One of the aspects of ethnic conflict in Israel is ethnic stratification. In Israel, the ethnic Arab minority does not have equal status to the hegemonic Jewish majority. Because of this status gap, the Arab minority experiences a dilemma forming its identity in relation to the Jewish majority: whether to accept or deny the Jewish majority group as the positive reference group. This dilemma affects the complex identity processes among Muslim Arabs in Israel (Smooha, 2019).

The ethnic conflict in the Israeli society is between the dominant majority, most of whom arrived in Israel in different migration waves, and the native minority. The state is perceived as belonging to the Jewish majority and is not identified with the Arab minority, despite them being native. The conflict over state and land ownership is preserved by cultural and ethnic differences, which make it difficult to develop a collective Israeli identity, shared by both Jews and Arabs (Smooha, 2019). The common perception in part of the Jewish society, which sees Arabs as enemies, makes it even more difficult to construct such an identity (Smooha, 2002). This background is necessary in order to understand the complexity of identity processes among mixed families in Israel.

# Mixed Families in Israel

In this study, a mixed family refers to a family in which one of the spouses is Jewish and the other is Muslim. Although this definition refers to the religious aspect, in the Israeli context, the Jewish-Muslim divide also reflects the Jewish-Arab ethno-national divide, and therefore Jewish-Muslim families are not only interfaith, but also demonstrate a unification that crosses the main divide in the Israeli society. In Israel, there is no civil marriage, only religious. The jurisdiction to wed people rests with the religious authorities to which each of the individuals belongs. Therefore, individuals of different faiths cannot marry in Israel, but they can get married outside of Israel and then register the marriage in Israel (DellaPergola, 2017). Because of these restrictions, mixed couples choose one of three practices for their shared lives:

The first option is to live together without marrying. The second practice is to travel abroad in order to undergo a civil marriage, and then get it approved by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior. The third one is for one spouse to convert to the other's religion in order to marry. In this option, usually the Jewish spouse is the one who converts to Islam since, in Israel, conversion to the Judaism requires a long and complex process that can last for many years, while conversion to Islam is easier to facilitate.

The first significant study on mixed Jewish and Arab families in Israel was conducted in 1969 by the anthropologist Eric Cohen. He describes 12 mixed couples in which the men are Arabs and the women are Jewish. The women are of Sephardic origin and left their parents’ home 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's conclusion is that mixed marriages do not bring Jewish and Arab populations closer together. On the contrary, it creates greater hostility between Jews and Arabs and sharpens in-group solidarity, especially in the Jewish community (Cohen, 1969). Cohen (1969) did not focus on identity formation processes among these families.

A few studies have been conducted since then mainly by researchers from the Social Work field (e.g. Nasser, 1993; Kessari, 2001; Cohen-Golani, 2011; Hakak, 2016). These studies largely focus on mixed families from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They usually adopt a therapeutic approach and do not focus on identity formation processes. Sagiv (2017) conducted a study that focuses on identity formation processes among mixed families in Israel, but this study deals with mixed families between two ethnic groups within the Jewish population in Israel, so the main divide that divides the society does not cross 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. I collected information by taking part in various events in the lives of the mixed families, like birthdays, Muslim holidays like Eid al-Fitr, Jewish holidays like Hanukkah, and daily activities in and outside the home. The participants were found through mutual acquaintances, an active search on social networks and in the media, and by snowball sampling.

The criteria for choosing the interviewees 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 from 16 different families. In each family, at least one member of the nuclear family (one of the spouses or the child) was interviewed and, in addition, other relatives were interviewed, such as siblings of the spouses and the spouses' parents. Five of the families have a medium-high socioeconomic status, and 11 have a low socioeconomic status.

Since these families often experience negative treatment in Israeli society, many of whom are wary of exposure. I assured the families that no personal details would be included in the published study and thus their identities would be kept anonymous. Therefore, all the names mentioned in this study are aliases.

**Two patterns of identity formation**

Analysis of the findings indicate two patterns of mixed marriages. The first is the one-way transition of one spouse to the other spouse’s culture, creating a single identity and a monolingual home. These families are, typically, traditional Muslims from low socioeconomic status. Of the 16 families participating in the study, 11 follow this pattern. Out of them, most of the families (8) chose to adopt an Arab identity, and only three families chose to adopt a Jewish identity. In this pattern, the families always adopt the cultural identity of the man. In the present article, this pattern is illustrated by presenting a case study of the Albi family.

The second pattern is the hybrid-identity family. This type of family is secular, modern, and middle class and forms a hybrid identity and has a multicultural, multilingual home in which both partners take part in each other’s religious practices. Out of the 16 families participating in this study, five follow this pattern. In the present article, this pattern is illustrated by presenting the case study of the Hativ family.

**Choosing single identity: The Albi Family**

Khaled and Maya met at a hotel in a resort town in Israel, where they both worked in menial jobs – Maya worked in housekeeping and Khaled in maintenance. They were both in their mid-twenties. Maya is Jewish and Khaled is 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 was born but faced difficulties. The following quote from Maya illustrates this well:

“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 describes the way in which her choice to convert to Islam resulted from the special legal situation in Israel. Conversion to Judaism by Khaled was not a reasonable option since the process of conversion to Judaism is long and a nearly impossible process for Muslims living in Israel; therefore, the couple decided that Maya would convert to Islam as this is done by reciting a simple declaration whereby the person accepts the Muslim faith upon them. The option to marry in a foreign country as mentioned by Maya, is unattainable for citizens of low socioeconomic status since financial limitations may prevent them from doing so.

Three years after they met, the couple married in a Muslim wedding according to Islamic law, and they continued to live in the same city for one more year until their second child was born. It then became difficult to sustain themselves financially with two kids and so they moved to Khaled's family home in an Arab village. Khaled describes 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 at which the process of choosing one identity began and the transition of the two partners from a two-identity family to a one-identity family – the Arab one. In the period that I observed the family, they were living on the ground floor of the extended family home of the father, Khaled. On the floors above, his two brothers were living with their families, each in their own apartment. The couple has four children now: three boys (11, 9, 1) and a girl (7). 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 lives in proximity to the father's family which means that they are always in an Arab environment. Khaled and Maya were both secular when they met and maintained a secular lifestyle in the first years of their relationship. In the past few years, they have been getting closer to Islam. Khaled attends the mosque regularly while Maya has started to wear a head scarf. This is how Khaled describes 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 celebrate the Muslim holidays with Khalid’s extended family and rely on the family members for help in their daily lives and on their joint resources in order to sustain themselves. Maya and Khaled's link to the Jewish community is weak; they do not speak Hebrew with their children and, on Jewish holidays, Maya settles 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 little Hebrew because he remembers we lived South, but the rest of the children hardly understand any. Sometimes I speak Hebrew with Khaled so the children would not understand”

Maya specifies that she spoke Arabic since it was more convenient. It seems that the choice to speak one language is described as incidental, not as one 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 school and is a housewife, while the father completed 8 years of school and does menial labor.

Several common patterns characterize 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. They choose to abandon their culture and religion in order to enter a new world. Similar to the process of an immigrant, they learn the language and customs of the culture that absorbs them. Most of these couples live in the locality of that same culture, usually in an Arab village.

Low socioeconomic and traditionally-oriented couples or families often choose the identity of only one spouse. Generally, one spouse chooses to convert to the other's religion. Due to the couples’ precarious economic circumstances, they usually join the Arab spouse's family, which is more traditional and culturally more supportive, and normally welcome the couple into their home.

The story of the Albi family demonstrates the casual relationship between socioeconomic status and choosing adoption of one identity and, out of the two possible identities – the Arab one. The spouses were living in the city and led a secular lifestyle. Financial difficulties caused the spouses’ desire to be closer to the family. In order to be closer to the family, to integrate in its life and get its support, they had to choose one identity and adopt it. The choice of the Arab identity was made because family support in the Arab society with regards to helping with the children and so on, is stronger than in the Jewish society. We also saw that because of financial difficulties, the only option for the spouses to marry is if the wife converts to Islam.

As a result of adopting the Arab identity, the children study in the Arab educational system and sometimes speak only Arabic. The children construct an Arab identity. This is a total transformation in which the spouse, 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 taking one of his courses. Their relationship, at the time, was very superficial. They only began to get closer when they met a year later at a mutual acquaintance’s house. After being a couple for one year, they got married in civil wedding in Cyprus and began sharing a joint household. Shortly afterwards, they had their first son, Omer (today 22) and two daughters (today 19 and 16). Both parents had an academic education and earned decent salaries and they belonged to Israel's middle-class.

The family choose to live in a Jewish town that is geographically close to Abbas's family village. Since the family lived in a Jewish town, the children attended Jewish kindergartens and schools where the Hebrew language was used. On the one hand, the family lived in a Jewish environment and many social links were formed with this population. On the other hand, the proximity to Abbas's family home and the close relationship with them meant that the family spent much of its free time with their extended Arab family. The nuclear family led a secular lifestyle, but nonetheless celebrated both Jewish and Muslim holidays. They celebrated the Muslim holidays with their extended Arab family and the Jewish holidays within the nuclear family and sometimes, Natasha's brother would join them. After 18 years of marriage, Abbas passed away. Following this, Natasha and their children moved to live in a town that has mixed Jewish and Arab populations, and they still lived in a Jewish environment. Omer, the eldest son, describes 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 describes the different attitudes he and his sister experience from their extended Muslim family. In Israel, the Muslim population is patriarchal and traditional. This mixed family is secular and therefore less patriarchal and traditional; however, the extended Muslim family still treats men and women differently. Omer, being a man, does not need to adhere to codes of modesty, unlike his sisters who are expected to act differently by the extended family. He describes 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 half, I can be Jewish and I can be Arab Muslim, I am both”.

Between themselves, the parents spoke Hebrew since Abbas did not speak fluent Russian and Natasha did not speak fluent Arabic. For this reason, the common language at home was Hebrew, but in addition to Hebrew, the father insisted on speaking to the children in Arabic while the mother spoke to them in Russian.

As shown, the family lived between the two worlds, the Jewish world and the Arab-Muslim world. The second pattern is generally associated with middle class couples and families who are more secular and modern. Within such couples and families, each spouse maintains their own culture and even performs everyday practices related to their culture and religion.

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

The case of the Hativ family also demonstrates the casual relationship between socioeconomic status and the family’s choice of a hybrid identity. First, the family did not need the help of the extended family, could continue living in the city, and could conduct a secular lifestyle with a connection to tradition. This lifestyle enabled the family to often get together with the extended family, but did not bring them to adopt the identity of one of the families. Second, the academic status of the spouses (especially the Arab man) was honored by the extended family, and helped them to accept the members of the mixed family in spite of the cultural differences. Third, the improved economic status enabled them to get married abroad so the wife did not have to convert to Islam, and maintained her Jewish identity.

The couple, especially the children, learn to live with and develop a hybrid identity. This 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 through two systems at the same time (comp. Therrien, 2020). This process allows chance to be exposed by the very act of hybridization.

In Israel, these families threaten the binary categories of Jews and Arabs, 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 manifested in the fact that in everyday life, they choose which identity will be present in any given situation. Therefore, they can cross a border, physical and symbolic, in order 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 point to two patterns in which members of mixed families choose to construct their identities in the context of the Israeli conflictual society. The article also shows how the socioeconomic status of the family can affect the way 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 way in which mixed families choose to negotiate their identities. One of the characteristics of the Israeli society as conflictual is, as noted, the lack of a collective Israeli identity and the perception of only a Jewish or an Arab identity (Smooha, 2019). As a result, mixed families cannot adopt or generate an Israeli identity (Sagiv, 2017, comp. Collet, 2015) and must adopt a Jewish identity, an Arab identity, or both (a hybrid identity). This situation strongly affects the identity processes within mixed families in a conflictual society.

In this context, it is interesting to note that most of the families who chose to adopt one of the identities, chose, surprisingly, the Arab identity. This choice is not obvious since, in the context of the Israeli society, it is a discriminated minority (Smooha, 2019). Seemingly, given that the family has the option to choose one of the identities, one would expect them to choose the privileged majority. The choice made by the families to adopt the Arab identity demonstrates the importance of family support within these families and also the effect of the marriage laws in Israel, which, in practice, allow mixed marriage only if the woman converts to Islam.

The findings support the model of Collet (2015) and show that in a conflictual society as well, the mixed family tends to choose one of the 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 the minority identity for the reasons detailed above, and in that they show that socioeconomic status might explain the choice made by the families from the different patterns.

With regards to gender, as noted, most of the families who chose to adopt one identity chose to adopt the identity of the man. It is tempting to say that the man's dominance is the reason that the couple chose the man's identity and the woman gave up her original ethno-national identity. But 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 a choice to adopt the Arab identity, as explained above. An analysis of the families’ perceptions about choosing the Arab identity strengthens the second explanation, although it does not rule out the first.

The findings show that identity change among individuals in mixed families in a conflictual society can be stable and long-lasting, and especially (but not only) among women from low socioeconomic status who adopt the Arab identity. These findings are different from those of Todd (2008b), who claimed that a person’s social identity change in a mixed marriage is not sustained in conflictual societies. Although, similar to Todd’s explanation, in the Israeli society as well, every expression is loaded with nationalist interpretations. The difference may be because the tension between the 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 has to give up their original identity completely and totally adopt a new identity, and so the family unit does not have the identity conflict that could disturb the stability of the identity change (comp. Collet, 2015).

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

Studies of mixed families conducted in Israel (e.g., Cohen, 1969; Nasser, 1993; Kessari, 2001; Cohen-Golani, 2011) have so far only studied families from 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, and therefore shows an alternative way that mixed families can navigate their lives in a conflictual society. A study of families from a low socioeconomic class only does not allow identifying 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 the hybrid identity pattern invites to study more about the processes of construction of a hybrid identity in a conflictual society. Future research could study the ways in which the various identities are negotiated within a hybrid family unit.

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