Dr. Abeer Jiries

The Double Mourning

Negotiating Selves and Reconstructing Identities in Mixed Marriages

A Case Study of Marital Unions between the Israeli Arab Muslim Husbands and the Post-Soviet Slavic Christian Wives living in Israel

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ
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I am from there, I am from here,
But I am neither there nor here
I have two names which meet and part
I have two languages,
But I have long forgotten
which is the language of my dreams
I have an English language,
for writing, with yielding phrases
And a language in which
Heaven and Jerusalem converse with a silver cadence,
But it does not yield to my imagination

Mahmoud Darwish, 2007, 176-177

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Preface

As a family and couple therapy specialist, family and immigration lawyer, and sociologist specializing in cross-cultural relationships, I have spent years accompanying individuals and families as they navigate the complex terrain of identity, belonging, and love across boundaries. *The Double Mourning* emerges from this deep engagement—both professional and personal—with people whose lives are shaped by migration, hybrid identities, and the longing for home.

This book explores a little-known intersection: the mixed marriages between Israeli Arab Muslim men and post-Soviet Slavic Christian women in Israel. In these unions, cultural, religious, and historical differences collide—not only between spouses, but also within their inner worlds. Through rigorous qualitative research and the authentic voices of the couples themselves, I examine how identities are negotiated, how memory and nostalgia act as silent partners in the relationship, and how resilience is forged in the face of societal pressures and cultural dissonance.

As a woman who belongs to a minority within a divided society—and as a professional who has worked for years with transnational families—I offer this book as a window into lives lived "in-between." It is a scholarly contribution, but also a deeply human one: rooted in empathy, inquiry, and the belief that understanding complexity is the first step toward healing it.

By Dr. Abeer Jiries

Foreword

The book begins with a quote of Mahmoud Darwish's farewell to Edward Said, a verse that covers and reflects the quintessence of the subject investigated by Abeer Jiries: „He says *I am from there, I am from here, but I am neither there nor here*." Sometimes, when people are caught between worlds, it is not a question of geography, but a condition of the soul. *The Double Mourning* is not just a book title. It is a framework and a theory. It names the bond shared by Arab Muslim men and Slavic Christian women—each carrying in their bodies and memories a rupture, a loss, a longing for a homeland that exists no longer, or perhaps never fully existed. What makes this text special is not only the depth of its topic, but the philosophical insight that animates it: that multiculturalism, in this context, is less enrichment and more estrangement. The marriages investigated by Abeer Jiries do not tell us much, if anything, about bridging cultures; they expose the scars that cultural crossings leave behind. While liberal narratives on diversity often frame mixed marriages as instances of progressive integration, this book goes on a different path. It presents us with the reality that hybridity may also be a wound. It is not always a celebration of identities blending, but at times a quiet catastrophe of self-erasure, confusion, or survival. What Abeer Jiries discovered in her interviews and we find in the book pages is not so much the merging of different worlds, but the loneliness of existing between them. The author, herself a Christian Arab from Israel, is uniquely positioned to hear what others most often overlook. She is not an outsider, nor fully inside. Her own positionality shaped the research, infusing it with a blend of empathy and critique. Her voice resonates with the subjects she studies – those who live in the in-between, seeking coherence in the fragmentation of displacement, memory and cultural contradiction. What emerged from this research is a layered, sometimes unsettling portrait of what transnational

marriage looks like in an already deeply divided society. The men, returning from Soviet universities with secular, educated wives, find themselves caught between tradition and aspiration, pride and dispossession. The women, enticed by the dream of escape from post-Soviet decline, arrive in a place that promises sanctuary but delivers disorientation. Both quickly discover that being together cannot shield them from the grinding pressure of language, religion, gender roles, extended family expectations, and the unrelenting politics of belonging. They are in marriages governed by power, not symmetry. The demand for women to assimilate – to learn Arabic, submit to patriarchal roles, and suppress their cultural instincts—is rarely reciprocated. There is no fantasy of the Arab husband converting, nor integrating into Slavic norms. There is a gendered and structural imbalance. The wives are asked to bend, sometimes to break. And yet, remarkably, some persist –through adaptation, negotiation, and an often unspoken resilience. Another important contribution of the book lies in the exploration of nostalgia and the impossibility of return. The Slavic women's yearning for the Soviet past is not mere sentimentality; it is an attempt to preserve a fading identity, a self that was formed in a country that no longer exists. Likewise, the Arab men, though more stoic in voice, carry the burden of a homeland experienced through absence—a Palestine remembered but inaccessible. In this way, both partners are united not by cultural compatibility, but by shared dislocation. Another significant contribution lies in the attention given to affect and memory. Immigration trauma, culture shock, and nostalgia are explored not merely as psychological responses, but as enduring states of being. Many wives attempt to recreate Soviet aesthetics in their homes—linking objects of memory that serve as anchors in an unfamiliar land. Meanwhile, husbands carry a quieter, but equally potent grief tied to a Palestine that exists more in longing than in geography. These elements illuminate how homesickness is not only backward-looking, but actively shapes the marital present.

The theoretical framework offers a multi-layered, critical, and human-centered understanding of transnational marriage: multidisciplinary, by drawing from sociology, psychology, anthropology, and postcolonial studies; critically reflexive, acknowledging the researcher's positionality; grounded in lived experience, treating participants not as data points but as identity negotiators within intersecting systems of power. This framework

has a solid, yet dynamic foundation. It abandons the traditional assimilationist model, which expects the immigrant partner to fully adopt the dominant culture, in favor of an acculturation model, which recognizes integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization as adaptive strategies. Most women in these marriages either preserve their cultural identities through separation or attempt bicultural integration— but none fully assimilate. Though, the few who manage to strike a bicultural balance tend to experience more satisfying and stable relationships.

The methodology of the research reflects the book's overarching aim: to give voice to individuals negotiating intimate relationships across deep cultural, religious, linguistic, and geopolitical divides. Rather than seeking generalizability, the approach privileges **depth over breadth**, emphasizing **subjective meaning, narrative identity**, and the **interplay of personal and structural forces.** Abeer Jiries fully adheres to the interpretive, constructivist epistemologies along with the ideas that identities are contextual and fluid, and knowledge emerges through interaction, language, and reflexivity. The methodology is not ancillary to its theoretical contribution—it is integral to it. By engaging with participants' stories through a **constructivist and culturally situated lens,** the research operationalizes the theoretical claims outlined in the framework: that identity is fluid, hybridity is often painful, and acculturation is shaped by power and gender. The choice to use **semi-structured interviews** embrace **narrative complexity** and reflects an epistemological coherence that strengthens the study's credibility and relevance. In this way, the methodology is more than an instrument—it becomes a mirror of the themes under investigation: negotiation, adaptation, vulnerability, and the search for coherence in fractured lives. The decision to interview both spouses separately is another strength, enabling **cross-perspective analysis** and revealing **interpersonal discrepancies** that enrich the analysis.

In conclusion, what, then, does this book leave us with?

Without doubt, there is some discomfort. It questions the assumptions that underlie integration and multiculturalism in politically fraught spaces. It challenges us to see acculturation not as a smooth process but as a terrain

of struggle, often asymmetrical and unjust. We are invited to interrogate ourselves whether hybrid identity is freedom or a new form of exile. And yet, it also leaves us with admiration – for the honesty of the participants, for the persistence of relationships born under duress, and for the quiet humanity that emerges amid alienation.

This is a book for academics interested in intermarriages, yes – but also for anyone who has ever felt the ache of not fully belonging. It is for migrants, for partners across boundaries, for those who carry multiple names, tongues, and homes in their hearts. And most of all, it is for those who have learned to build intimacy not despite difference, but in the deep, trembling shadow of it.

By Prof. univ. dr. Dan Chiribucă

1. INTRODUCTION: The present research, its rationale, and pioneering contribution

Intermarriage is a subject of scholarly interest since a group's tendency to marry beyond its ethnic boundaries implies the social distance existing between different groups within a multiethnic society (Song, 2015). In general, the study of intermarriage shows that partnering by traversing religious, ethnocultural, or racial boundaries does not only relate to individual choices but also indicates the degree of societal stratification, as well as the degree of rigidity of boundaries separating different groups in society (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015). Thus, the research on intermarriage, its patterns, and consequences enable us to understand cultural and societal shifts occurring around the globe, as well as to explore the role of an individual agency as opposed to social constructs and constraints and to illuminate the identity construction processes.

The present research focuses on mixed marriages (intermarriages) between Israeli Arab Muslim men living in Israel and Post-Soviet Slavic Christian women who immigrated from post-Soviet republics to Israel. While the first group is a group of natives, and the second is an immigrant group, both are minority groups in Israel in relation to the hegemonic Jewish population. Intermarriage between Arab Muslim men and Slavic Christian women represents an important case study, as it illumines the phenomenon of mixed marriages wherein one of the partners belongs to an indigenous minority (Sabbah-Karkabi, 2017) and where relations between majority and minority are informed by a deep-rooted conflict, which resulted in a built-in inequality in every aspect of life (Sabbah-Karkabi, 2021).

The overwhelming majority of studies on mixed marriages between immigrants and natives were conducted in Europe and the United States, where the research has focused primarily on European immigrant groups. An interest in the descendants of those groups has recently renewed (Qian et al., 2018), focusing mostly on mixed marriages between African-Americans and Whites, Asians, Native Americans, or Hispanic groups. Only a few studies examined the mixed marriages of European-origin Americans among themselves and the unions of individuals from minority groups (Boyd, 2021). Hence, the majority of research on mixed marriage focuses mainly on East Asia and North America, where the majority of transnational marriage migrations originate (Charsley & Shaw, 2006).

The narratives of mixed couples in Israel are still an overlooked study of research. Also, the literature on Arab-Israeli and Post-soviet marriages is limited and, overall, an understudied population. A recent Pew Research Center report, "*Marriages of Jews with non-Jews: Global situation and first data on prevalence in Israel*" (2015), underlines this limitation of lacking attention to Arab-Israeli marriages. Transnational marriages in which one of the spouses is from the Post-Soviet republics are an important focus for research on intermarriages in general and on Post-Soviet immigrants in Israel in particular (Esteve, García Román, & McCaa, 2012; Robila, 2007). However, the research on mixed marriages between immigrants from the post-Soviet republics and Israeli Arab citizens is virtually non-existent.

In this context, the population of my study is particularly original: Slavic Christian women from the post-Soviet republics and Israeli Arabs, who are themselves considered a minority in Israel from the point of view of the hegemonic Jewish majority. My study explores the factors contributing to the quality and stability of intermarriage, seeking to shed more light on that rather neglected area of research. In particular, I am interested in exploring the processes behind partner selection and the decision to intermarry, the factors affecting the relationship development and role distribution, and historical, societal, economic, and ethnographic factors affecting the consequences of intermarriage. Additionally, the research addressed the subject of integration and its relation to the quality and stability of intermarriages between Slavic Christian women from the post-Soviet republics and Arab Muslim men from Israel.

1.1. The structure of the dissertation

In the **first** chapter of the dissertation, a literature review is presented. The review unfolds the subject of intermarriage in terms of definitions, theoretical developments, and conceptual frameworks. In particular, the chapter discusses the structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, 1949) and functionalist approach (Parsons, 1952), the theory of symbolic interaction (Burgess, 1972 (1926)), and social exchange theory, as well as the shift from the structural positivism to the post-structural epistemology of social constructionism, transnationality, and reflexivity. Two major models of intermarriage (Kalmijn, 1998; Foeman & Nance, 1999; 2002) are also described after that.

Then, the review addresses the theoretical shift that occurred in the view and research of intermarriage, from the assimilationist perspective on intermarriage to the paradigms of acculturation (Berry, 2009; 2013; 2017) and hybridization, informed by globalization changes, recent currents of migration, and post-colonial multicultural and multiethnic pluralism. Likewise, the review discusses the vicissitudes of identity construction in mixed marriages and their progeny, especially referring to the notions of hybridization and hybridity. Furthermore, the review chapter discusses the trauma of immigration that haunts the immigrants through culture shock, grief reaction, and permanent nostalgia, having particular relevance to the population of my study. The third chapter presents the findings obtained from the interviews, which are divided into main categories with prominent emerging themes. The findings are structured along the axes of the research questions: the process of making the decision to marry and the relationship's development; coping with challenges of intermarriage; determinants of quality and stability of marriages; and acculturation styles.

The findings are discussed and interpreted in the fourth chapter in terms of their consistency with the recent research in the area. In addition, the chapter suggests avenues for future research. The last chapter recapitulates the conclusions in terms of the research contribution and my insights.

2. Literature Review

The literature review, presented hereafter, delineates the conceptual frame of reference for my study by recapitulating theoretical tenets and empirical foundations underlying the studies of inter-(mixed) marriages in general and relevant to my research field and participants in particular. The review discussed the evolution of the theoretical approaches to intermarriage and described the information undergone by the paradigm of assimilation towards acculturation styles, transnationalism, and hybridity. The review also addresses the trauma of immigration, accompanied by culture shock and expressed in mourning, alienation, and nostalgia.

The **first** section describes the evolvement in the epistemology of intermarriage in the context of major sociological theories and models, from structuralism, functionalism, and social exchange theories to symbolic interactionism and social constructionism. The **second** section addresses the patterns of intermarriage in theory and research by introducing Kalmijn's model of marriage and the model of interracial relations, two leading schemes in the research on intermarriages. The **third** section discusses a shift that occurred in viewing intermarriages as assimilation, informed by the scheme of "race relations," toward the notion of acculturation that comprises assimilation as only one of the acculturation strategies, the concept of transnationalism as a framework for understanding transnational marriages. The section continues the discussion by exploring the notion of hybridization and hybrid identities in the post-colonial and global world, as well as biculturalism in the context of the consequences of intermarriages. Furthermore, the trauma of immigration is discussed in the context of mixed marriages with immigrants, as featured by culture shock, loss, bereavement, and nostalgia.

2.1. Marriage and Intermarriage: defining the key concepts

Marriage constitutes one of "the foundational blocks of human social organization" (Lévi-Strauss, 1949 in: Alami Gouraftei, 2022: 2). Despite the diversity of family arrangements, marriage constitutes a phenomenon that is universal across human societies; its broad definition describes a union between two or more individuals, which is socially recognized and generally requires economic cooperation between the partners and investing social and material resources in joint progeny (Fortunato, 2015; Gurven et al., 2009). Marriage results in the creation of extended kinship bonds, producing alliances between groups, as well as supra-group levels of social organization (Chapais, 2013).

There are several fundamental dimensions of marriage. One dimension is the dichotomy of **homogamy** and **heterogamy;** the former refers to the pairing of two individuals with similar social, national, religious, or racial attributes, while the latter means the union of two individuals belonging to different social categories and groups (Waldis & Byron, 2006). The practices of **endogamy** versus **exogamy** (marrying either inside or outside one's natal community) constitute another well-studied dimension of marriage systems (Durkheim, 1965; Lévi-Strauss, 1949). Alami Gouraftei (2022: 3) compares exogamy and endogamy in the human community to what is defined as philopatry in other mating systems in nature: exogamy prevents competition over limited resources (e.g., Arciero et al., 2020 in: Alami Gouraftei, 2022: 3), whereas endogamy derives from kin selection and aims at defending communal resources (e.g., Clutton-Brock & Lukas, 2012 in: ibid). To conclude, exogamy is a rule of selecting a marriage partner requiring that they be outside of a defined social group. At the same time, endogamy refers to marrying someone from within a social group (Fulias-Souroulla, 2006).

An additional dimension of marriage refers to **the choice** that determines who the partners are and, in essence, forms a marital union. According to Kalmijn's model (1998), three forces operating in society affect this choice: 1) the personal preference of an individual, 2) the influence of third parties, norms, and institutions, and 3) the pressure of marriage markets. The process of selecting the "one" to connect with and spend their

life is affected and shaped by historical contexts, as well as socioeconomic and cultural circumstances (Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2006).

Intermarriage was defined in the past as a marriage between individuals who belong to different groups (Merton, 1941). However, throughout the years, the term "intermarriage" became used interchangeably with other terms, such as cross-nativity marriage, mixed-race marriage, interracial marriage, binational marriage, inter-ethnic marriage, and exogamy (Rodríguez-García, 2015). The terms used to refer to mixed marriages are loaded with ambiguity and characterized by a lack of consensus. The abundance of definitions reflects the difficulty of agreeing on the types of differences that constitute intermarriage. Different definitions refer to different contents. Two authors can use the same term but not cover a similar meaning. Quite regularly, the same author may use several terms interchangeably or without defining them. The meta-analysis of scientific literature identified five types of interethnic marriages (Kalmijn, 1998; Romano, 2008): 1) marriages consisting of representatives of the so-called kindred peoples with close cultures, traditions, languages, or historically established family relations; 2) representatives of "unrelated" nationalities; 3) "unrelated" peoples professing a common religion; 4) representatives of "kindred" peoples who profess different religions or even belong to different confessional groups; 5) representatives of the same people who profess different religions.

English-speaking authors most frequently employ such terms as "intermarriage," "mixed marriage," "interfaith marriage," "interracial marriage," "interethnic marriage," "cross-cultural marriage," and "international marriage." Adopting definitions relies on the historical, social, and legal contexts, as well as on the viewpoints of actors and researchers alike (Ozgen, 2015).

The term "*interracial marriage*" generally refers to marriages where the spouses differ in "race." As for the criteria used to define "race," these vary, but most often, it is the color of the skin. In the past, however, what we think of today as "ethnic groups" were seen as "racial groups": for instance, distinctly from other European groups, the Irish were viewed as a "race" in the nineteenth century, the definition was informed by stereotypes such as their criminality, lack of education, and weak family values – the Irish were even addressed as "niggers turned inside out" (Waters, 2000).

In "*interfaith marriage*," spouses are born and raised in families with different religions. To define a marriage where the spouses share the same religion following the conversion of one of them, the term "*intermarriage*" is sometimes used. Still, this term can also more generally signify a mixed marriage. "*Cross-national marriage*" or "international marriage" unites individuals who do not share the same nationality. The latter differs from "inter-ethnic marriage," where the spouses, if they did not grow up in similar cultural backgrounds, generally share the same nationality. For their part, Israeli authors use the concepts of "mixed marriage," "intercultural marriage," "binational marriage," or even "bicultural marriage" (DellaPergola, 2017a). These terms all refer to some differences between the spouses (in language, religion, culture, and nationality).

The diversity of terminology defining the phenomenon of mixed marriages worldwide reflects the diversity of mixed marriage modalities, their reasons, consequences, interpretations, and meanings. Numerous variables define the differences between the groups to which the spouses of mixed marriage belong, such as nationality, race, faith, culture, ancestry, etc. For example, the spouses of one couple of mixed marriages may differ from each other in terms of race and faith, while the spouses of another couple in terms of country of origin and ethnicity.

It is important to mention that intermarriages, especially those involving racial mixing and crossing boundaries in most countries and communities worldwide, are likely to evoke anxiety (Blau, 1964; DaCosta, 2007; Hodes, 1999; Kennedy, 2003). Although boundaries-crossing unions, such as interracial or interfaith, have always constituted a natural part of human history, there is still much reluctance and resistance regarding such mixing from the pre-established categories of religious, ethnic, or racial groups. Moreover, such boundary-crossing unions with sharp cultural or religious incompatibilities may even face social and legal sanctions (Chong, 2021).

2.2. Mixed marriages: frequency, likelihood, and motivation

The overwhelming majority of research on mixed marriages focuses on spouses and couples. Some of the main themes examined regarding intermarriage include intermarriage rates (Sasson et al., 2017; Yahirun, 2019),

the causes of mixed marriages (Breger & Hill, 2021) and the choices of partners (Hannemann et al., 2018), the consequences of intermarriage (Breger & Hill, 2021), more specifically on women (Khatib-Chahidi, Hill, & Paton, 2021) as well as on the reports about marital relations and married life (Potarca & Bernardi, 2021). As Breger and Hill (2021) note, referring to the studies carried out prior to the 2000s in English-speaking countries, in all cases, the researchers consistently focused on the problems and difficulties emerging in mixed marriages - marital conflicts and crises, difficulties among young people, rejection by extended family and community, racism, etc.). Today, the positive aspects of such a union, such as facilitating integration, promoting multicultural open-mindedness, and expanding boundaries of difference are more readily recognized and welcomed.

In the US scholarly literature, the first studies on mixed marriages appeared scholarly at the beginning of the last century, with a special emphasis laid on strong religious and ethnic boundaries between various social groups of European immigrants (Drachsler, 1921; Kennedy, 1944 in Elwert, 2018). However, as time went by, those boundaries grew weaker, being replaced by racial boundaries, which still exist and seem more powerful than others in the marriage market (Rosenfeld, 2008). That is to say, despite a significant decrease in racial barriers, in the States, racial endogamy remained strongest among blacks than among whites and Asians, respectively, as compared to Europe, which is characterized more by the religious barriers to intermarriage, especially among Muslims. The scholarly interest in patterns of exogamy among racial minority groups renewed at the end of the twentieth century, showing differences in the tendency to intermarry between different racial groups: Hispanics, Afro-Americans and whites, and Asians – each group displayed different patterns for endo- and exogamy. For instance, in the 1990s, in the United States, about 97 percent of marriages were racially homogamous (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1990), and 90 percent of marriage partners had a similar religious background (Fulias-Souroulla, 2010). Among Afro-Americans, racial endogamy still prevailed, even among highly educated individuals (Rosenfeld, 2008). Asians show different patterns of intermarriage in comparison to Afro-Americans. The socio-economic status of those who marry interracial was significantly lower than that of their endogamous counterparts.

Even though research has consistently shown that the predominant trend of marriages is homogamous, inter-ethnic marriage, wherein the partners belong to different ethnic groups, has become more and more popular. The research has referred to "cultures of mixing" (Caballero et al., 2008), involving partners from different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Yet, the percentage of mixed marriages, as compared to homogamous marriages, has been relatively low, as the "public" in the Western world is still sensitive to the instances of interracial partnering (Song, 2015).

Despite a significant decrease in racial barriers, in the United States, racial endogamy remained strongest among blacks than among whites and Asians respectively, as compared to Europe, which is characterized more by the religious barriers to intermarriage, especially among Muslims (Qian & Lichter, 2007). The mixed British population constitutes one of the fastest-growing sectors (Coleman, 2010).

In the United States, as Qian and others demonstrated (Qian, 1997; Qian, 1999; Qian & Lichter, 2007), breaking the racial barrier by intermarrying was easier for Hispanics, especially for individuals with a higher education, who tend to intermarry much more, as compared to blacks, regardless of the education level; furthermore, Hispanics were found to intermarry more frequently with whites, regardless of the education levels (e.g.), yet, Hispanic immigrants were more likely than whites to marry natives and same-race immigrants (Qian & Lichter 2001).

Race was found highly relevant for Asian Americans, as well as for other racial minority groups. It mattered in various ways, now salient and then subtle, in particular, in forming romantic desires, forging marital relationships, and negotiating child-raising. A study of intermarriage among Asian Americans reveals a lot about their racial struggles, their experiences as a racial minority group, and their process of social integration into American society. The problems faced by Asian Americans are more difficult to identity than for other "groups of color" since they are both praised as "honorary Whites" and conceived as racial and cultural others (Qian & Lichter, 2001).

Evidence from the past also suggested that most people prefer partners with similar demographic and social characteristics such as age (Atkinson & Glass, 1985), education (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004), nationality, socioeconomic status (Kalmijn, 1994), religion (Ortega, Whitt, & William Jr,

1988), and physical appearance (Chambers, Christiansen, & Kunz, 1983). Still, the increase in international migration following the process of globalization had a tremendous impact on expanding the opportunities to marry across borders, whether national, cultural, religious, or racial (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) and even sparked the development of a transnational marriage market (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2020; Charsley, 2013; Scott & Cartledge, 2009; Williams, 2010).

Once human populations that are culturally different begin to maintain mutual contact during a significant time, both individuals and families begin to face new opportunities and challenges while choosing a potential marriage partner. Consequently, both individuals and groups began to maneuver adjustments between including members of culturally different groups into their networks of kinship and strengthening the existing bonds between members of their cultural group (Alami Gouraftei, 2022: 2-3).

Despite the predominance of homogamous marriages, the proportion of mixed marriages is growing (Song, 2009), with attitudes, migration patterns, availability of partners, and education all factors behind the growth of interracial and interethnic marriage in various locations of the world (Foeman & Nance, 2002). The increasing incidence of intermarriages also suggests boundary shifts for different ethnic groups, as mixed marriages may affect the distinctiveness and boundaries of ethnic minorities (Song, 2009).

The odds for intermarriages are stronger between individuals with similar sociodemographic characteristics and with access to social interactions in micro-publics, such as sports teams, youth centers, workplaces, and university campuses, which permit everyday interaction between diverse groups. This is also true for deeply divided and conflict-affected societies, where semi-public spaces are used neutrally, avoiding confrontations (Mac Ginty, 2017). On the other hand, new immigrants may be less likely to marry natives, especially if they reside in enclaves, having thus little or no interaction with natives, which decreases the likelihood of mixed marriages (Furtado & Trejo, 2013). Still, schooling may reduce endogamy because it allows immigrants to leave their ethnic enclaves (Wozniak, 2010).

The level of education may also increase the chances of mixed marriages among some immigrant groups with a relatively high education level and decrease it for immigrants whose level of education is relatively

low. The frequency of intermarriage also depends on the opportunity to meet co-ethnic partners (e.g., Kalmijn, 1998; Qian & Lichter, 2007; Foad, 2018). If immigrant group members have a large selection of dating partners within their group, they will be less likely to intermarry (Song, 2009).

An immigrant may be motivated by the economic benefits of mixed marriage with a native, which becomes a determinant of a spouse selection (Furtado & Trejo, 2013). It was found that those immigrants to Australia who marry natives tend to have higher incomes (Meng & Gregory, 2005). Immigrants married to a native have a higher income on average than immigrants married to other immigrants, and this difference increases over time (Furtado & Song, 2015). In the US, one study indicated that marrying natives increased the employment opportunities for immigrants (Furtado & Theodoropoulos, 2010). However, those tendencies cannot always be extrapolated to all contexts or claimed to be universally valid. Thus, according to Zabyelina (2009), in her analysis of internet marriage agencies in Eastern Europe, the prospective wives are motivated by economic reasons, such as poverty and unemployment, which makes them accept offers that are not only dubious but also fraught with danger, for the sake of the hope to find a better life. As there is no regulation or state control over those agencies, many "mail-ordered brides" become victims of human trafficking, not to mention physical and sexual abuse.

According to Lavee and Krivosh (2012), findings obtained on various continents (the United States, Europe, and South-East Asia) show that spouses in mixed marriages tend to experience less marital satisfaction, have to cope with more conflicts, and are at greater risk for divorce, as compared to spouses in endogamous marriages. The main factors that put the stability and quality of the marital union in jeopardy are differences in norms, attitudes, and cultural values (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2004). If society views intermarriage negatively, it may contribute to conflicts between spouses in mixed marriages (Lavee & Krivosh, 2012). In addition, intermarried couples may face group sanctions and social discrimination (Rodríguez-García, Solana-Solana, & Lubbers, 2016; Milewski & Gawron, 2019). On the whole, the findings point out that mixed couples tend to experience higher marital strain and reported higher levels of depression as compared to endogamous couples.

2.3. Theoretical perspectives on intermarriage

2.3.1. Structuralism: Intermarriage as a transition from nature to culture

In his famous *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949), Claud Lévi-Strauss considered the father of the French structuralist school, advanced the notion of structuralism and delineated the theory of kinship by introducing the principles of reciprocity, i.e., "the synthesis of two contradictory characteristics inherent in the natural order" (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]:490). Resonating with Noam Chomsky's (1957) idea of "deep structure" in linguistics referring to concepts and ideas in the human brain, Lévi-Strauss was interested in the "deep structure," that is, in the common pattern uniting all human societies. Chapais describes five characteristics of "deep structure" relevant to human society (2010: 21): 1) it designates the uniqueness of human societies among all other animal communities; 2) its development matches chronologically the birth of human society; 3) it is cross-cultural and epitomizes the unity of all human societies; 4) it refers to the highest level of abstraction, comparable in its complexity to the human mind itself, but in the social sphere; 5) it reflects most elementary principles that govern social relationships between humans.

By imposing taboo on incest, human society has moved from nature to culture; in Lévi-Strauss' words, prohibiting incest signified "***the transition from the natural fact of kinship to the cultural fact of alliance*** (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]:30). In other words, the act of marriage between groups constitutes an exogamous alliance, now, instead of marrying their mother, sister or daughter, men would rather exchange them to social groups outside his group.

Such an exchange can be either symmetrical and restricted (between two groups of men in the relations of mutual exchange of women) or asymmetrical and generalized (in larger groups and populations exchanging women) (197). Lévi-Strauss also emphasized the fundamentality of systemic balance (equilibrium) in matrimonial exchanges that cannot be maintained if the permanence and substantial identity of the groups are not ensured; moreover, in such a case, the entire system would be endangered (323).

Lévi-Strauss's theory is based on the concept of ***binary oppositions***: culture versus nature, symmetrical versus asymmetrical, man versus woman, traditional versus modern, and so forth. It is through those sets of

binary oppositions that cultural production can be understood and analyzed. Despite its revolutionary quality at the time of appearance, structuralism has received much criticism for being ahistorical (non-chronological), androcentric, and formalist. Yet, as Chapais argued, Lévi-Strauss implied that all human societies were characterized by one defining feature, that is, by reciprocal exogamy between members of distinct groups". At least formally, the description met the criteria for "deep structure": 1) reciprocal endogamy constituted the passage from non-human to human society and defined its uniqueness; 2) the human ability to engage in relationships based on exchange constituted the most fundamental cognitive process, involved in reciprocal exogamy and described by Lévi-Strauss as a "universal mental structure"; 3) characterized what Lévi-Strauss called reciprocal exogamy the "atom of kinship," that is, the most elementary indivisible kinship unity of all human societies (Chapais, 2010: 21). In essence, the reciprocal exogamy is a rudimentary form of intermarriage, constituting a social arrangement whereby two distinct groups are bound together through marital union and kinship.

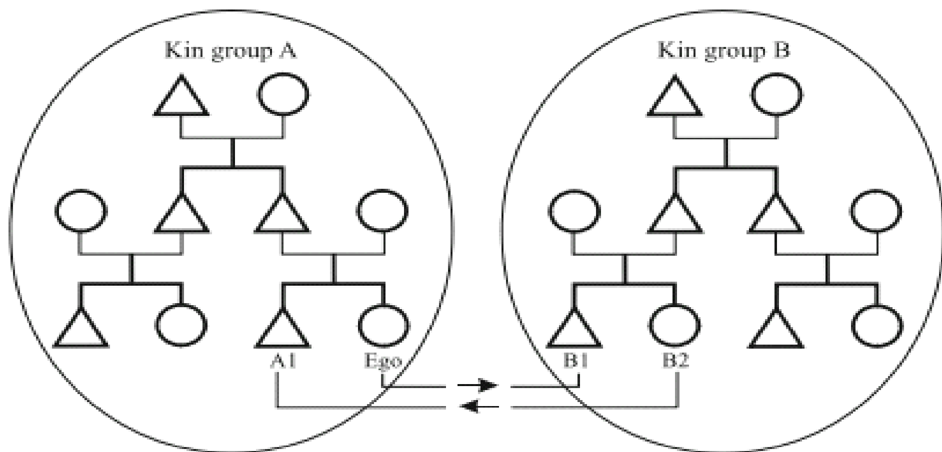

Figure 1: Reciprocal exogamy illustrated with the simplest system described by Levi-Strauss, restricted exchange between two exogamous kin groups, A and B (Chapais, 2010)

The **Figure 1** above finely displays the reciprocal endogamy in the shape of a restricted exchange between two exogamous kin groups. A single-family per group signifies intermarriage between A and B. Both groups are patrilocal, and both families exchange their women while purchasing other

women in return, thereby building alliances. After marriage, the ego wife is transferred to her husband's group. As Ego brings up her children in the B family, the A family will have relatives – grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins, who live in the B group. The process can be extrapolated to all marriages; it works in both directions. Therefore, two intermarrying groups become intimately and intricately connected. At the same time, the bonds between the A and B families are strengthened by this marriage since Ego and her husband connect and unite in-laws (Murdock, 1949: 29).

2.3.2. Functionalism

Following Durkheim, Talcott Parsons delineated the functionalist approach to sociology in general and to marriage in particular by emphasizing the centrality of functions and roles. He combined the premises of social anthropology and clinical psychology to put forth a role-based theory explaining how individuals contribute to society by being of service and playing a useful function. According to the functionalist perspective, all societal components are interdependent, and their interactions contribute to both societal functioning and individual well-being (Lindsey, 2010).

In his study of kinship (1943; 1952), Parsons emphasized the functional significance of a solidary kinship, especially in regard to socializing individuals, as well as concerning the deeper layers of psychological security (1943: 34). The benefits for the individuals entering a marital contract included: regulation of sexual behavior, economic cooperation, children’s protection, and socialization. Furthermore, marriage may provide the spouse with ego support, prevent depression, and improve psychological wellbeing. The level of education, housing, income, and material goods also provide the members of families with social capital.

Parsons saw the spouses in a conjugal unit (family) as performing binary opposed yet complementary functions: the “*primary role of the normal adult man in our society*” being “*the main “breadwinner” of his family*.” At the same time, “housekeeping” and childcare were the primary functional content of the adult feminine role in the “utilitarian” division of labor (34). In terms of this perspective, any change in functions or any ambiguity of gender roles, i.e., when one member of a couple assumes the role prescribed for and expected from another family member, negatively impacts familial

harmony and results in tensions and conflicts (Barker, 2009). Referring to what he deems “a romantic complex,” Parsons reduces the significance of the “personal” emotional feeling component in marriage, claiming that any affective spontaneity may hinder the interests of too many persons involved and even destabilize the entire system. Furthermore, he argues that the primary institutional sanctions are of positive functional significance, as they help maintain the solidarity of the kinship unit (31).

Parson’s functionalism is a macro-sociological systems theory that, despite its popularity for at least two decades, has been criticized as static, untestable, conservative, teleological, and tautological (Bailey, 1994).

2.4. The social exchange theory: Does the marriage pay off?

The social exchange theory has been informed by philosophical premises deriving from utilitarianism and psychological orientation known as behaviorism (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). According to the social exchange theory, individuals’ social behavior and interactions among them result from a process of exchange. This perspective suggests that the relationship between individuals is created by the pursuit of rewards and benefits while avoiding costs and punishment. In George Homans’ view (1958), social exchange can be referred to as **reinforcement**. The reinforcement principles originated from the theory of behaviorism, popular in the beginnings of the sixties of the past century (e.g., the work of Skinner). According to behaviorists, human behavior constitutes a function of payoffs provided by either non-human environment or other humans. Homans explicitly adopted behaviorist principles to explain the persistence of social exchange relations among individuals: people learn from their past experiences whether their behaviors will lead to rewards or punishments. Those positive or negative behavioral outcomes may reinforce, stop, or modify future behaviors for the sake of achieving the consequences they desire and minimizing those they would rather avoid. In their interactions with others, individuals tend to opt for social exchanges with positive outcomes while doing their best to avoid those with negative outcomes.

Homans argued that social behavior results from social processes of mutual reinforcement, as well as the lack of reinforcement. Blau defined exchange behavior as the intentional actions of persons who are driven by

the rewards those actions are expected to produce (1964:91). If reinforcement fails, relationships can terminate. According to Thibaut & Kelley, a dyadic relationship is sustainable if it brings forth rewards that are favorably comparable with other rewards in competing activities to which both individuals have access (Thibaut & Kelley, 2017: 49). The paradigm of social exchange helps understand how individuals appraise their marital life and marital satisfaction, how they see its advantages and disadvantages, as well as make their decisions either to continue or terminate their marital union. Most individuals will maintain their marital relationships if they believe that the benefits of staying with their partner outweigh the losses of leaving the relationship altogether.

As opposed to Homans and Blau, who analyzed the social exchange occurring in elementary (sub-institutional) social processes, Emerson extended the exchange paradigm to the macro level. He doubted the claim that individuals' choices are conscious and based on self-interested deliberation before taking action (Emerson, 1976:340)

The exchange theory can also be applied to the relationships between ethnic minorities and ethnic majority groups, as well as to the relationships between immigrants and natives. One can claim that ethnic minorities marrying individuals from a majority group exchange their high *socio-economic* status for their high *ethnic* status (Dribe & Lundh, 2008). Likewise, immigrants with higher education may enter the marriage market with natives (Furtado & Song, 2015; Furtado & Theodoropoulos, 2010).

Milewski and Gawron (2019) pointed out that most research addresses intermarriage as the dependent variable. That is to say, scholars study the effects of different factors on mixed marriages, but relatively little is known about *how intermarriage itself affects individual life conditions* (Milewski & Gawron, 2019). To investigate those effects, the authors used the gain/loss approach. Based on the review of the literature on intermarriage, they suggested an *intermarriage gain effect*, whereby the migrant spouse gains from being married to a native. The native spouse is a source of social capital for the migrant spouse in terms of learning the host country's language, institutional knowledge, and social and family network of the native partner, which provides the opportunity to enter the world of natives.

In essence, Milewski & Gawron extended the approach to the gain effect of intermarriage by including in their analysis the dimension of mental

well-being resulting from the benefits of being married to a native. However, at the same time, intermarriage may be associated with *loss*. As mentioned earlier, the mixed couple experiences higher marital strain than the spouses of endogamous marriage. The differences in values, preferences, and worldviews may result in a lack of mutual understanding, intense conflicts, and, eventually, the termination of the marriage. In such a case, an intermarriage inflicts misery upon both partners.

2.5. Social constructionism theory

Social constructionism theory, informed by the insights of existential, phenomenological, and social psychology, social history, and hermeneutics (Galbin, 2014), emerged in an attempt to come to terms with the nature of "objective reality" during the post-structuralist era of phenomenology and paralleled the advance of qualitative research. Social constructionism has been defined as a semiotic paradigm that is grounded in the interpretative axiom, according to which reality is an ongoing negotiation enacted from a cultural consensus (Galbin, 2014). While social constructionism does not call into question the existence of objective reality, it chooses to focus on understanding the world, produced in the process of human negotiations and interactions of meaning across social groups (McLeod, 1997). McLeod (1997) describes five characteristics of social constructionism:

- Social constructionists divorce themselves from the traditional positivist views of knowledge as lacking reflexivity.
- Social constructionists interrogate the taken-for-granted postulates on the social world as supporting the interests of dominant societal groups.
- Social constructionists argue that our understanding of the world is constituted by the process of interactions and negotiations between people who are historically positioned.
- Social constructionists maintain that the main objective of research is not to generate fixed and universally valid knowledge but rather to advance an appreciation of possibilities.
- Social constructionists seek to re-conceptualize psychological constructs of the "emotion," "self," and "mind" and see them as not intrinsic to the individual but rather generated by social discourse.

Thus, the basic conceptions human beings use, such as "self," "mind," "emotions," and "meaning," are all products of social discourse. People's conceptions, believes, and knowledge are ingrained in the fabric of society (Berger & Luckmann, 2016).

In their fine book, "*The Social Construction of Reality*" (1966), Berger and Luckmann made a major contribution to the theory, claiming that the version of social reality we perceive is generated by a conglomerate of interpersonal socio-cultural interactions, as individuals themselves are the main producers and sustainers of social phenomena through performing their social practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

As Andrews states, the claims of social constructionism are *epistemological* rather than *ontological*; that is to say, the approach does not assume to shatter the premises of objective reality as such and views society as the reality that is both objective and subjective; instead, social constructionists are interested in how individuals form their reality by language and construct their knowledge by narrative experiences of stories and histories (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism theory examines the effects of social and interpersonal variables on human beings' construction of reality and understanding of the world (Gergen, 1985).

Even though social constructionism is frequently used interchangeably with social constructivism, it is important to distinguish between the two. While the latter suggests that the world of experience is mentally constructed, reflected, and represented by the individuals and focuses on an individual rather than on social processes (Young & Colin, 2004), the former is interested in the interactions between the individuals precisely in the context of their societal roles and functions (Galbin, 2014; Gubrium & Holstein, 2014).

Social constructionists challenge key criteria of "good science' and, in particular, its criterion of objectivity, which is inappropriate, as there is no single "truth." In addition, the proponents of the social constructionism theory question the concepts of validity and reliability pertaining to the quantitative paradigm of positivist research. The criterion of **validity** requires that the scientific description be true, while **reliability** demands that the research data be reproducible, regardless of who obtained them and where. In their turn, social constructionists suggest that there is no finite description of the world since the world is inseparable from an individual

discourse about it. Thus, social constructionists argue there can be no true objectivity in the human sciences, as the methods used in these sciences imply the assessment of one group of subjective individuals by another group of subjective individuals, the instrument of research being inevitably subjective.

The social constructionists put forth their criteria for assessing the quality of scientific research. One of such criteria is ***trustworthiness***. Compliance with this criterion requires providing detailed information about the analytic procedure, as well as feedback from the research participants regarding the accuracy of data and the resonance with their experience. Thus, social constructionists do not present their findings in positivist objective terms but rather rely on their *plausibility*. In other words, they use a convincing argument rather than argue that the results are definitive, in accord with the constructionist idea that the findings of all research are but one of many existing discourses possible. Social constructionist approaches call attention to subjective processes and invite to look beyond the established structures (Khan & MacEachen, 2021)

Even though there are no clear-cut accepted by all definitions of social constructionism (Burr, 2015), there are several assumptions shared by its proponents:

(1) They challenge the approach to knowledge as a result of direct perception of reality, which is based upon objective observation solely, suggesting that the processes of interaction between individuals sustain it;
(2) They do not see essence in things or human beings that make them what they are;
(3) They do not accept the existence of objective facts or the idea of the objective factual truth that exists “out there.”
4) They see language as a tool for social interaction and a basic condition for thought (Dessler, 1999).

One of the main objects of Berger and Luckmann’s (1996) theoretical analysis is the nature and construction of knowledge. They consider knowledge to be created in the process of interaction between people within society. Social constructionism assumes that knowledge is embedded in cultural practices and values and historically situated; in addition, it is dynamic and fluid (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Gergen & Gergen, 2016).

Hence, in essence, rationality constitutes a product of cultural conventions and societal constraints. It should be noted that the dynamic and fluid approach to knowledge acquisition does not involve proving the ultimate truth but providing additional possibilities for the understanding of reality.

The object of social science research on intermarriage is twofold (Burr, 2015; Dessler, 1999). It is a question of studying both mixed marriages and what is considered mixed in a given society. The very conception of mixed marriage, therefore, constitutes in itself an object of reflection. Indeed, there is no consensus around its definition, and the term itself is problematic due to its vagueness and ambiguity. Burr & Dick (2017) delineate and detail the following dimensions of Social Constructionism: 1) Language, 2) Cultural and Historical Specificity, 3) Discourse and Disciplinary Power, 4) Power Relations, and 5) Relativism.

2.5.1. Language

For social constructionism, language is a fundamental tool in the process of generating knowledge; rather than describing or representing the world, language is seen as a form of social act that, in fact, constructs reality (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2009). It is through language that we make sense of people, objects, and events in the absence of direct one-to-one correspondence between language and the objective world. Rather, language acquires meaning only from its contextual use; thus, social constructionism proponents focus on language as capable of creating realities through varied forms of presentation, thereby inspiring a process of perpetual creation (Galbin, 2014).

2.5.2. Cultural and historical particularity

Classifying and categorizing the world varies in both cultural and historical terms. For instance, the notion of class division in European societies categorizing people as belonging to working, middle, or upper classes has been contested, with introducing new categories, such as “underclass”; however, just 200 years ago, we could find out that such category as the “middle class” did not exist; in fact, the category emerged at the times of the

industrial revolution following changes in property rights (Stallybrass & Whyte, 1986).

2.5.3. Discourse and disciplinary power

Social constructionists view *discourse* as a broad system of meaning (Speer, 2005) used to make sense of the world; discourse refers to clusters of ideas that are culturally significant, yet it is different from ideas because of its power to produce meaning. That is to say, the discourse does not merely describe a person or an event but, in essence, affects the way we act (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Thus, the discourse of "personhood" shapes perceptions of what a "normal" person should be; so, for instance, if a person has a BMI of over 25, they are "overweight," such discourse produces subsequent behaviors to reduce BMI, such as diet and exercise.

However, not all discourses are capable of producing disciplinary effects; in fact, the more discourses operate to normalize certain behaviors, the more "resistance" they generate, which often produces counter-discourses (Foucault, 1977). The dialectics of conformity and resistance impregnate categories characterizing late modernity (Frank & Meyer, 2002).

2.5.4. Power relations

Power relations exist on the societal level, as well as between individuals. Those individuals who hold various positions of power in society determine the norms to which the individuals occupying less authoritative positions are supposed to conform.

2.5.5. Relativism

The premises of social constructionism envision a world wherein there is no single "truth"; instead, what one believes to be true at a given point in time cannot be separated from the dialectics of power, discourse, and language. By embracing a philosophy of social constructionism, one accepts that any given person or event may be viewed through a variety of perspectives;

those perspectives, in turn, are shaped by the discourses of politics and power.

2.6. Patterns of intermarriage – theory and research

2.6.1. Symbolic interactionism – family as a "unity of inter-acting personalities"

The central premise of the symbolic interactionism theory, informed by the ideas of Mead (1934), Cooley (1902), and Thomas (1931), lies in the assumption that human beings live their lives in the symbolic sphere. Symbols are produced and sustained in social interactions; they are culturally derived and have shared meaning; through language and communication, symbols construct reality. Hence, in terms of symbolic interactionism, reality is, first and foremost, a social product dependent on symbolic interactions. The human self, too, is constructed by interactions with others.

According to the early proponents of applying symbolic interactionism to family studies, family is a "**unity of inter-acting personalities**" (Burgess, 1972 (1926)); that is, it is a mini-universe of interactive communication wherein personalities are affected by each other, roles are constructed, and identities become shaped. Burgess described an early 20th-century family as a dynamic system of interacting personalities that produces a "super-personality," i.e., a family identity. In his work, Burgess addressed dramatic changes in the American family in the twenties of the last century – its size was decreasing, and the roles of family members were changing, with the "wild and reckless behavior… of youth in revolt" (1972 [1926]: 8).

The proponents of symbolic interactionism argue that spouses can be flexible in defining their roles and negotiating the role definitions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2009). The degree of agreement on expectations concerning the roles of married individuals constitutes one of the key factors contributing to marital satisfaction (Hall, 2006).

Similarly, to functionalist and social exchange theories, symbolic interactionism is also interested in social roles. Both the functionalist approach and symbolic interaction theory could explain the division and

negotiation of the roles of family members (Stryker, 1968: 559). However, unlike the functionalist approach, the symbolic interactionist perspective in family research emphasizes the dynamic processes of roles-making, defining, and negotiating within the family (Hochschild, 1989). It explores the changes in defining the roles of husband and wife during different stages of family life and how those are affected by a variety of variables, such as gender role conceptions, the arrival of children, external events (e.g., parental employment, migration, natural disasters and so forth) and internal events (e.g., births, deaths, divorces) (Hutter, 1985).

A significant scope of symbolic interactionist research addresses socialization, i.e., the processes whereby personalities and self-concepts are created and shaped, and cultures, values, and attitudes are transmitted and passed to the next generation. The symbolic interactionists are interested in the reciprocity of family socialization, especially in the research where the negotiation of identity is problematic in motherhood (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999) or immigrant families wherein both parents and children have to re-negotiate their roles in new and unfamiliar cultural and social contexts (Hyman et al., 2000).

Hochschild & Machung (2012) distinguished between three types of ideology characterizing marital roles: 1) traditional, 2) egalitarian, and 3) transitional.

The **traditional** woman seeks to identify herself as a wife and a mother; she sees work as a fundamental component of her husband's identity and acknowledges that he has more power than she does. The **egalitarian** woman identifies herself with the same spheres of action as her husband does and seeks to gain an equal amount of power. The **transitional** ideology represents a merger of traditional and egalitarian roles, whereby a wife seeks to identify simultaneously with caring for the home and earning money yet expects her husband to be a primary breadwinner. At the same time, a transitional man expects his wife to perform a "lion's share" at home, as well as working outside the home. Even though the overwhelming majority of families interviewed by Hochschild & Machung seemed transitional in their beliefs, there has been a discrepancy between what they said about their beliefs in marital roles and the way they felt about those roles (2012).

It is also important to recognize that the relationship of spouses is characterized by conflict and a struggle for power. Thus, the proponents of

the so-called *conflict theory* of marriage believe that there is an inequality of resources possessed by the spouses. Each partner protects their interests and resources, seeking to augment their power in the home. A husband's power is primarily based on his earnings. However, a wife "*increases her power and acquires economic strength if she becomes a wage earner, which may result in the forming of more egalitarian households*" (Lindsey, 2010).

2.7. The Kalmijn's (1998) marriage model

Kalmijn views exogamy as a link between different social groups, while endogamy constitutes a form of group closure. However, rather than a "binary opposite" of endogamy, intermarriage functions as an indicator of various modalities characterizing social processes. That is to say, intermarriage does not merely reflect boundaries, divisions, and social distance, nor do marriage patterns always indicate societal differentiations. Instead, those patterns reveal demographic trends, such as the increasing prevalence of cohabitation and divorce over marriage; however, a positive correlated between intermarriage and divorce has been demonstrated.

The relationships between different groups as a result of intermarriage may make cultural and socio-economic differences more pronounced, thereby generating tensions and conflicts between the spouses. However, intermarriage may also provide the spouses with an opportunity to acknowledge otherness, thereby making their prejudices fade away. Furthermore, the salience of sociocultural differences may decrease in future generations, as the progeny of mixed marriages do not tend to identify themselves with a single societal group; however, mixed couples may also decide to socialize their progeny according to one spouse's culture only (Kalmijn, 1998: 396-297).

According to Kalmijn, marriage patterns are produced in the interplay between the following three forces operating in society: 1) the **individual preferences** for specific qualities in a spouse, 2) **the degree of influence from the social group** to which a partner in question belongs, and 3) **demands and constraints of marriage markets.** Although those factors represent distinct claims, in sociological terms, they have been addressed as complementary parts of one theory (Kalmijn, 1991; 1998). Each of the factors is composed of several variables:

2.7.1. Preference of marriage candidates

An individual evaluation of potential spouses is based on the resources they have to offer; there is competition between individuals for the spouse they desire by proposing in return their resources. Sociologists have been mainly interested in **socio-economic** and **cultural** resources.

2.7.1.1. Socioeconomic resources

Those are resources that are accountable for status and economic well-being. Upon marrying, one spouse's status and income contribute to those of the other, increasing the status and income of the family unit. In the marriage market, competing for socioeconomic resources brings about a pattern of homogamy. In the case of the strict gender division of paid and domestic labor, men and women exchange the resources from those two forms of labor. When the family status is mainly derived from the husband's position, male prestige is exchanged for female class background and physical attractiveness. Yet, the increase in the number of women in the labor market makes their socioeconomic resources increasingly appealing and significant for the family status (Davis, 1984).

2.7.1.2. Cultural resources

Cultural resources refer to a preference based on the cultural sameness of value systems and attitudes; this similarity generates mutual validation of each other's behavior and confirmation of each other's worldviews. That is to say, cultural similarity gives rise to personal attraction and eventually leads to a long-term relationship, as spouses participate in joint activities, such as buying a house, raising children, spending leisure time together, etc. (Kalmijn, 1994). Generally speaking, individuals prefer to marry a person with similar cultural resources since that permits them to build a common lifestyle in their marriage, thereby creating social confirmation and approval. However, Kalmijn argues individual preferences for cultural and socioeconomic resources do not signify endogamy (Kalmijn, 1998: 399).

2.8. Third Parties interventions

Since mixed marriages threaten the group by putting its homogeneity and inner cohesion in jeopardy, "third parties" attempt to prevent new generations from intermarrying in two ways: 1) by group identification and 2) by group sanctions (Kalmijn, 1998: 400).

2.8.1. Group identification

One experiences group identification by being aware of being distinct from other groups while sharing a common history with one's group. There is a direct relation between the intensity of the group identification feeling and internalization of the endogamy as a norm. Group identification was particularly significant for racial and ethnic groups, with the norms of endogamy deeply internalized (Merton, 1941). Conversely, the more homogeneous the environment is, the more likely individuals are to develop a sense of belonging to and identification with that distinct group.

2.8.2. Group sanctions

People may still refrain from intermarrying not only because of internalized norms of endogamy but also due to the sanctions applied by third parties. The state, the church, and the family represent three major third parties that may impose sanctions for intermarrying:

In the context of interracial marriages, the research found a number of characteristics in White people determining their decision to form interracial relationships: being a younger Catholic, a politically liberal male who attends a multiracial school and resides in an integrated community, yet those characteristics did not constitute a "profile" for intermarrying but rather independent variables that increased entering interracial relationships (Yancey, 2002).

2.8.3. Marriage markets

In addition to individual and group factors, endogamy may be controlled by structural arrangements, which, in turn, shape the opportunities for contact

between members of different groups. The arrangements related to the marriage markets can be studied in terms of the population composition in demographic terms, in the framework of groups' distribution according to the regional, or in a smaller and more functional setting, such as a school or workplace.

The chance for an individual to marry inside or outside a certain group is the same as the proportion of potential partners in that group; therefore, the smaller the group is, the lower the chances for endogamous marriage. As a rule, smaller groups are also more isolated, which implies a negative association between endogamy and the heterogeneity of a population (Blau & Schwartz, 1984). In addition, there are more opportunities for endogamy within groups concentrated in specific regions, e.g., Jewish-Americans living in New York City or Catholics and Protestants living in the northern region of the Netherlands (Lieberson and Waters, 1988). The size of the marriage market affects its structure: in a smaller marriage market, the structure is based on individual preferences rather than on market pressure (Kalmijn, 1998: 401).

2.9. The model of interracial relationship development

Foeman & Nance's interracial model (1999; 2002) distinguished between four stages whereby the interracial relationship evolves: 1) developing racial sensitivity, i.e., racial awareness; 2) grappling with the social definitions of race; 3) the emergence of a new identity, and 4) maintenance of the relationship.

2.9.1. Racial awareness

The stage of racial awareness, that is, developing racial sensitivity, is an experience that is interpersonal and cultural at the same time – it is characterized by being attracted to the other individual, with a sharpened awareness of their race (ethnicity) (Foeman & Nance, 1999). Developing sensitivity to the racial position of the other person requires understanding each other's membership in a group, awareness of their societal roles in relation to that group, and employing a common view on the role the race

variable plays in the relationships (Foeman & Nance, 1999; 2002). More precisely, the members of interracial couples ought to acquire an awareness of the following perspectives: 1) the individual's perspective, 2) their partner's perspective, 3) their group's perspective, and 4) the perspective of the partner's racial group (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

According to the authors of the model, it is during this stage that couples should acknowledge the role of race in affecting the development of their relationships, as well as how their mutual attraction will undergo social scrutiny. The researchers also discussed the differences in cultural privileges between Black and White partners in everyday interactions, as well as the ways of developing sensitivity to another's perspective, which is not always agreeable and comfortable (Foeman & Nance, 1999:550).

The premise of racial awareness of the model can be applied not only to interracial marriages between Blacks and Whites but also *to any mixed marriage*. "Racial sensitivity" may exist in interracial relationships that are beyond Black and White categories, as interracial couples become sensitive to their own and each other's perspectives. In other words, any interracial couple has to develop racial sensitivity and awareness of each other, which is an essential pre-condition for a racial consciousness required to sustain interracial relationships (D'Brot, 2006). The members of the couple must also develop a common belief that their relationship is feasible (Foeman & Nance, 2002).

2.9.2. Coping with social definitions of race

After an interracial couple has founded racial awareness and sensitivity, it enters the next stage and begins to cope with a variety of social definitions of race as a construct (Foeman & Nance, 1999). There are eight different definitions of "race" in Merriam-Webster's Dictionary only (2004): race as a division of humankind into traits transmitted by descent as distinctly and exclusively a human possession; race as a biological concept, defined as a sub-specific group of people from a specific geographic region with phenotypic and gene characteristics which distinguish them from other groups (King & Stanfield, 1990). D'Brot (2006) has defined race as "*a class of kind of people unified by geographical and ethnic origin*" (2006:9).

Amidst the varieties of racial constructs, during this stage, an interracial couple learns to find strategies to grapple with a society that does not accept interracial relationships; those strategies may be either proactive or reactive. If society does not accept their union, the couple may be forced to retreat from situations that may be harmful; in addition, the couple learns to negotiate potentially destructive but unavoidable situations (Foeman & Nance, 1999: 552).

The authors of the model define a coping stage as crucial, as it determines whether a mixed couple will separate, survive, or thrive. During this stage, the couple should develop their definitions of intermarriage, thereby strengthening their connections and bonds. The couple does so by handling challenges faced from the society (Foeman & Nance, 1999: 552)

2.9.3. Identity emergence

This is a stage whereby the members of an interracial couple re-define themselves; in the process, they learn to manage images of each other and their relationship. During this stage, the spouses continue to develop behaviors that are helpful in sustaining their relationship; in the process, the couple becomes able to redefine and re-name their experience in a way that undermines their adherence to previously learned norms and attitudes. The couple also needs to reconceptualize and re-negotiate societal taboos of differing family traditions and religions.

As a result of the increase in the number of non-White residents, the United States has become increasingly multicultural, and interracial families become more and more accepted by society (Foeman & Nance, 1999). However, as D'Brot argues (2006), until acceptance of interracial marriages becomes an "accepted norm," as it were, passing the stage of identity emergence remains necessary to sustain an interracial relationship. The dialectics of identification are unique to each particular individual (Hall, 1976: 204).

There are various possibilities for creating one's identity in the framework of interracial marriage: some insist on maintaining their racial identity after entering an intermarriage. By doing so, individuals in interracial relationships define including a different race in their lives as a source of additional strength and not as a source of controversy (Foeman &

Nance, 1999). To maintain one's "racial" identity, a person should be permanently engaged in identifying with their own racial culture; yet, individuals would often disassociate from it to sustain the interracial relationship. By dissociating from what threatens one's sense of belonging, an individual manages to maintain their self-respect (Hall, 1976: 206).

To view the interaction in interracial relationships as beneficial in terms of openness to new experiences, diversity, and cultural awareness, each spouse should maintain identification with their race (ethnicity) and, at the same time, remain aware of the racial (ethnic) identification of their partner. The study by D'Brot (2006) identified togetherness, dialogue, involvement, and social support as behaviors at the stage of identity emergence. Those behaviors indicated that the persons in an interracial marriage tended to do more things together to have more dialogues with their partner; in addition, they tried new experiences and enjoyed supportive surroundings.

2.9.4. Maintenance

During the stage of maintenance, the spouses create a system of shared strategies and perspectives to maintain their union and employ behaviors to preserve a powerful couple's identity. It is during this stage that the couple fosters a common vision for the rest of their life (Foeman & Nance, 1999, 2002). In fact, the maintenance phase is not an exclusive prerogative of intermarriages; it is inherent for all kinds of relationships: married and non-married, endogamous and exogamous, heterosexual and same-sex, romantic and non-romantic (Foeman & Nance, 2002; Stafford & Canary, 1991; Dainton, Zelley & Langan, 2003). In this context, the interracial relationship model offers an effective instrument to explore behaviors characterizing each stage of relationship development.

Stafford and Canary (1991) named five strategies for maintaining relationships: (1) positivity, (2) openness, (3) assurance, (4) networks, and (5) sharing tasks. This typology was further expanded by introducing the strategies of joint activities, writing cards and letters, and humor (Canary et al., 1993). Dainton, Zelley & Langan (2003) further developed the five-item typology by emphasizing the significance of routine behaviors.

The study by D'Brot (2006) demonstrated that interracial couples at the maintenance stage of their relationship had little to no concern for the race variable but rather cared for the well-being of the other person; for the sake of maintaining their relationship, they developed a repertoire of behaviors which they found the most productive and adequate for both spouses. In addition, they developed an awareness of differences, having learned to understand and respect each other's boundaries and limitations.

2.10. Shifting paradigms of intermarriage

2.10.1. From the assimilationist view to acculturation and its strategies

For a long time, intermarriage has been analyzed through the prism of assimilation. Intermarriage has been perceived as an integral and important part of assimilation, constituting "*the barometer of social integration and social distance*" (Yang & Prost, 2021:1). The so-called classical assimilation theory approach (Qian & Lichter, 2007) sees assimilation as a series of social processes that lead ethnic minorities (or immigrants) toward the mainstream of the ethnic majority.

According to early scholarship, the immigrant could be considered assimilated if they adequately participate in the mainstream discourses, practices, and institutions of the host society in the absence of any prejudices regarding their ethnic, cultural, or racial origins. During the same period, it was claimed that differences within a given society were grounded in religious divisions between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews rather than in ethnic variation (Kennedy, 1944). Furthermore, the assimilationist paradigm can be broadly divided into three theoretical models (Richard, 1991):

- **Anglo-conformity**: the earliest approach to assimilation, known as Anglo-conformity, originated in the United States and required that an immigrant abandon their cultural heritage and adopt behaviors and values of the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon group. In these terms, assimilation necessitates a merger of individuals and groups into the dominant society while completely embracing a common lifestyle (Park & Burgess, 1969).

- "The melting pot" is another view on assimilation, suggested by Zangwill in 1909 in the United States. This view conceptualized a new homogenous American ethnicity, born out of blurring ethnic differences and national, cultural, and racial blending into a single large community of Americans. However, the idea of a melting pot came out as rather controversial, as ethnic differences and identities continued to persist in the life of American society despite generational changes (e.g., Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). The melting pot emphasizes the idea of universality rather than diversity. The dynamic metaphor of the "melting pot" has come to signify a commonly-used term among theorists of cultural assimilation. The American idea of "the melting pot" - the intercultural assimilation that featured the American society in its years of development, symbolizes the process of change whereby heterogeneous societies made up of peoples from different cultural, social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds come together, thus forming a new democratic society (Gorney, 2009). Immigration is one of those major streams that feed "the "national pool" [which] quickly becomes a "tide" as the editorial considers the consequences of large-scale non-European immigration to the United States after 1964, which eventually produced "a contemporary American nation" (Madsen, 2011: 105).
- Cultural pluralism, the most recent model of assimilation, assumes that immigrants adopt behaviors and values of the host society but yet seek to preserve their cultural heritage.

  With the advance of globalization and in the face of large currents of migration, the notion of total assimilation, implied by the "melting pot," was replaced with the idea of multiculturalism, with a subsequent introduction of a "salad bowl" metaphor. Here, the "salad bowl" represents a metaphor for a combination of ingredients (cultures), each of them adding a unique and authentic taste to the "meal" of society. An additional metaphor, fundamentally different from that of the melting pot for multicultural diversity, has been "the human/cultural mosaic"; In contrast, in the melting pot, each piece blends with the others to make one homogeneous whole, "the human mosaic" refers to a dynamic multicultural model that takes into consideration the uniqueness of cultural, religious, and ethnic identity

of each distinct group in the society (Bor & Ketko, 2019). The advocates of the "***salad bowl***" theory claim that the idea of the melting pot signifies a lack of tolerance, as it requires that minority populations abandon their culture for the sake of integration into mainstream society. Instead, they suggest adopting the notion of multiculturalism, wherein each unique culture is allowed to maintain its identity and its authentic self (Bor & Ketko, 2019).

In his book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964), which by and large focused on European immigrants to the USA, Milton Gordon suggested a seven-stage model of assimilation, having established a link between intermarriage and the process of assimilation, claiming that intermarriage is the last stage in the progression of assimilation process undergone by individuals from minority groups. Gordon's theory has been the leading model to address assimilation through intermarriage, **Table 1**.

Table 1: The Assimilation Variables (Gordon, 1964: 71)

Sub-process or Condition	Type of Stage of Assimilation	Special Term
Change of cultural patterns to those of the host society	Cultural or behavioral assimilation	Acculturation
Large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society on a primary group level	Structural assimilation	None
Large-scale intermarriage	Marital assimilation	Amalgamation
Development of a sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the host society	Identificational assimilation	None
Absence of prejudice	Attitude Receptional Assimilation	None
Absence of discrimination	Behavior Receptional Assimilation	None
Absence of value and power conflict	Civic assimilation	None

Gordon maintains that structural assimilation results in marital assimilation and is thus a gateway to assimilation. Whereas cultural assimilation (acculturation) is not necessarily a pre-condition for structural assimilation, the latter invariably results in acculturation (Gordon, 1964:81). During marital assimilation, one's minority group is dissolved within a larger mainstream society, resulting in identificational assimilation.

Consequently, intermarriage comes to signify the ultimate acceptance of "others" into the social mainstream (e.g., Patterson, 2005; Peach, 2005).

Exogamy has been traditionally viewed as one of the best indicators of integration or assimilation of the migrant population, and the very term "mixed unions," or *Métissage*, was used to relate to a society without ethnic and racial prejudices (Garcia & Freedman, 2007). Kalmijn (1998:410) interprets the decrease in endogamy as a gradual integration of the national origin group into the host society, whereby the children of immigrants were more likely to marry out than the immigrants themselves.

Since marriage constitutes a mechanism for transmitting distinct cultural practices and values to the next generation, intermarriage has a central impact on the distinctiveness of ethnic minority groups (Barth, 1969). Therefore, according to assimilationists, in all cases, the identity transmitted to the children of intermarriages could be only the identity of the parent from the majority group. As a result, the ethnic group disappears as a separate entity. Its unique values are extinguished (Gordon, 1964: 81). Similarly, to Gordon, for whom a price for assimilation consists in the evaporation of the ethnic group's distinct values and characteristics, Alba and Nee see assimilation as a gradual dissolution of an ethnic specialness, along with its distinct culture and differences (2003:11). As there was no consensual clear-cut definition of "integration," scholars used it interchangeably with "assimilation" (Favell, 2001).

Many researchers still view mixed marriages as one of the best means to integrate different populations (e.g., Foeman & Nance, 2002; Lichter, Qian, & Tumin, 2015; Elwert, 2018). A mixed marriage is believed to lead to more interethnic contact, with fewer prejudices and more mutual acceptance between two groups (Kalmijn, 2015: 247). The assimilationist perspective would consider immigrant-native marriages as a sign of the successful integration of the immigrant into the host society (Gordon, 1964; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015).

The theory of assimilation aimed to understand immigration scientifically (Alba & Nee, 1997). Yet, a significant body of research has questioned the direct causal link between mixed marriages and integration and pointed to the multidirectional relationships between the two and the complexity of establishing the vector of the causality. While some studies argued that economic, social, cultural, and legal integration occurs prior to

intermarriage, others claimed that intermarriage is what antecedes and subsequently leads to the integration, as well as to the individual's sense of belonging (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). Yet additional studies maintained that in multicultural and diverse societies, especially those deeply divided, it becomes more and more difficult to identify the target "mainstream" society into which immigrants are supposed to integrate. What is more, it is precisely the mixedness that differentiates between the couple and the "mainstream society" (Collet, 2015). Therefore, more research is needed to reach a more comprehensive perspective on the relationship between intermarriage and integration.

Many researchers have recently begun to question the assimilationist premise (Spickard, 2000; King-O'Riain et al., 2014): the assimilation theory has been criticized for its inability to explain contemporary interracial and inter-ethical relationships. The classical theory of assimilation has also been criticized for **ethnocentrism (Anglo-conformity)**, as it states that immigrants **must** get rid of their forms of behavior and accept those that natives accept. At the same time, it is assumed that more advanced forms of behavior and cultural repertoire are characteristic of natives. Another controversial assumption of the theory is that assimilation is inevitable.

In addition, nowadays, assimilation is no longer viewed as a unidirectional process that automatically results in the merger of immigrants and natives (Qian & Lichter, 2007). For instance, Alba and Nee (1997) re-formulated the classical approach to intermarriage as a gateway to assimilation. They suggested that the erosion of social and cultural distances between representatives of different races and ethnic groups is a bidirectional, rather than an asymmetric, process. Race or ethnicity are socially constructed boundaries, which makes them traversable as time passes. Rather than assimilation, there is a process of mutual adaptation between representatives of distinct racial and ethnic groups, as well as between immigrants and natives. In addition, the discovery of DNA sequencing led to revolutionary discoveries of multiple genes that flow among human populations (Bentley et al., 2009), thereby permitting us to conclude that intermarriage is a fundamental driver of cultural exchange in our species (Alami Gouraftei, 2022).

A growing body of research, informed by theories of ethnic competition, argues that intermarriage does not necessarily lead to the loss

of the ethnic minority identity; rather, it is claimed that intermarriage may heighten the racial awareness of the spouses belonging to the minority, precisely because of their direct contact with the members of the mainstream society; thus, instead of weakening the minority group, intermarriage contributes to its growth (Olzak, 1992; Song, 2009; Alami Gouraftei, 2022). In addition, the researchers pointed out in their surveys the possible transmission of a multiple or bicultural identity to children.

On the other hand, the research has also shown that the increase in the number of mixed marriages worldwide by no means does away with the negative view of mixed marriage as such, nor does it reduce societal prejudices (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015). Recent studies have demonstrated that the patterns of intermarrying may originate from the existing social stratification informed by imperial-colonialist discourse, which imposes binary oppositions of "the white" and "the other"; thus, frequent unions between "white men" and East Asian women, who, in accord with the colonial paradigms, embody a seductively exotic docility, so valued by white patriarchy (e.g., Lee, 2015). That is to say, rather than subverting the pre-established boundaries of social interaction, mixed marriages may precisely confirm and reinforce those boundaries. Instead of questioning a stereotype, a mixed marriage reinforces it.

Indeed, the research by Rodriguez-Garcia et al. (2016) on marriage preferences among immigrant minority groups demonstrated that ethnic prejudices existed even within exogamous couples: e.g., Latin Americans would not marry "Moors" or Pakistanis; neither Chinese nor Moroccans would marry Latinos, while Romanians would discard both Chinese and Latinos. The scholars conclude that mixed marriages do not really abolish ethnocultural boundaries and do away with stereotypes and prejudices.

Berry (2009; 2017) discussed assimilation as one of several modalities of **acculturation**, which he described as **cultural adaptation that either includes or excludes various attitudes, values, behaviors, identifications, and one's sense of self**. He argued that the differences between heritage and destination cultures necessarily require a certain degree of acculturation on the part of the immigrants. In this context, he suggested the following acculturation styles: 1) **assimilation**, i.e., adopting the host culture and discarding the original culture; 2) **separation**, i.e., rejecting the host culture while retaining the original culture; 3) **marginalization**, i.e., rejecting the

host culture and discarding the original culture; 4) **integration of biculturalism**, i.e., adopting the host culture while retaining the original culture.

According to these models, acculturation strategies are situated between two orientations: 1) the degree of identification with one's culture of origin and 2) the degree of identification with the host community. The research has shown that minority groups prefer the "integration" strategy, which is high in both orientations; in addition, the integration style is associated with the least acculturation strain (Brown, 2000).

In a similar vein, Beate Collet suggested an analytical model founded on three main patterns adopted by mixed couples in the process of acculturation: 1) the minority partner adopts the dominant culture while reducing the attributes and practices of their original culture to a minimum; 2) the majority partner adopts the culture of the minority spouse; 3) seeking for balanced relationships based on equal and reciprocal exchanges; in this way, new spaces, situated outside the fixed boundaries, are created (Collet, 2015). In this context, Collet reminds us that "***whatever her status… a woman will tend to adjust by adapting to the man's culture, whether he is a part of the majority or a minority***" (Collet, 2017: 385).

Since the late 20th century, the process of acculturation has changed in many ways, as many migrant-receiving countries are increasingly adopting multiculturalist ideologies that allow and even encourage immigrants to preserve, foster, and take pride in their cultural heritage (Berry, 2013). What is more, the advances in communication and modern technologies enable immigrants to stay in touch with friends and family in their native land, as well as to access the media of their heritage culture (Jensen et al., 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Therefore, the influence of the heritage cultures on the host culture may be more pronounced than in the past.

Yet, since cultures, religions, and races that come in contact during intermarriage rarely have the same social prestige, the inequality of status between the partners is inherent and inevitable (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). Since inequality is a given point of departure in the process of acculturation, partners are required continuously to make choices and decisions regarding a wide spectrum of matters: the place of living, the division of roles and responsibilities in the home, the language spoken at home, the religious affiliation, the relations with the in-laws and friends, the number of children,

their names, the ways of cultural transmissions to those children, and last but not least, even the furniture style at home and culinary preferences (Caballero, Edwards & Puthussery, 2008).

Since my study is located in a society that is considered deeply divided (Israel), it is particularly important to keep in mind that mixed couples in such societies may be much more restricted in negotiating cultural identities, making choices, and employing strategies for successful adjustment (whether as acculturation or integration) (e.g., Jacobson et al., 2004; McDoom, 2016). In a society that is affected by permanent conflict and characterized by ongoing tensions, any individual or group's acts or decisions always have the potential to generate friction. Therefore, mixed couples are forced to "walk on eggshells" to avoid marital conflicts and familial or social exclusion if they seek to maintain their own private space (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

The study by Abu-Rayya (2007) ventured to understand the well-being of European wives of Arabs living in Israel in terms of acculturation styles the spouses adopted while adapting to a new cultural and social environment. The study found that those women who adopted assimilation and integration styles were most satisfied by the quality of their marriage and marital intimacy, displayed positive affect, and had high self-esteem. On the other hand, those wives who adopted a separation style scored lower on both psychological and marital well-being; the lowest scores were received by those who adopted a marginalization style.

2.11. Navigating identity(ies) in the intermarriage: Hybridity as acculturation style

Identity can be broadly defined as one's subjectivity, constructed in and shaped by socialization within different groups, such as family, religious or political community, or a nation.

The Post-structuralism scholarship_rejects previous views of identity as fixed and suggests that identity is found in an ongoing process of being shaped and modified. In other words, one's identity is not as unequivocal and transparent a notion as we used to think (Hall, 1990). The notion of "identity" proceeds much beyond an understanding of the self on the reflective and reflexive layer; it incorporates the way one relates to or

differentiates oneself from the group, as well as the way the group relates to or differentiates itself from that individual. The identity is fluid and flexible, as one constantly re-appraises and re-adjusts oneself throughout one's life in society (Bendle, 2002).

In Hall's terms, we should rather think of identity as a never-ending process of production constituted inside the representation rather than of an accomplished and fixed fact, which problematizes the authenticity and authority associated with 'cultural identity' (Hall, 1990:222). In a similar vein, Hogg and Abrams argue that our identity, i.e., our sense of who we are, is very much affected by social groups to which we belong; thus, such constructs as Syrian or Israeli, Latino or Afro-American, Muslim or Hindu, politician or surgeon are all determined by the normative properties of social groups. In their terms, both self-definition and intergroup acting are affecting each other (2007: 335).

There are two parallel perspectives on the self-concept that is socially grounded: 1) identity theory (Burke, 1980; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1968) and 2) social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Turner, 1982, 1985). The former theory sprang from the sociology field, while the latter pertains to the disciplinary space of social psychology that endeavors to explain group processes and intergroup relationships. Yet, both theories are quite similar in their premises: they both do away with treating the self as prior to society, autonomous and independent, and suggest that the self is constituted by society and thus social. In addition, the two theories consider the self as differentiated into multiple identities residing in embedded practices, such as norms and roles (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Tajfel & Turner (1986) distinguished between personal and social identities in interpersonal situations, wherein personality variables primarily shape one's behavior, and in group situations, which are mainly determined by processes based on categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The theory of social identity emerged as a theory of intergroup relationships, including conflict and cooperation between groups. However, the theory evolved into a broader sociological theory of the role of self and identity in a group, and intergroup relations have remained a core characteristic of this theory (Hogg, 2016). The theory assumes that identity primarily originates from group memberships; furthermore, it suggests that people seek to achieve and maintain a positive social identity, which boosts

their self-esteem; the positive identity emerges out of comparing one's group of belonging and relevant groups outside (Brown, 2000).

Social and cultural identities are the last to change and adjust during an acculturation process (Bhugra et al., 1999). In the process of migration and acculturation, one's racial, cultural, and ethnic identities combine to shape one’s identity that is rather mutable on a personal and a social level (Bhugra, 2004a, 2004b).

According to Bhugra’s definition (2004a), social identity refers to a culturally defined set of personal characteristics attributed to social roles, e.g., the role of being a father, mother, friend, employer, and so forth. Furthermore, one’s social identity is grounded in one’s ethnicity, as ethnic groups are composed of people who share a common culture, including common history, religious and cultural beliefs, values, culinary preferences, and language (Bhugra, 2004a). Ethnicity includes both race and culture, the former based on biological constructs but not necessarily a social and political construct: for instance, peoples from Africa or parts of North and South America may belong to the same race but still differ in terms of value systems, social norms, language and religion (Shah, 2004).

According to Bhugra, the components of cultural identity include religion, rites of passage, language, dietary habits, and leisure activities. Even if an adult does not practice **religious rituals**, they continue to construe a key component of their cultural identity, as religion has the power to preserve community values and foster a sense of belonging. **Rites of passage** are additional fundamental stages in developing one's cultural identity; accomplishing those rites determines the degree of one's acceptance by one's cultural group. **Language,** both written and spoken, constitutes an additional marker of cultural identity. Along with economic stability, linguistic proficiency determines one's eventual abandonment of one's cultural group in favor of the dominant culture. **Dietary habits and practices**, as well as the symbolism of food and religious taboos associated with food, constitute another component of cultural identity. **Leisure activities**, such as music, movies, literature, or sports, make one feel part of one's culture; those do not necessarily change in the acculturation process. However, as the use of language is invariably socially situated and allied with other issues of identity and power, even in seemingly liberal societies,

cultural identities may be imposed while multiple identities are contested (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004: 10-11).

Contemporary perspectives on identity seek to achieve a balance between agency or reflexivity and the unconscious habitus (Adams, 2006). The scholars criticize the Bourdieusian approach of *habitus*, or *unconscious identity formation*, for being deterministic and for denying the subject a conscious and autonomous choice (Boland, 2020). However, one cannot conceptualize oneself in a vacuum since one writes and speaks from a specific culture and a particular place and time; therefore, what one says must always be positioned and contextualized (Hall, 1990).

Thus, the term "*mixing*" does not precisely describe the combining of nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture but embodies an active space, examining and challenging the norms and routine (Rodríguez-García, 2015: 11). According to Rodriguez-Garcia, mixed couples are categorized by three features: first, the adaptation to the dominant culture; second, the adoption of the perceived cultural minority; and third, the reciprocal cultural exchange that creates a balance between the couple's cultural background and identity.

The proponents of the pervasive reflexivity of identity emphasized individual and collective human agency. According to Bernstein (Bernstein, 2015:8), self-conceptualization is an ongoing social process in which individuals participate by learning societal discourses, expectations, and beliefs, participating in various social circles, and making decisions to associate with those discourses or to distance themselves from them. In his terms, the individuals construct and perform their identities through verbal interactions and storytelling, memory, and narrative. Thus, Bernstein argues, identity cannot be a product of a personal choice only; rather, it incorporates one's connection to one's collective environment, to the duties and norms within this environment, and one's symbolic and real attachments with others. The union between two ethnically, culturally, and religiously different identities through a mixed marriage may disrupt the process of identity transmission to the next generation, thus "catalyzing expressions of **hybridity**" (Bernstein, 2015: 8, my emphasis).

As a theoretical term, the notion of "**hybridity**" emerged in the post-colonial discourse on globalization and mixedness; the scholarly literature of

cultural hybridity emerged in postcolonial studies during the eighties of the last century.

Cultural mixing and globalization, the scholarly literature on hybridity, or, to be precise, cultural hybridity, appeared in postcolonial studies during the eighties of the last century. The term hybridity has been informed by notions such as "hyphenated identity" or syncretism, also referred to as "creolization," which is used to observe and interpret cultural beliefs and practices in ethnic and cultural intermarriage. Bhabha viewed hybridity as a third, an "in-between" space in the postcolonial context that uproots hegemonic colonialist paradigms and dismisses discrimination (Bhabha, 1994). As individuals are engaged in an ongoing process of modeling their selves across a spectrum of shifting identities, they are bound to choose from a variety of sociocultural markers, often producing new hybrid identities (Trask, 2010: 17, 77-79).

Hall connected hybridity to identity in diaspora, migration, and multicultural studies, claiming that one's identity lives through difference via hybridity (Hall, 1990). According to Smith, "hybridity" signifies an encounter between and merger of two ethnocultural categories, which subsequently become impure and indistinct and which are experienced as a meaningful identity label (Smith, 2008). Bernstein defined hybridity as an amalgamation of identity components, wherein two or more different identities affect each other in a variety of ways, from creating mixed ethno-cultural identities to synthesizing religious and ideological beliefs (Bernstein, 2015).

Hybridity is sometimes used interchangeably with "duality," yet while the former suggests a blending of identities, the latter implies that two of them are occurring simultaneously; thus, Berstein explains that hybridity expresses itself in feeling "both and neither" in one's cultural space and situated in the "in-between" space of blending cultural and religious identities (Berstein, 2015: 9). Yet, duality, too, may still constitute a form of hybridity.

In addition, hybrid identity may be understood as "double consciousness," as Smith puts it, referring to a distinct double consciousness that overtly embodies multiple identities rather than crosses the boundaries of identity group; therefore, those individuals or groups feel a certain "two-

ness," as it were, with two identities that attempt to co-exist in one individual (Smith, 2008: 7).

One's identity invariably relies on **memory** as a source of knowledge of its contents. The identity is neither stable nor complete since it is constantly affected by the unconscious choices of memory and by ongoing social interactions and environmental influences. Even though memory is elusive, impalpable, and untrustworthy, it still affects one's consciousness of one's heritage culture and influences one's acceptance of a host culture. In one's mental structure, the identities represent themselves as narratives: they interweave and intertwine, creating a merger content of hybridity. In this sense, *hybridity is not the same as biculturalism*: bi- prefix presumes a co-existence of autonomous elements (e.g., bilingual). In contrast, hybridity is the existence of the "third" in-between space, different from union or combination, implied by biculturalism.

Hybridity is *oxymoronic* by definition, as it embraces ethnic, cultural, and social elements that are otherwise incompatible; thus, a hybrid-speaking position called "*Black British*" is a mode of representation that interrogates definitions of British national identity as "white" (Ang, 2003). Hybridity is also inherently *ambivalent*: the hybrid identity is suspended in the in-between space: as Ang describes it, a hybrid identity is not really Western nor authentically Asian; it may be embedded in the West, yet always partially disengaged from it, but also disembodied from Asia, though emotionally attached to it (Ang, 2003). While problematizing boundaries and borders, hybridity does not intend to erase them altogether. Rather, it constitutes an encounter of self with others, the local with the global at the junction of borders (Boland, 2020).

By preventing the absorption and erasure of differences within a hegemonic uniformity of homogeneous sameness (Boland, 2020), hybridity challenges assimilationism and creates a spectrum of differences (Geertz, 1988: 148). The prism of hybridity foregrounds complex entanglement, togetherness-in-difference instead of separation and virtual apartheid. In essence, the theories of hybridity suggest an additional dimension in the discussion of mixedness and address a wide variety of societal boundaries confronted by individuals in the acculturation process. They also emphasize reflexivity on identity by embracing an autonomous choice of systems of beliefs, regardless of nation, community, and religion, avoiding defining a

stranger (Boland, 2020). Thus, in the context of acculturation styles, hybridization may be considered one of the acculturation strategies and, at the same time, one of the consequences of acculturation, whereby an individual (an immigrant or their progeny) blends the identity of heritage culture with that of a host culture, by creating a new, different identity that is larger than the sum of its components.

However, hybridity alone does not suffice to explain the variegated situations of persons from mixed multicultural families, nor does it fully account for the way people describe their multiple attachments and the strategies they employ to imagine a sense of belonging. The experience of simultaneously being both insider and outsider is ambivalent and may be quite distressing in everyday life (Bhabha, 2007: 2)

Although scholarly work on mixed families in deeply divided societies such as Israel has been quite scarce, it is clear that exploring mixed families among conflicts and complex tensions offers a unique opportunity to address religion and ethnicity as interdependent dimensions of identity. The recent research on intermarriages between Muslims and Jews in Israel that aimed to identify the trajectories of constructing identities in those families in the context of the ongoing conflict between Jews and Palestinians came up with the following two patterns of identity formation: (1) *single identity*, i.e. full "relocation" of one partner to the other partner's culture and (2) *hybrid identity*, i.e. full participation of both partners in each other's religious and cultural practices (Gaya, 2022).

2.12. Transnationalism and transnational marriage

The notion of transnationalism is linked to and inseparable from globalization, yet the concepts are by no means synonymous. While globalization refers to a variety of activities in socio-economic and political domains that expand and deepen interactions between countries and across continents (Klingerberg et al., 2020: 2), transnationalism is interested in individual and social movements across borders at an ongoingly accelerating speed and in the way globalization impacts the trajectories of those movements (Li & Teixeira, 2007; Peck, 2020). Thus, scholars of transnationalism discuss it through the prism of the connection between "here" and "there" perspectives of people regarding their daily lives; in this

context, each individual's experience is unique, while their self-perception of transnational citizenship and identity is subject to a continuous change (Grewal, Caplan & Gunew, 2002).

Vertovec (2001) describes transnationalism as social morphology that relates to kinds of social formation spanning across borders (e.g., diaspora); he identifies several clusters of meanings attached to 'transnationalism.' For Vertovec, transnationalism is a type of consciousness that implies multiple identifications, individuals' awareness of decentred attachments, and a process of cultural reproduction. The latter is characterized by fluidity of styles, institutions, and quotidian practices and is referred to in terms of syncretism, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity. In essence, transnationalism is an antipode of assimilationism, as it aims at reconfiguring the way of thinking about key concepts that transgress the pre-established notions through migration and mobility (Yeoh, 2005: 208). Contemporary migrants, who share multi-cultural aspects with the host country, can maintain a bond (some attachment) to their homeland while at the same time trying to adjust and incorporate into the host country (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007).

According to Schiller et al. (1992), transnationalism refers to the processes whereby migrants construct social spaces to link between the country of origin and the hosting country; during those processes, transmigrants establish and sustain various networks of cross-border relations, among which there are familial, socio-economic, religious, and political links, thereby developing identities with simultaneous attachments to two or more societies (Schiller et al., 1992: 1-2). The process of constructing meaningful interrelations is by no means fixed and static; rather, it is permanently evolving, thereby forging the individuals' identities as well as creating their sense of belonging (Tedeschi et al., 2022).

It should be emphasized that migration refers not only to the act of moving but also to the links between different places that are continuously created and reproduced over time (King-O'Riain et al., 2014). Not only do (trans)migrants move between different territorial spaces, but they are also engaged in constructing, altering, and resolving links between the past, the present, and the future embodied by those places (Lysgard & Rye, 2017: 2131). Bauböck and Faist (2010) highlight the importance of migrants' agency

in a globalized world and suggest that transnationalism inherently contains a variety of dynamic cross-border activities and relations.

The concept of transnationalism can certainly deepen our understanding of the possibilities of intermarriages through couples-defined spaces (Gargano, 2009). The transnational paradigm enables us to see intermarriage through the lens of cultural and social transformation and the avenue of symbolic capital in the context of mixed couples, particularly the wives and their living situation in Israel. This understanding is essential to this study as cultural and social reproduction, and the awareness couples develop of the disparities between their familiar domestic and the less familiar socio-cultural habits, which in turn influence their narratives about mixed marriage life. For the post-Soviet group of women living in Israel, this might mean establishing new social relationships, making decisions about children's education or home environment, and making friends with others living abroad. This specific 'transnational imaginary' (Wilson et al., 1996) is a reflection of how individuals across a range of networks can create communities out of transnational groups (Bauböck & Faist, 2010).

Rather than concentrating exclusively on their experiences of living abroad as a mixed married couple, it is essential to acknowledge the complexity of the relationships and lived realities of the couple's space, place, and scale. By using the prism of transnationalism as an avenue to analyze mixed marriages, we can identity how couples' narratives are intimately related to certain entities across time and space, how these connections form the very foundation of what it means to be a transnational and living in a mixed marriage relationship (Lysgård & Rye, 2017). The tenets of transnationalism can be used to understand how the female participants in this study who settled in Israel convey their cultural and social class, religion, or migration history in relation to home and the host country (Li & Stodolska, 2006).

Transnationalism theory can help understand the consequences of interaction with another culture and society (Grewal, Kaplan, & Gunew, 2002). In the present research, transnationalism as an approach permits contextualizing the case of Post-Soviet Slavic wives and Arab-Israeli husbands. The transnational process often happens to both parties at different stages of their relationship.

The term “**transnational marriage”** emphasizes a transnational space and networks created by individuals and couples. It also encompasses the transactions of economic and symbolic resources and exchanging political and cultural practices between two communities. It applies to couples in this case study when discussing the impact of home and abroad social practices and cultural norms in both societies. Since this study addresses diverse aspects of transnational marriages, such as culture, society, economic status, education, and religious differences, it is useful to use both terminologies.

Scholarly work in transnational marriage has often been dominated by sociologists who studied structural factors in determining common paths of behavior between transnational marriage and its many meanings for the societies in which they occur. Some of the common patterns of mixed marriage in societies were discussed in early studies in social- psychology, for example (McRae Jr, 1983) as “*social distance*” between different social groups. Others spoke about a group’s size and its proportion to others in the area or socioeconomic differences and group heterogeneity (Spickard, 2000).

Although the scholars mentioned above used distinct methodologies in their work, they all shared the idea that transnational marriage reveals how productive society is in incorporating its diverse social groups into a coherent, stable, and peaceful coexistence. Other scholars in the sociology field focused their attention on how ethnic preferences can determine how individuals are accepted as potential partners by those from another cultural and or ethnic group (Nave, 2000; Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). Transnational marriages can incorporate differences between social and cultural structures and existing social and cultural norms because such social relationships in private life have an impact and capacity to change social relations and living realities.

Transnational couples experience specific challenges while building their relationship; those challenges are informed by significant and often drastic differences in cultural heritage, gender expectations, emotional expression, family, leisure, and work activities, cultural traditions, language, conflictive views on child raising, racial prejudices, and social stigmatization. Ethnic, cultural, and social differences, implied in transnationalism, also affect one’s perception of basic affective concepts, such as love, desire, intimacy, and emotional attachment, and controlling certain uncertainty in relationships. Thus, one can suggest that whereas

transnational marriage helps to sustain the wellbeing of societies, it also brings challenges to an individual's notions of love and intimacy and complicates the ethnic origins of families, especially those with children.

A large body of literature on transnational couples has been approached from a sociological perspective. Still, there have been psychological studies that consider the development of these cross-cultural couples' relationships. One such study maintains that transnational married couples are more likely to experience stressful relationship events leading to psychological distress as compared to those married within their culture (Bratter & Eschbach, 2006). Other scholars suggested that transnational couples have a higher risk of separation than intra-racial relationships (Wang, Kao, & Joyner, 2006). Factors such as health, social status, economic concerns, alcohol and substance use, and poverty are some contributors to the dissolution of transnational relationships. Without a shared understanding, proper negotiation, and clear communication, challenges will arise, potentially contributing to cultural, social, and religious identity struggles. In this sense, it is possible to say that the social hierarchies in which the couple exists extend to the relationship and shape the nature of the interaction (Lomsky-Feder & Leibovitz, 2010).

2.13. Inter-faith marriages

Religious identity constitutes an inseparable part of the individual's personal and social identity; it is an integral component of an individual's selfhood expression (Dollinger, 2001). In the context of religion, if an individual has a strong religious commitment, they may feel compelled to emphasize and endorse this facet of their identity in their social life. It is precisely in the context of religious identity, which embodies many values that have a profound impact on people's way of thinking and behavior, and that in the conduct of religious ceremonies, mixed partners can easily reach an agreement (Ting-Toomey, 2005).

For example, Barnett's (1962) study on interfaith marriage maintains that Jewish parents' disapproving attitude concerning interfaith marriages for their children and the potential rejection that spouses may experience from in-laws (Barnett, 1962). The relationship between the parents can affect the children's familiarity with symbols and worship - the imposition of one

identity or another or out of identification. Conflict between parents can also be expressed in divided religious identities in children. However, beyond the prim of a child's identity, there is usually a marked sense of syncretism and internal negotiation between parts of identity (Al-Yousuf, 2006). Children tend to absorb several values and customs passively, yet they also tend to choose the dominant cultural parts themselves.

Children will adopt components of their cultural or religious identity that are perceived as more '*desirable and socially acceptable*' (Sapir & Statman, 2019) in the context of their daily life/communities/group interaction. According to Kalmijn (1998), even if the children of intercultural couples are educated in the light of one cultural group, they will identify less with this group if the marriage involved in society is common.

Beyond the challenges and impact of interfaith marriage, another challenge rests within the couple's social networks and the weight these have on the relationship. For example, in some cases, the individual's social network may advocate for or have a strong opinion about whom an individual should marry. For instance, one quantitative study explains that Iranian Jewish parents prefer and advocate religious endogamy for their children (Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998). Reports have shown that if a suitable Jewish Iranian were not available, parents would continue to marry within the religion and so preferred someone of Jewish background to a non-Jew. If a potential suitor were Iranian but not Jewish, the suitor would not be a desirable choice (Perlmann, 2007). Even as a quantitative study, the data suggest that religious identity, in this case, is valued higher than ethnic connection when considering a partner for their children. Parents' attitudes derived from a traditional view of interfaith marriage as a betrayal of both family and community; consequently, the couple would be ostracized from both the immediate family and the entire community (Hanassab & Tidwell, 1998: 397).

Hanassab and Tidwell's study (1998) does not delve into other relevant questions, such as what it means for the children of Iranian Jewish parents to marry someone outside their religious faith and to what extent ingroup values are being infringed. In this thesis, attention is paid to internal and external challenges and first-hand narrative experience. Undoubtedly, these factors will affect an interfaith couple's relationship in the long term and can carry over to the couple's daily life, social sphere, and children's education.

There is also the romanticized idea of "*love to conquer all,*" where partners in interfaith may adopt to 'cover' up their initial inter-faith challenges. However, at a later stage, the negative impact of such differences can challenge the relationship.

Imahori and Cupach further develop this idea by arguing that during the initial attraction, partners are inclined to dismiss cultural differences between them and focus more on the emotional interpersonal connection (Imahori & Cupach, 2005). This approach of avoidance can prove detrimental to relationships, suggesting that talking openly about religious differences at an initial state, although frightening, is ultimately beneficial to the success of the long-term relationship. Reiter and Gee (2008) also mention that open, transparent, and honest communication is associated with fewer conflicts and less distress in an interfaith relationship. Open communication here signifies addressing all topics without any avoidance (Reiter & Gee, 2008: 541).

Despite the fact that interfaith unions may commonly experience a higher degree of conflict, when partners manage their conflict usefully through open communication, they experience relationship growth. This idea will be discussed in relation to how participants communicate their feelings and ideas about children's education with one another. I note that, in the case of my participants, open communication may be challenging to achieve in the inter-faith and inter-cultural context.

McCurry, Schrodt, and Ledbetter (2012) found that in a romantic relational context, religion might be avoided by the partners when particular uncertainty about the future of the relationship still exists. Factors such as uncertainty regarding the future of the relationship, intimacy levels, and degree of communication affect the manner in which couples will choose (or not) to discuss religious topics. Thus, avoiding the topic allows individuals to avoid potentially undesirable topics that may challenge the relationship dynamic (McCurry, Schrodt, & Ledbetter, 2012).

Findings by McCurry, Schrodt, and Ledbetter (2012) also suggest that although being in an interfaith marriage may bring challenges due to the nature of the relationship, they are not lesser challenges faced by couples of the same faith. The studies presented above suggest that effective management of religious differences should be addressed by honest, direct, and open communication that will, in the long term, strengthen the

relationship. The intensity with which sociocultural identities and religious differences are expressed varies depending on the individual, the level of self-reflection, and interactional contexts.

It would be beneficial to understand what factors contribute to minimizing religious differences between Israeli-Arab husbands and Post-Soviet wives while attending to their narratives. While attending to these couple stories, this study can explore in-depth which topics are challenging to approach and why couples choose to speak openly or refrain from engaging in these discussions. Therefore, this study can expand previous findings concerning social, cultural, and religious differences in the unique context of Arab-Israelis and Post-Soviet couples. A deeper understanding of how spouses' relational social, cultural, and religious identities intersect or conflict is therefore needed to grasp why couples employ avoidance tactics or if specific topics are avoided more than others.

Keeping the discussion mentioned above in mind, being in a transnational and interfaith marriage need not be depicted as a relationship doomed for failure. This literature review provides evidence that the positive aspects of the interfaith and transnational union can also be a rewarding and positive experience for these couples and their individual growth.

2.14. Intermarriage as difference: caught between norm and transgression

The phenomenon of a mixed marriage is inevitably related to transgressing societal norms (Breger & Hill, 2021). Mixed families, by their very definition, challenge the pre-established marital norms and group affiliations in society, thereby transgressing collective norms and symbolic boundaries (Merton, 1941). That is to say, a mixed marriage, in all the populations studied, is always characterized in one way or another by non-conformity with the existing social norm, as in the social life of 'mixed' marriages, one of the spouses has the feeling of transgressing the norm of social closeness. Mixed families are all formed by non-conventional and often interdicted marriages between individuals who belong to different groups in terms of race, nation, class, ethnicity, religion, or a combination of those. Mixed families are constructed and viewed as socially “distant” and “different,” depending on the contextual discourse of time and place. Various social groups deem the

union of their members as appropriate or inappropriate, making some groups appear more foreign and less acceptable than others. Marriages between different and often quite distant social groups constitute a threat to the social order; they challenge collective identities and the hegemonic endogamous social norms, thereby creating new spaces that undermine social hierarchies (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). Furthermore, mixed marriages put the collective survival in jeopardy in terms of culture and demographics; in this context, women are both viewed and treated as fundamental to ensure the reproductive growth of the collective (Mac Ginty, 2017; McDoom, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The extreme example of the xenophobic German context of 1932, wherein mixed marriages were mentioned, alongside delinquency and schooling, as one of the problems that foreigners would pose to the German nation (Weindling, 2022), further illustrates that group boundaries are arbitrary, while the definition of membership is always relational and contextually situated, even though the members of the group believe they put barriers voluntarily. As Barbara put it,

> "A marriage will be mixed from a social point of view depending on where the barrier has been put. And where you put the barrier is strictly arbitrary" (Barbara, 1994).

As mentioned above, the advocates of intermarriage as facilitating assimilation/integration assume that intermarriage signifies social acceptance of the "other" as equal and reveals a decrease in prejudices against minority groups. The assumption implies that intermarriage indicates success and social acceptance of a minority group – "he or she has made it," that is, has become successfully incorporated within mainstream society (Song, 2009). However, the very notion of the "mainstream society" referring to the hegemonic majority seems fluid and indeterminate, as different groups in society form bridges, thereby redrawing social boundaries which previously divided between or demarcated individuals and groups, which may, indeed, alter social mainstreams (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

Lara Deeb (2020) depicts a series of dramatic occurrences following interreligious marriages in Lebanon, which are experienced as transgressions by parents (Deeb, 2020). Since its independence in 1943,

Lebanon has been a country characterized by “political sectarianism:” There are eighteen officially recognized sectarian groups in Lebanon's parliamentary democracy, none of which constitute the “mainstream majority”; furthermore, all public and governmental positions, whether elected or appointed, from prime minister to public university lecturers are distributed in accordance with a sect. Moreover, there are fifteen different laws, all sect-based, with no civil alternatives for marrying, divorcing, having child custody, and inheritance. Quite remarkably, Deeb points out, many parents who opposed inter-religious marriages of their children were not particularly devoted in terms of practicing their religion; moreover, some of them considered themselves “secular,” agnostics, and even atheists; besides, all of them had meaningful social interactions with business partners, colleagues, or friends from other sects. So what, Deeb wonders, made those parents so vehemently oppose their children's choice of a marital partner from a different sect? (Deeb, 2020).

One of her conclusions is that belonging to a certain sect constitutes the marker of social distance related to status rather than to religious confessional identity, as sectarianism in Lebanon is structured in the framework of social hierarchy. Thus, for instance, Sunnis view themselves as having a higher status than Shi'i, while Christians consider themselves as having a higher status than Muslims. Those self-perceptions may or may not be shared by others: both Christians and Druze agree with Sunnis' superior view over Shi'i, yet not all sects believe Christians possess higher status than Muslims. Deeb suggests that shifting criteria of status, as well as definitions of “community,” emerge in various ways when the situation of intermarriage arises. Those fluctuating differences parallel differing objections to inter-sectarian marriages among representatives of different sects (Deeb, 2020).

Deeb’s conclusions are in line with Barbara’s statement that the criteria on which the social groups rely to determine the distance between spouses do not refer to discrete categories but rather address “fuzzy sets” such as race or culture. These affiliations are not mutually exclusive and cannot be diagnosed independently of the way in which the subjects themselves use them as social categorizations or identification schemes (Barbara, 1994). Even in societies that are deeply divided, boundaries are fluid and permeable (Mac Ginty, 2017). Thus, the limits of diversity are practically impossible to

draw, as they constantly shift and vary according to many parameters. Even when the spouses share the same nationality, there are other parameters, such as family histories, classes, religions, classes, languages, and personal traits, which may intervene to make a couple be seen as mixed. In addition, the factors of diversity can add up or, on the contrary, offset each other.

As already stated, mixed marriage always implies a difference, mainly conceived as a social distance between spouses in relation to social norms and their transgression. The "minimal content" of mixed marriages is the union between members of groups who consider themselves different, even potentially antagonistic. Thus, we see the notion of boundaries between communities emerge (Breger & Hill, 2021). For this reason, some authors often consider the reaction of the social environment as the essential point of diversity (Stephan & Stephan, 1989). In other words, it is the relevance conferred by the actors on differences in a given social context that determines diversity, the problem remaining to specify the differences.

However, because of the existing variations and gradations, constructing a homogeneous sociological category from the notion of diversity poses a problem. Furthermore, the broad indeterminacy of the concept of mixed marriage itself reflects the inability to situate the clear-cut boundary between the *normative* and the *transgressive,* as well as to demarcate and determine the constantly fluctuating limits the groups assign to themselves (Spickard & Burroughs, 2000).

To address this indeterminacy, some scholars insist that the characteristics attributed to the constructs of race, ethnicity, and culture be re-considered and re-conceptualized (Breger & Hill, 2021). They argue that viewing the existence of groups posed as initially different, as well as seeing difference as constitutive of diversity, may distort the understanding of the very phenomenon of diversity. The approach of embedded difference homogenizes the culture of the ethnic group, thereby neglecting internal variations: there is an assumption that all cultural norms and expectations, including religion and language, are the same for individuals of a specific ethnic identity; moreover, all those are unanimously accepted and practiced by all the individual from that ethnic group; therefore, there exists only set of ethnic speech, religion, and traditions, which is easily recognizable (Breger & Hill, 2021)

In a similar vein, the concept of race can no longer be conceived of as a biological category but rather as a social construct relative to its historical, cultural, and political contexts. Sanjek (1994) draws on the evolution of intermarriage in the United States to highlight the racial divisions existing in this country. It illustrates how, for many groups, racial differences turned into ethnic differences, yet racial status remained for blacks (Sanjek, 1994). Through an analysis of mixed marriage, other authors, too, attempt to explore the fluid notions of race and ethnicity (Kibria, 1997).

One can conclude that the determinants of diversity tend to fluctuate in accordance with the historical, political, and national context. Thus, the significance of various forms of heterogeneity is relative to a given situation in a given society (community) at a given time. Subsequently, there are multiple parameters and criteria used to delineate boundaries between groups, differences, and distances and to capture the broad meaning of diversity: social status, language, culture, nationality, age, race (skin color), ethnicity, confession (religion), historical backgrounds, etc. That said, mixed marriages can be perceived and analyzed from more than one point of view. Thus, for instance, to this day, the main barrier between groups in the United States remains essentially the issue of race (Qian et al., 2018), while in Europe, nationality and culture have always been key parameters. As for Quebec, for example, it is only since the Quiet Revolution that so-called mixed marriages have been defined in terms of ethnic or linguistic differences rather than religious (Cerchiaro, 2022).

Another positive outcome refers to the capacity of intermarriage to augment social assimilation (Furtado & Theodoropoulos, 2010). Social assimilation and integration can be measured by immigrants' feelings of national identity, which are strongly rooted in the national and historical contexts of their native and host country. At the same time, other authors consider assimilation not as an outcome but as a cause of intermarriage (Song, 2009). Also, as highlighted by Rodríguez-García (2015), although integration generally signifies that all the newcomers have become full and equal members of the host country, the concept of integration is quite ambiguous and multidimensional (Rodríguez-García, 2015).

An additional reason for interethnic marriages may be related to the upbringing of a new generation that finds itself at the junction/intersection of a variety of ethnic groups. Yet, it could also be a result of the upbringing

of a new generation of people who find themselves in the conditions of the 21st century at the intersection of several ethnic/national groups, where the economic conditions in the Partner II nation could be appealing to Partner I. in this case, the formation of such marriages certainly contributes to the enrichment of the personality by the diverse cultural heritage of both one's own and the other ethnic groups.

Ethnic psychological characteristics are very diverse. The psyche of representatives of different peoples is influenced by historically significant factors of various content: socio-economic conditions of life, religious affiliation, interethnic communication experience, local traditions, customs, and habits. There are no two ethnic groups where the result of their complex impact would be completely similar. Different conditions of people's historical existence give rise to different features of their ethnic psychology (Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2006).

2.15. Mixed (transnational) marriages in the shade of the Immigration trauma

2.15.1. The immigration trauma: culture shock and other aspects

According to Bhugra (2001), who examined mental health and social adjustment issues among migrants, their well-being may be affected by the following factors: the length of time, the degree of similarity between the culture of origin and the receiving culture, proficiency in the language of the host country, social support systems, acceptance by the "majority," employment and housing solutions (Bhugra, 2001). When a migrant feels isolated from their culture and unaccepted by the culture of the "majority," when they lack social support, they are likely to develop a subsequent sense of rejection and alienation. The factors contributing to mental distress are **culture shock**, **loss and bereavement,** a **mismatch between expectations and achievements**, and **lack of acceptance by the new nation** (Bhugra, 2004).

Culture shock refers to the psychological distress that is often experienced by individuals who find themselves immersed in new and often unfamiliar social contexts (Elliot et al., 2016; Furnham, 2010). Pedersen provides a specified definition of culture shock as "**the process of initial**

adjustment to an unfamiliar environment" (Pedersen, 1994). In the sixties of the last century, Oberg (2006) introduced the term "**culture shock**" referring to the anxiety (fear of contact) experienced by individuals relocating to a new environment, mainly to a different country; he also defined four stages of this experience: 1) **the honeymoon stage** refers to an enjoyable experience of fascination by the "new" that may last from a few days to six months; during this stage, one may romanticize their experience of the initial immersion into a new environment; 2) the romanticized enthusiasm becomes replaced by **hostility, aggression, and uncomfortable feelings** about the receiving environment; 3) the process of **acculturation and acceptance of the new environment**; 4) complete **adjustment and autonomy.** Oberg emphasizes that the complete adjustment does not necessarily mean undergoing a complete identity transformation; it is more about completing the acculturative transition while alleviating social discomfort and anxiety (Oberg, 1960).

Culture shock is also associated with Adler's approach of **disintegration and reintegration phases**, which characterize transnational experiences and refer to unfavorable processes of cross-cultural immersion. According to Adler, **disintegration** is characterized by disorientation and confusion within one's new cultural environment; during this phase, an individual feels baffled, isolated, and helpless; on the other hand, **reintegration** consists of rejecting the second culture, usually by stereotyping generalizations, evaluation, and judgmental attitude and behavior (Adler, 1975).

Culture shock tests the adequacy of one's functioning; it induces mourning over the culture left behind, as well as threatens the identity of a newcomer (Garza-Guerrero, 1974). Culture shock may lead to dire consequences, causing cultural confusion, isolation, and alienation (Bhugra, 2004). It may even qualify as an experience of *traumatic separation*, echoing the definition of trauma as something that overwhelms one's psyche suddenly and unexpectedly (Lijtmaer, 2022). However, as Lijtmaer emphasizes, when the initial reaction of grief is overcome, the experience of immigration can create resilience and result in personal growth in the process of discovering new possibilities for a hopeful future [28].

On the whole, as immigrants seek to adapt themselves to the majority in the host country, including adjusting to its value system, they experience

psychosocial changes in the process of acculturation. The acculturation may be either voluntary or imposed and requires coming into contact with culturally different groups, which results in assimilating cultural values, practices, beliefs, and language by a minority group with a "mainstream" community of majority (Bhugra, 2004). Despite a typically domineering position of one (host) culture, acculturative changes in values and attitudes, social status, and religious affiliation may occur in both cultures – mainstream and minority (Bhugra, 2004).

The changes in one's cultural identity during the acculturation processes are often upsetting and may affect one's well-being and mental health. Mental health experts see integration and assimilation as helpful in reducing feelings of loss and grief as the immigrant starts to incorporate the aspects of the dominant culture. However, when immigrants contact the dominant community of the host country, in addition to assimilation and integration, they may also experience rejection or deculturation. The concept of deculturation parallels the acculturation style of marginalization in Berry's model (2005) (Berry, 2007). Rejection, i.e., withdrawal from the majority group, may subsequently lead to segregation. At the same time, deculturation, followed by a loss of cultural identity, a sense of alienation, and severe acculturative stress, may even result in ethnocide in extreme cases. To conclude, the hostility of the host society that may range from mere unacceptance to explicit racism, exacerbated by unemployment strains and financial hardships, poor housing, and lack of opportunities, along with severe discrepancy between expectations and actual achievement, are likely to result in mental health problems in vulnerable individuals (Bhugra, 2004).

2.15.2. Grief reaction and cultural bereavement

An additional element of immigration trauma refers to experiencing grief and bereavement over the lost culture (home). The loss of one's familiar social framework, structure, support networks, language, values, and attitudes often generates a grief reaction or, to be more precise, cultural bereavement. Cultural bereavement is defined as either individual or group experience of uprootedness resulting from losing social structures, cultural values, and even personal identity (Eisenbruch, 1990, 1991). As a result, an individual or a group lives in the past, suffering from painful memories and

a sense of guilt. An immigrant is haunted by the images from the past, anxieties, and morbid thoughts, unable to function and get on with one's daily life. While grieving for this loss may constitute a healthy reaction to a natural consequence of migration, there are cases when the symptoms of grief cause significant emotional distress and even impairment that lasts for a prolonged period and requires a mental health professional intervention (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

Cultural bereavement has been considered essential to the experience of migration; this experience is affected by the concurrence of various variables: the process of migration, the vicissitudes of cultural identity, and the search for cultural unity, along with biological and personality factors. The discontents of cultural identity and lack of cultural congruity affect one's ability to process the experience of grief; furthermore, the disturbances in identity and congruity may lead to a complicated bereavement. On the other hand, undergoing an acculturation process assists a culturally bereaved individual in reaching a state of certain equilibrium. As the process of acculturation evolves, many individuals may begin to develop and experience a sense of belonging to their “new” homeland (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). As the individual becomes more proficient in language and fluent in the new cultural settings, the majority culture begins to feel less threatening and more welcoming and accepting. Friendships and employment opportunities constitute a social support network that facilitates the process.

The interaction of the immigrant's culture with the mainstream culture of the host society is dynamic and reciprocal; it also brings about changes in the dominant cultural group and upgrades the majority's capacity to understand and appreciate various aspects of the immigrant's culture. Thus, the receiving society may feel more empathy for the needs of the immigrants (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

According to Akhtar (1995), the task of assimilating to a newly adopted culture is akin to undergoing a third individuation. In other words, if the immigrant manages to go through the mourning process, they can form a new identity; to do so, they do not have to give up on their cultural heritage, nor is the new identity a bicultural sum of two cultures (Akhtar, 1995). Rather, this identity is born out of remodeling object representations by harmoniously integrating certain characteristics into the new culture and

finding congruency between the host culture and the cultural heritage from the past (Volkan, 2018).

Variables that may affect the immigrants' mourning process include the experiences that have driven them from their homeland in the first place. Some of them have endured racist attacks, religious persecution, or even genocide in their home country; for those migrants, a sense of loss may be comforted by the feeling of alleviation at having fled light-threatening situations. Furthermore, the technological advances in the means of communication have dramatically transformed the immigrant's experience by mitigating the effect of loss through less expensive and more available telecommunication, such as cellphones, Skype, and so forth, as today it is much easier to stay connected with the loved ones, as well as to maintain contact with cultural expressions from one's homeland (Ainslie et al., 2013).

2.15.3. Nostalgia and "linking objects"

Nostalgia is an essential component of loss and grief processes. Nostalgia, or homesickness (a Greek compound of "return home" and "pain"), is a persistent, pervasive experience haunting the immigrant. The term ¨nostalgia¨ is complex: its emotional expressions may vary from positive feelings, such as joy, affection, and gratitude, to sadness over the loss of security and historical continuity (Howell, 1999). Being directed into a vanished past, nostalgia inevitably incorporates components of distortion; since a literal return in time is impossible, nostalgia comes to signify an incurable sense of "absence" and "loss" that can even be made into "presence," except through creative reconstruction of an individual's memory. The feelings about the past are oxymoronically bitter and sweet, as they express a disparity between "there" and "here," "then" and "now," where the "absent" is appraised as somehow better and more coherent than the "present" (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2017). According to Akhtar (1996), nostalgia is the fantasy of "if only" and "someday," in essence, fantasizing about ideal times (Akhtar, 1995, 1996). Nostalgia combines longing and hope, pathological optimism, and related forms of idealization (Aron, 2011).

According to Volcan (1999), many immigrants create so-called linking objects or linking phenomena that help them "stay in contact" with their past while adjusting to the new environment; most immigrants and refugees keep

linking objects and phenomena (Volkan, 2018). In these terms, nostalgia refers to an effect accompanying linking objects and phenomena. Such a linking phenomenon may refer to a certain song, a particular smell, a gesture, an action, or a feeling that constitutes "a linking object" (Volkan, 1999). By linking objects such as pets and even people, which embody the mental representations of lost things or deceased individuals, the mourner externalizes their grief and feeds their nostalgia. They are symbols loaded with the significance of preceding a significant loss; in essence, these linking objects function as psychological tools for individuals to deal with complicated mourning.

Linking objects and phenomena can also be used in adaptive ways; the adaptive use means remembering a song, a place, a pet, or a photograph whenever the need to mourn emerges; such use helps an individual accept changes, recognize the gains, and work on denial of what was lost (Lijtmaer, 2022). Lijtmaer questions the predominant tendency in the psychoanalytic and mental health literature to view immigration as a traumatic event and argues that the experience of immigration also has the potential to build character and resilience. She explains that the immigrants are, in fact, forced to become more flexible and tolerant. As she put it, "*in addition to hardships, immigration can also add flavor, complexity, and adventure to one's life*" (Lijtmaer, 2022). Pacheco, too, suggests a transition from the culture shock approach to culture learning (Pacheco, 2020).

2.15.4. The mixed progeny – the children of intermarriage

The common denominator between all children born to a mixed marriage belongs to family spaces marked by two (or more) sets of practices. Thus, the term "bicultural families" has been used to describe this situation in the case of intercultural marriages (Meca et al., 2019). Biculturalism operates by the mere presence of a father and mother, each of whom belongs to a different culture. Because each of the parents brings their cultural background into the family, children clearly benefit from a twofold exposure to languages, religions, countries, etc. The effects of this exposure on the lives of children vary significantly, according to the way the parents employ it and the extended family (SADIYAH, 2018). We need to understand the transmission of the twofold cultural reference by mixed couples to their children to be able

to identify and describe the elements making up the new cultural zone, informed by a synthesis of parental content.

Little is known about the cultural space of those families. Theoretically, mixed backgrounds interrupt or end certain traditions of the families of origin and create new ones. Still, it remains to describe and analyze them before being able to decide on their possible particularities compared to other backgrounds. There are numerous cultural practices involved in intermarriage.

One of the most salient areas in which the mixed couple works is the education of the children (Barbara, 1994). With the arrival of the child, a series of new questions arise. The arrival of the child confronts the spouses with decisions that are never neutral. First name, baptism, circumcision, education principles, language, religion, and nationality are all subjects to negotiation. The choices made, whether values or concrete markers, play a role in the identity of the child by guiding her socialization and future projects. In this sense, the decisions of the children may reveal the projects, desires, and intentions of the parents concerning the identity of the children (SADIYAH, 2018).

Among the choices most often analyzed in studies are the first name (Barbara, 1994; Cerchiaro, 2019), language (SADIYAH, 2018), and religion (Sasson et al., 2017), including the question of baptism and circumcision. The principles of education and nationality are more rarely analyzed. The choice of a first name by the parents of mixed couples has often aroused researchers' interest (Cerchiaro, 2019). This choice is never neutral because of the symbolic function that the personal name fulfills in the definition of the social identity of the individual. The given first name represents, through simple phonic naming, a particularly revealing choice of identity strategies, yet behind the search for the first name, it is indeed the identity of the child that is beginning to become a concern for parents, grandparents, and all the family circle (Barbara, 1994). This is a defining moment in family history, which forces parents to manifest the identity transmitted to their children publicly. More than an individual identity, since the stock of first names is always more or less limited, the first name expresses the will of the parents with regard to the social, family, national, and religious identity of the child. It marks the belonging to a parent, a kinship, a state, or both. It aims to reproduce two national, cultural, and religious identities through the same

descent. The power to name the child is never randomly granted to the spouses. The first name reveals, within the family itself, the relationship between the father and the mother (Barbara, 1994).

By representing the valorization of traits considered specific to the spouses' country of origin, felt as essential for identity, the family choices made by mixed couples, always by will or by default, constitute identity markers, where the child sets the problem not only of transmission of symbolic goods, such as family names but also the problem of the transmission of other goods, such as national, ethnic or religious identity. In this sense, parental decisions amount to public statements. The adoption of cultural signs reveals which group, one of the fathers or the mother, marks the child more. Depending on the choices made by the family, the child of a mixed couple will belong more to one or the other parent (SADIYAH, 2018).

The transmission of identity traits to children associated with the different origins of the parents is also seen as an issue of marital relations (Cerchiaro, 2019). The choices result from a marital negotiation, always present, for the appropriation of the identity of the child. In relation to the decisions taken, the studies note a diversity of situations. Families are organized along what is called “a bicultural continuum,” where at one extreme, there is a concentration of elements referring to the foreign parent, and at the other extreme, these references are rare, if not non-existent. Between the two extremes, it is possible to discover all kinds of development of the family territory. Some texts analyze the behavior of mixed couples that may influence the identity of children. Either the competitive or cooperative model guides the functioning of the parental couple: the negotiation between spouses speaks in terms of competition, agreement, acceptance, deferred choice, compromise, etc.

Breger and Hill (2021) list various possible strategies put forward by spouses in mixed couples (Breger & Hill, 2021). When we observe the erasure of cultural differences for the benefit of one of the spouses and the submission of the other, there is an *asymmetrical relationship* between the spouses. Gains for one spouse result in losses for the other, hence the strategy of ***cultural domination***. A **cultural confrontation** develops when there is regular competition between the two cultural models of the parents. In these situations, a rivalry between the spouses is established, which aims to impose their respective cultural choices. Family choices are presented as

openly competitive. This strategy does not promote equality between spouses or synergy between cultures. Thus, for instance, the attribution of first names in mixed families is also generally considered to be an indicator of the balance of power between two families "camps." It highlights the unequal importance of the stake represented by the naming of the child for the two lineages.

On the other hand, if the parents adopt ***the communication strategy***, they repeatedly negotiate the definition of their common identity through agreements and compromises. The two cultures are viewed as complementary rather than antagonistic or mutually exclusive. To these strategies, Barbara (1994) adds that of "***deferred choice***," i.e., when the parents impose no decision upon the child but rather leave her to make her choice after she has reached the age to do so (Barbara, 1994).

While choosing the first name, spouses generally adopt two types of strategies: 1) ***invisibility***, by attributing a neutral first name, or 2) ***ethnic affirmation***, by attributing a marked first name: one aiming to avoid the stigmatizing effects that the possession of cultural attributes entails characteristics of a socially despised group; the other aims to demonstrate through them and in an ostentatious way, loyalty to a group of origin whose denial is, by the very fact of mixed marriage, in question (Edwards & Caballero, 2008).

It can also be an ethnic affirmation or the creation of a new syncretic identity: When two origins "compete" in the same family, the first names given to the children can be analyzed in relation to the desire to transmit the identity of one side of the family rather than the other or, on the contrary, to create a kind of combined identity. Ethnic affirmation is reflected in the attribution of a marked first name. The latter seems to refer more often to the paternal line than to the maternal line, with the father playing a predominant role in the naming of the children. One study of Muslim families observes that the first names chosen in the paternal culture are twice as numerous (Cerchiaro, 2019). This tendency seems stronger when the father is of Muslim origin. In the Middle East and North Africa, it is the father who chooses the first name because it seems to have no stake in the mother, who is excluded from her group. Among Middle Eastern couples, the two strategies present themselves more openly as competitive because nomination is an issue for both lineages.

However, the father still prevails since these couples exceptionally endow their child with an Arab/Muslim first name, especially when the family lives in the village/town of the father. Consequently, the mother is dissociated from her family and culture. Strategies of compromise and sharing are practiced through the attribution of neutral, international, all-purpose, bilingual, or double first names (Barbara, 1994) or that the Muslim-Arab parent avoids a first name that is very strongly Christianized or has a strongly Islamic connotation.

Religion is another major component of identity in mixed marriages; unlike language, the child can't have two. It is another area wherein negotiations between parents in mixed families develop. Yet, the research shows that the religious socialization of the child is rarely an issue of marital conflict (Cerchiaro, 2020). It does not constitute a field of conflict in cases where one of the spouses has converted to the religion of the other, when there is mutual religious respect, or when the parents are not practicing. In this regard, the very varied situations of mixed couples do not allow us to elaborate a theory on the level of religion (Barbara, 1994). In the few studies that observe parental willingness to transmit religious beliefs and practices to children, it is the religion of the father that appears to be transmitted.

Cerchiaro (2020) indicates that Muslim-Italian couples have not experienced much conflict in the choice of religious education for their children and that some of them have given a Muslim religious education to their children (Cerchiaro, 2020). In his study of mixed Muslim-Christian families in Britain, Al-Yousuf (2006) shows the importance of the Muslim religion in the socialization of children (Al-Yousuf, 2006). The motivation for the man for the conversion of his partner consists in transmitting Muslim values to the children without there being a conflict of allegiance for them. In his research on the choices of Franco-Maghreb families, Streiff-Fenart (1989) indicates that despite the manifest desire of the parents to spare the child the signs of belonging to one or the other religious community, the practice of circumcision of male children is general in couples where the husband is Muslim (Cerchiaro & Odasso, 2023). In these families, when the parents come to a compromise, *the sacrificed religion is, in all cases, that of the mother*. In these Muslim-Christian families, it is also the father who gives the Muslim religion to the children.

The subject of transmitting identity in intermarriages has only recently entered the academic scene. The question of intergenerational identity transmission is examined through the prism of children's socialization process, either by exploring parents' choices regarding their education, religious, social, and communal practices or, less often, through studying the experiences of children themselves. Still, the identity transmitted to children does not constitute a specific object of study. Still, it is encompassed under the heading of marital relations and married life, a point widely explored within the literature on mixed marriages (Minagawa, 2017).

The research on the mixed progeny of intermarriages mostly examines the choices made by parents concerning various aspects of children's lives. A literature review of English-language texts dealing with international marriages notes that although half of the authors mention the choices of parents, the latter are rarely taken into consideration (Tan et al., 2021). Even today, only a few studies on women's roles briefly address the subject.

In several studies, a significant number of mixed families have decided not to make their religious differences an issue or are not religious at all (Barbara, 1994). When mixed marriages involve a significant difference in religion, the parents opt for a deferred choice. Several studies observed that the majority of mixed families present themselves as non-practicing (Fishman, 2004; Voas, 2003). Hence, either the parents decide to minimize the importance of their convictions, or they share a common disbelief. Among all the socio-professional categories, it seems that it is generally the senior executives who attach much less importance to children adopting their religion. Yet, while the religion of the child rarely poses a problem within the couple, it is sometimes the object of very strong pressure from the family circle (Sewenet et al., 2017). In fact, two major situations may arise: either the environment is very permissive, or it is not very tolerant and very normative (Barbara, 1994).

The research on children of mixed families is gaining popularity; it explores the way the children's mixed origins shape their own identities (Alba & Foner, 2015; Kalmijn, 2015; Song, 2015). Numerous studies on the second generation of mixed marriage obtained several important insights into the experience of mixed children. One of the insights refers to **the status and achievements**, as mixed children are trapped between integration and stigmatization – two competing mechanisms. As a result, they find

themselves in the "in-between" space, that is, between children belonging to the majority and those belonging to minorities or migrant families. Yet, the effects of intermarriage are more positive for children of higher-status backgrounds than for kids from lower-status, particularly on the social and economic aspects of integration (Kalmijn, 2015).

Another insight underlines the issue of **agency**, wherein the subject of analysis is the degree to which one can determine one's identity and choose one's affiliations, along with the degree to which one must accept specific categories from dominant groups. The descendants of mixed couples may develop mixed, hyphenated, or multiple identities (Song, 2015). Dan Rodriguez-Garcia and other scholars report what is defined as an "identity mismatch," in which the self-identification of the individual and the externally assigned identification do not coincide (Rodríguez-García, 2015). Alba and Foner (2015) explain the configuration of children born to one African-American parent and one white parent, who tend to identify themselves as mixed but are viewed as black (Alba & Foner, 2015).

The third insight refers to **the union of children of intermarried couples**. Focusing on mixed children and their partners enables us to address the issues of generational changes, multiple axes of identity, difference, and commonality. Arnett (2014) found that individuals of "mixed/multiple ethnic groups" tended the most to be in such a relationship (85%) (Arnett, 2014).

Yet, the research that emphasizes choice and agency cannot be fully adapted to mixed children living in deeply divided societies, living in a social context that is polarized, wherein they might belong to both or none of the poles (Hilker, 2012). Mixed children in conflict-affected societies have more difficulties when determining their identity (or identities). Their difficulty with agency and self-definition is even more pronounced in societies with patrilineal systems, where children inherit their group identity and status from their father only; the mother is irrelevant; the identity is categorized only in accord with their father's designated one (Hilker, 2012).

2.16. Integration or ethnic distinctiveness erosion?

As already mentioned, the concept of integration has been recently problematized, and the causal relationship between intermarriage and integration has been re-examined. It is almost impossible to establish the causal vector between intermarriage and integration; that is, it is unclear whether the former causes the latter or the other way around (Rodríguez-García et al., 2016). Further, seeing intermarriage as a "barometer of openness of society" might blur some distinctive variations in how the partners and children in such families can make a living. Indeed, Platt (2012) found that in Britain, some children growing up in such interethnic households were more vulnerable to the parents' unemployment than children from the endogamous majority (Platt, 2012).

Intermarriage can also presage the gradual attrition of the ethnic distinctiveness of the particular group; the children of such families are expected to further this process of blurring and obliterating the boundaries of ethnic identity within the mainstream culture (Song, 2009). At the same time, however, ethnic and racial prejudices may also become eroded (Rodríguez-García et al., 2016). In addition to eroding ethnic unique differences, intermarriage can produce children with a multicultural heritage: those children adopt cultural identities that are more fluid, they are more likely to select marriage partners from the majority group (Brunsma, 2005; Kalmijn, 2015; Qian et al., 2018). Evidence has shown the potential to weaken children's ethnic attachments and the subsequent generations of the family tree in the context of transnational and or mixed marriages (Perlmann & Waters, 2002).

For this reason, members of larger ethnic groups have less motivation to search for a co-ethnic partner and put great effort into socialization because belonging to those groups provides better odds of finding a co-ethnic partner with less effort. To belong to a larger group also raises the chances that children are socialized in a preferred way with little effort, as the social group is more likely to reflect the ethnic and cultural traits of larger groups. The growing of transnational marriages opens the door to intersections of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status while exploring economic, political, social, and cultural integration, thereby contributing to social changes (Rodríguez-García, 2015).

2.17. Mixed marriages and mixed-ness in Israel: the backgrounds for the present research

2.17.1. Israel as a deeply divided society

Similarly, to countries such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Serbia, Lebanon, and Israel, a small country with nearly 8,300,000 inhabitants, is associated with the category of "deeply divided societies". A deeply divided society is a society where internal divisions are so severe that they constantly threaten the very existence of the nature of the state (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017).

Since its very establishment in 1948, when, after the War of Independence, the Mandatory Palestine territory previously governed by the British Empire was divided into the State of Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, the Jewish State has existed in the shade of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, which has been affecting every aspect of individual and collective life, and the society as a whole. In the context of the ongoing armed conflict and hostilities, the Arab citizens of Israel are often seen as a "fifth column," motivated to undermine the state from within; furthermore, their status depends on political considerations related to the territory of the Jewish state, its demographic makeup, as well as to its relationships with the Palestinian Authority and the surrounding Arab states (Al-Haj, 2002)

The deepest division within Israeli society is simultaneously national and religious, as the national conflict is framed as religious. That is to say; there is a major ethnoreligious divide between the Israeli Jews, who constitute the majority (75% of the population), and Israeli Arabs, who make up 21% of Israel's inhabitants and confess various religions: 17,5% of Muslims; 1.5% Druze, and 2% Christians, with the remaining 4% of the population classified as "other", with the absence of any religious affiliation. In addition, there are also deep divides among and within various religious and ethnic subgroups in Israeli society – among secular and religious Jews, among religious Jews from different affiliation subgroups with different spiritual leaders, and so forth (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2016)

It is due to the ethno-religious divide that family laws in Israel, self-defined as a Jewish and democratic state, are under the sole jurisdiction of religious tribunals for all Israeli citizens: Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze. The religious family laws serve several functions:

- Most Jewish citizens of Israel, regardless of the degree of their religiosity, conduct marriages according to Halakha (Jewish religious

law), which construes one of the essential components of the Jewish people's integrity, historical continuity, and thus survival, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

- For their part, Israeli Muslims and Druze view the religious family laws as strengthening the Arabs' and Druze's historical identity, as well as a bulwark against the threat of Westernization in the age of globalization. The religious laws constitute a bridge to the Christian and Muslim worlds for the Arab communities on both the personal and collective levels (Abu-Rayya, 2007; Halabi, 2015; Karayanni, 2012).
- Most importantly, family laws are key institutions that prevent mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews, labor migrants and asylum seekers, and different ethnoreligious groups among Arab Israeli citizens.

Despite that, couples that have married abroad, regardless of their religion and gender, are registered by Israeli authorities as married. Furthermore, Israeli law has equalized the status of heterosexual and same-sex cohabitants to the status of married couples, regardless of their religious affiliation. In this context, the major dividing line between Jewish and Arab citizens, as well as between different religious groups among the Israeli Arabs, is still constituted by religious laws for marriage.

According to the report by the Pew Research Center in 2015, interfaith marriages do not win the approval of the national religious majorities. Among Jews, 97% said that they would not be comfortable if their child married a Muslim, and 89% were uncomfortable about their child ever marrying a Christian. In a similar vein, 82% of Muslims, 88% of Christians, and 87% of Druze said they would be uncomfortable if their child married a Jew. Three-quarters of Muslims said they would not at all be happy with the idea of intermarriage with a Christian, while most Christians (80%) would not be happy if their child married a Muslim. Druze is equally opposed to marrying a Muslim (85%) or a Christian (87%).

In Israel, religion and nationality are mixed, where being a Jew means belonging to the religion of Judaism as well as to the Jewish nation. Religion and nationality, thus, have long been the most widely used criterion in studies to define mixed marriage in Israel. Thus, the mixed couple designates the union of a national and a foreigner. In this case, the researchers favor qualitative studies, and the studies focus essentially on marriages between Jews and Arabs; however, not much research is devoted to the subject of Arabs marrying women from Eastern Europe (Gaya, 2022; Sabbah-Karkabi, 2022)

2.17.2. Israeli arabs

Nowadays, Arab citizens of Israel are mainly composed of people from the territory of the State of Israel and some people from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who obtained Israeli citizenship under provisions of family unification (Goldner et al., 2015). Arab citizens of Israel have the right to vote for the Israeli Knesset. In 1966, Arab citizens were granted the same rights as Jewish citizens. The population of Arab citizens of Israel in 2019 was 1,890,000 people, comprising almost 21 percent of the state's population. Thus, the Arab population of Israel is a national minority. This has been one of the sources of the numerous conflicts between Arabs and Jewish citizens (Jamal, 2011; Smooha, 1990). Statistical Abstract of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics (2016) provided the following information about Arabs in Israel, **Table 2**.

Table 2: Comparative stats on Arab and Jewish citizens in Israel in 2016

Theme		Arabs (%)	Jews (%)
Religion	**Muslim**	**85**	**-**
Age	18 years or older	43	32
Education	Dropout rates by age 17	10	7
Employment	Women of working age employed	32	81
	Men of working age employed	77	83
Socioeconomic status	- Families living in poverty - Low-income families	53 38	14 13
	Children living in poverty	66	20

Source: Statistical Abstract of Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics 2016

Arabs' educational level has improved significantly since 2000, and Arab women have shown the most rapid progress. In 2016, twenty-nine percent of Arab women ages 25-34 had more than 16 years of education, compared with only ten percent in 2000. As can be seen from the above data, there are gaps in education, employment, family size, and wages between Arabs and Jews that lead to gaps in socioeconomic status.

In 2014, Statnet conducted a telephone poll among 700 Arab citizens of Israel on various topics such as terror, identity, state, and society (Radai et al., 2015). The poll provided valuable data regarding Arab attitudes towards Israeli society and Israel. Results of the poll on attitudes to government shown in **Figure 2** indicate that over three-quarters of the population consulted would want to live under an Israeli rather than a Palestinian government. At the same time, the poll showed a feeling of discrimination among the respondents within Israel (**Figure 3**).

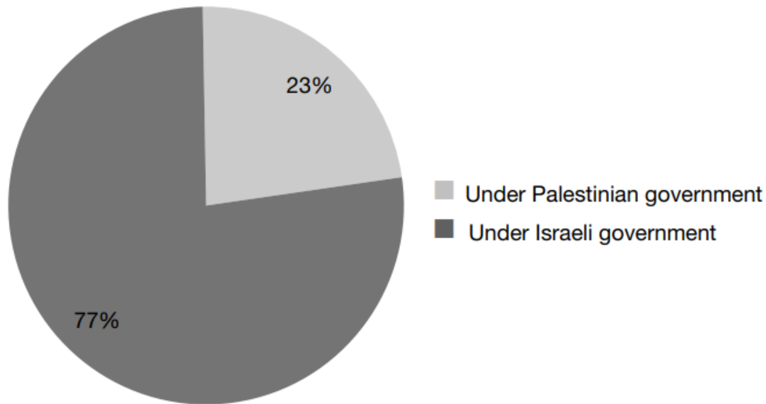

Figure 2: Under which type of government citizens would want to live, December 2014. Source: (Radai et al., 2015)

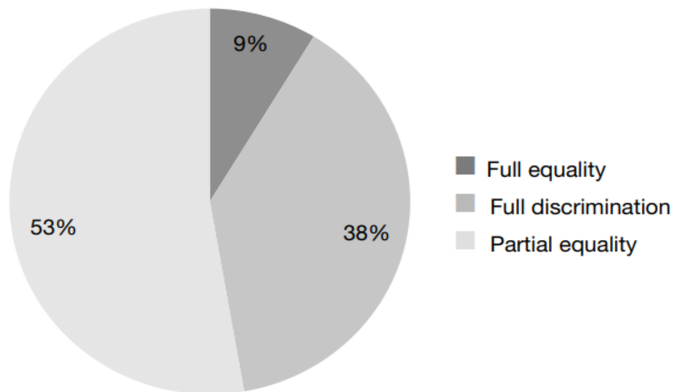

Figure 3: Perceptions of a degree of equity between Arab and Israeli citizens, December 2014. Source: (Radai et al., 2015)

In addition, data obtained in 2012 show that 70.5 percent of Arab citizens of Israel think that the Israeli government treats Arabs as second-class people (**see Figure 4 below**). Also, 86 percent of Arab citizens of Israel expressed the opinion that Israeli Jewish society holds racist attitudes towards Arabs, and only 14 percent believe that there is a small amount of racism (Telhami, 2010). Another survey conducted among Israeli-Arab citizens, shown in **Figure 5** below, points to a split in Arabs' identities, with only 7% viewing themselves as both Israeli and Palestinian. Interestingly, an almost equal number of those polled (33 percent) had no clear identification, as they clearly felt they were either Israeli or Palestinian.

Poll	Institutional/General Discrimination	Complete Equality
Statnet	39	9
Adenauer Program	75	
Arab-Jewish Relations Index	70.5	
Brookings	57	3

Figure 4: Perceptions of a degree of discrimination between Arab and Israeli citizens, Source: (Radai et al., 2015; Telhami, 2010)

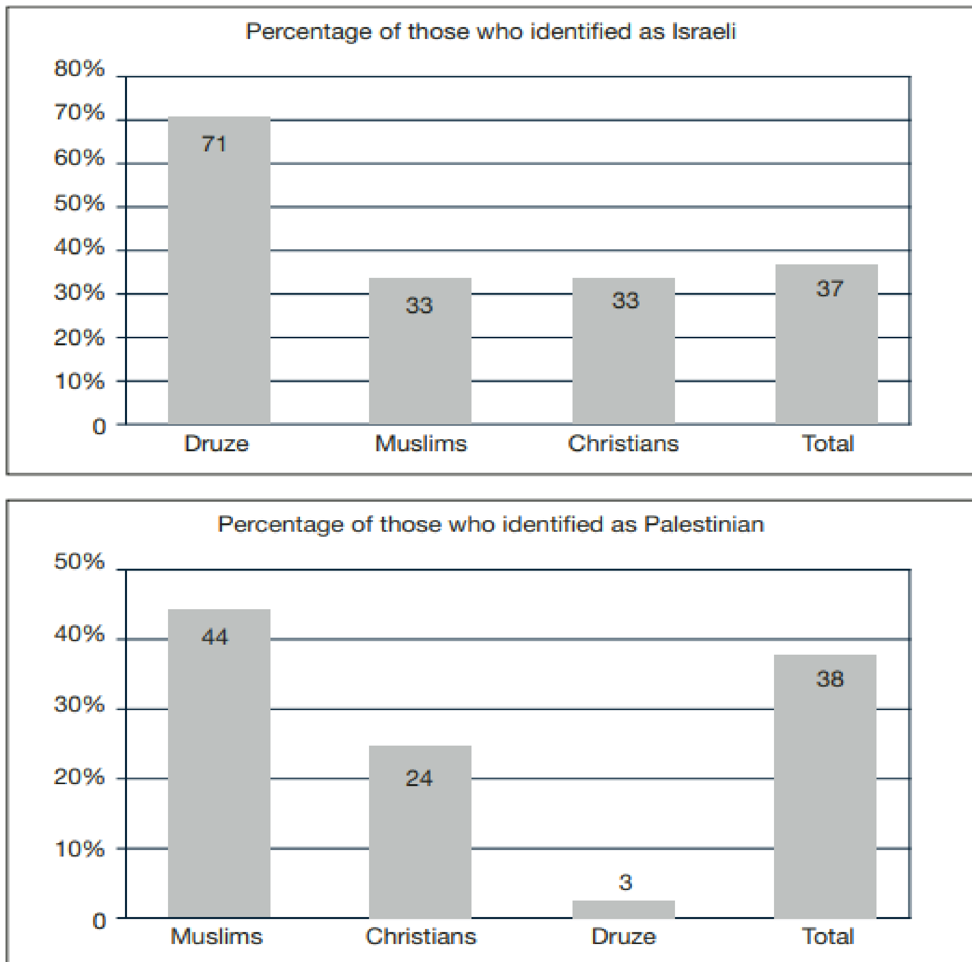

Figure 5: Arab identity
Source: Radai et al., 2015; Telhami, 2010

2.17.3. Singing "International" – the Soviet policy, intermarriage, and immigration to Israel

The Soviet theories and publications, informed by the Communist Party's ideological requirements, viewed intermarriage as a vehicle of assimilation whereby multiple Soviet ethnic groups would be drawn together and merged, creating "a New Soviet nation," free of "nationalist" prejudices and affiliations; such a merger was addressed as "internationalization" and achieved by doing away with ethnic discrimination (Gantskaya & Terent'yeva, 1977) (Ponomarev, 1983). The Soviet scholarly discussion of the consequences of interethnic marriages was mainly interested in their impact on attitudes toward internationalism, language use, and resulting ethnic identity.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, but mostly after WWII, implementing the Communist paradigm, or, rather, the dogma, of *internationalization* led to a rapid growth in the number of interethnic marriages. A mixed marriage was not only approved, but it was also strongly encouraged. The scholars of Soviet ethnography and demography described interethnic marriage as a main engine to advance modern (read: Soviet Socialist) values in the Soviet Union. Mixed (interethnic) marriages were explicitly juxtaposed to the mono-ethnic (exogamous) marriages, the latter implying a retrograde adherence to "traditional values," negatively connoted with "bourgeois" and "capitalist" relics to be eradicated. The empirical data sought to convince that intermarried families were much more successful and "progressive" as compared to exogamous marriages: the interethnic partners tended to live separately from their parents, they had more egalitarian relationships and showed more involvement in public activities (Terentyeva, 1979: 236).

The underlying motivation for encouraging interethnic marriages was based on the fact that adults would be unlikely to change their ethnic identity; for that reason, the children of the interethnic marriage, whose ethnic identity was already dual, instable, and hence weak from the outset (Kozlov, 1974) were seen as a vehicle for enacting natural assimilation towards eventual "internationalism" under the iron embrace of the Russian "big brother." Thus, inter-ethnic marriages were supported, encouraged, and even glorified by the Soviet ideology, with the purpose of "forging" a

new, Soviet "international" nation, as it were, without any "ethnic" prejudices, with no or litter memory, though speaking one common language – Russian. The Soviet "internationalist" doctrine had always addressed *ethnic awareness* as unacceptable and odious "*nationalism*" and connoted the latter with the dangerous belief in "national exclusivity," something akin to Nazism; *internationalism*, on the other hand, required not only forgetting native languages (dialects) but also putting away with "nationalist" traditions.

The Western scholars of intermarriage in the Soviet Union evaluated whether the Soviet policy towards ethnic minorities (non-Russians) promoted assimilation or, conversely, contributed to fostering ethnic identity. The researchers described the population losses as a result of assimilation (Anderson & Silver, 1983); however, Kaiser (2003) argued that the Soviet regime did not manage to accomplish its desire to assimilate ethnic minorities; the "internalization" failed to create a common identity (Kaiser, 2003).

The overwhelming majority of the newcomers confessed no religion and identified themselves as "atheists" due to the policy of forced secularization by the Soviet regime since its very birth in 1917, when Marx's claim that "religion is an opium for the masses" was fully implemented, including state-ordered demolishing churches and shootings representatives of clergy. Many churches were converted into so-called "museums of science and atheism." So-called "scientific atheism" was the official term used by the Communist Party's philosophical worldview (Froese, 2004).

Following the collapse of the Communist regime and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Michail Gorbachov did away with the previously existing restriction on international travel and immigration, thereby permitting Jewish families to immigrate freely to any country, including Israel. Upon their arrival, the Jewish newcomers' families were automatically granted Israeli citizenship (Goldner et al., 2015). As repatriates, according to the Israeli doctrine, they received meaningful financial support from the Jewish State, which included rental assistance, vocational training, academic tuition, huge discounts for buying a car, and more (Lerner et al., 2005). Between 1989 and 1992, Israel absorbed roughly one million immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. The number of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union constituted about 20 percent of the Israeli population at that time (Eckstein & Weiss, 1999)

The level of education of the arriving Jewish immigrants was very high (Cohen Goldner & Weiss, 2011). Their average years of schooling were 14.5 years. Besides, 68 percent of men and 76 percent of women held managerial and academic positions in the Soviet Union. At the same time, only 31 percent of native Israelis occupied white-collar positions. The percentage of married immigrants was higher among males than among females. Male immigrants also initially had higher than average participation rates in the local labor market than female Russian immigrants (Cohen-Goldner & Paserman, 2011)

According to Fogiel-Bijaoui (2013), despite having a high level of education and expertise, the newcomers from the FSU faced numerous challenges in Israel (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2013). These challenges included what has been described as a "process of social and occupational downgrading": the newcomers were forced to the lowest axes of the social hierarchy, having faced a social environment that was radically different from the one they had been used to. The implications were even more dramatic in terms of unemployment and professional downgrading, especially for women, whose rates of unemployment or underemployment were much higher. Worse, women "with a Russian accent" became victims of sexual harassment (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2013).

One study provides similar data about women from FSU, stressing higher unemployment rates and downward mobility than men (Soskolne, 2001). Remennick (2004) also highlighted the particular challenges faced by women in the process of resettlement and acculturation (Remennick, 2004). Other challenges faced by Jewish immigrants were perceived discrimination and social distancing (in some cases from other Christian immigrants) (Raijman & Pinsky, 2014) and psychological distress among the youth due to alienation from the new environment (including suicidal ideation) (Ponizovsky et al., 1999).

There was a significant number of mixed marriages among the newcomers, with a non-Jewish spouse; as the practice of intermarrying was strongly encouraged by the Soviet regime throughout seventy years of its existence, the practice of intermarrying between Jews and non-Jews was also quite frequent. In the case of the non-Jewish wife, the family faced quite serious challenges, especially the children who suddenly became viewed as "non-Jews – goyim" after having been bullied **as Jews** in their country of

origin! The children of such mixed families were very much distressed by the resulting experience of not being accepted and even bullied.

Some immigrants from the FSU married in Israel. Among those immigrants who came to Israel at ages 15-18, 24 percent of females married a native partner, and only 6.5 percent of males intermarried. In the group of immigrants who came to Israel at ages 25-40, 38 percent of women and 9.8 percent of men married a native partner (Remennick, 2004; Weiss et al., 2012). According to Sabbah-Karkabi, who studied intermarriages between Muslim Arab men and Jewish women in Israel, the women-immigrants from the FSU readily converted to the religion of their spouses – three to Christianity and one to Islam; it should be particularly mentioned that those women came from mixed families in which one of the parents was non-Jewish (Christian) (Karkabi-Sabbah, 2017; Sabbah-Karkabi, 2021).

2.17.4. Transnational marriages in Israel between newcomers and natives

Remmenick, who investigated inter-cultural marriages of immigrants from FSU (mainly women) and Israeli-born citizens (Remennick, 2004), found a marked tendency for the non-Israeli partner to do her best to adjust to the norms and social-cultural expectations of their Israeli partners. They note that the couple's integration strategy is expressed in assimilation and drifting toward the hegemonic culture. Remmenick and Prashizky (2012) also noted a tendency to adopt an exclusive use of Hebrew in the home environment, the preference of families, friends, social activities, and domestic activities such as diet/cooking habits and the management of an Israeli household, as well as influencing children school choice and education (Remennick & Prashizky, 2012).

In their turn, Lomsky-Feder and Leibovitz (2010), who examined Mizrahi men and women from the FSU, noted that the so-called white ethnicity had higher power over the eastern one (Lomsky-Feder & Leibovitz, 2010). The researchers also mention that family dynamics of exchange relations are informed by variables such as localization, ethnic perceptions, cultural and social capital, gender, and ethnic hierarchy. In mixed couples where one partner moves to the other partner's country, family dynamics enter into the locality factor. Thus, as a logical consequence, the native

spouse has more social power by the very fact that their wives leave their homeland and enter new territory, having to adjust themselves not only to the social and cultural lifestyle of the hosting country but also to its religion.

As previously mentioned, Arab societies discourage their members from marrying outside Arabs. Even marriage between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims is seen as undesirable (Dwairy, 1998)(Dwairy & Jagelman, 2020). Muslims' projects of marriage, particularly in Arab societies, are carefully considered and sometimes have the dimensions of coercion. Thus, relationships outside the boundaries of the group are seen as challenging and less favorable towards the family, sometimes even resulting in a crisis of loyalty to the family (Al-Yousuf, 2006). According to another study conducted a study in the UK among Muslim and Christian mixed couples, where Arab culture and Muslim religion were prominent (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010), the Christian couple converted to Islam at the wedding ceremony or later. Still, none of the Muslim spouses converted to Christianity. The Qur'an allows a Muslim man to marry a woman from another religion yet forbids it from Muslim women (since the father determines the children's religious identity). One of the conditions for this marriage is the strict observance of the Muslim identity of the children. The non-Muslim woman is entitled to continue to maintain her religion and cultural identity. However, there is an expectation that, in time, she will convert to Islam and integrate into her husband's religious, cultural, and social context (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010).

2.18. Summing it up

Social constructionism and transnationalism, religion, local socio-cultural norms, and practices constitute a fundamental frame of reference for our understanding of a mixed couple´s experience of their marriage across international boundaries (Perlmann & Waters, 2002). Furthermore, as Breger and Hill remind us (2021), mixed marriages do not constitute a part of social reality but rather represent a fluid social construction, just as the generation of knowledge, which is a social process. Individuals formulate and shape their thoughts, attitudes, and feelings through shared categories of meanings of their particular culture, and the classification and categorization of events, actions, and other individuals vary both temporally and geographically

(Breger & Hill, 2021). In fact, what is defined and experienced as a taken-for-granted assumption constitutes a "shifting axiom" situated in its historical and socio-cultural context and affected by power relations and hegemonic ideologies (Burr & Dick, 2017).

Thus, for instance, in the middle of the last century, people used to get married at a younger age, as compared to nowadays, which made staying unmarried past their mid-twenties not "normal." At the same time, today's parents tend to encourage their adult children to complete their education prior to getting married. Thus, social and historical factors may be both liberating and restricting. While the common use of contraceptives has expanded the individual's choices, such forms of marriage as polygamy are subject to legal prosecution in the US but are allowed in Muslim countries (Lamanna et al., 2020).

In these terms, the notion of *mixedness* itself becomes problematic, as it is based on the pre-figured assumption that individuals and groups are monoculturally and monoracially "pure"; the notion of "mixed" presumes clear-cut boundaries, thereby being juxtaposed to the ongoingly changing and heterogeneous essence of individuals, groups, and cultures (Rodríguez-García, 2015). Essentially, mixedness is indefinitely multidimensional, being determined by collective experiences, either accepted or rejected, in accord with specific social norms and associations of ideas. That given, any marital couple may be considered mixed, as it brings together two persons who are non-identical to each other.

The notion of diversity is also a subject to fluctuation, as the "shifting axioms" of "race," "ethnicity," and "cultural identity" that constitute the foundation for diversity are being interrogated by contemporary scholarship (Breger & Hill, 2021; Lamanna et al., 2020). Eventually, neither "race" nor "ethnicity" are biologically determined; rather, they represent social constructions reflecting people's views of different social groups (Lamanna et al., 2020). As biology professor Alan Templeton put it, **race is not biological**; rather, **it is essentially an economic, political, and cultural concept** ("*Genetically, Race Doesn't Exist*," 2003: 4, quoted in (Lamanna et al., 2020): 19, my emphasis). Furthermore, e**thnicity** does not imply biological connotations either; rather, it is designated by cultural distinctions that are embedded in and articulated through language, religion, and history. Expressions of ethnicity are experienced as an inseparable part of one's self

and based on one's personality (Čeginskas, 2016); just like language use, manifestations of ethnicity are subject to shifting and modification throughout one's lifetime (Čeginskas, 2016). In turn, any categorization systems cannot truly grasp the notion of cultural identity since race and ethnic categories are found in the process of constant remodeling and transformation, and so are the identity choices of persons of mixed heritage (Lamanna et al., 2020).

Consequently, the diversity itself is characterized by (1) relativity and (2) variability of criteria. **Relativity** refers to the fact that the conceptualizing of diversity is embedded both diachronically and synchronically: it is positioned in time within a society and a specific social environment. Within the same society, mixed marriage changes its shape according to the historical period and the social consensus prevailing at that time. The relativity inherent to diversity may explain the differences attached to the meaning of diversity in general and mixed marriage in particular (Breger & Hill, 2021). Variability of criteria refers to the plurality of defining what an appropriate and acceptable marriage is. In other words, the definition of a "good marriage" in a given society varies across different groups; that is, deciding what constitutes an adequate and socially acceptable marriage in local terms varies not only from one ethnic group to another but also within smaller groups and family clans; it also varies across generations (Breger & Hill, 2021). In addition, the attitudes toward mixed marriage also fluctuate: the individuals may as well view themselves as homogenously married in relation to other groups, according to the criteria of education, social class, and system of values.

In light of the above, the present Review highlights the epistemological shift of paradigms that occurred in conceptualizing and examining mixed marriages and emphasizes dynamism, fluidity, and multidimensionality of boundaries, categories, concepts, and attitudes in the contemporary globalized context.

3. Methodology

3.1. The present research: objectives, questions, rationale

The present research is a case study of transnational (mixed) marriages between Israeli Arab Muslims as husbands and Post-Soviet Slavic Christians as wives living in Israel. Although the first group is native, the second group is immigrant, yet both groups are minorities in Israel in relation to the hegemonic Jewish population and culture. The research sets forth three objectives. **The first objective** is to describe the processes of negotiating identities in the context of ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and cultures that seem so distant and so opposed to each other. **The second objective** is to explore the ways in which inter-married couples negotiate the issues of religious discord, cultural clashes, and differing opinions on children's education. **The third objective** is to analyze sustaining intermarriages between two minority groups with different statuses (native's vs immigrants), using the conceptual framework of acculturation styles, transnationalism, and hybridization of identity.

With these objectives in mind, my research embarks upon exploring the dynamics of those marriages by addressing the following questions:

How is the decision to intermarry made?

What are the dynamics of coping with the consequences at the beginning and later on, including responses and attitudes of their families, managing differences and conflicts inside the family amid cultural discrepancies, religious issues, and clashes about children's upbringing?

What are the determinants of the level of marital satisfaction, that is, the quality and stability of mixed marriages?

3.2. The research paradigm

The present study employs the qualitative paradigm; in particular, I adopt the generic framework of a social constructionist theory that thrived in the shade of post-structuralism, post-positivism, and the crisis of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Since the beginning of the last century, many scholars claimed to have done away with logical positivism. Qualitative research has undergone several stages: from modernist attempts to formalize the qualitative method as rigorously as the quantitative research, through the emergence of poststructuralist epistemology, with a new repertoire of paradigms and genres: critical (race) theory, feminism, post-colonialism, and ethnographic research, to the re-conceptualizing subjectivity as grounded in power relations and intersected by ideologies, beliefs, tensions, etc. The newly emerging forms of qualitative writing shifted the boundaries between objective reality and subjective viewpoints and blurred the lines of demarcation between the discourses of social sciences and humanities (Wilson et al., 2016).

Unlike the quantitative approach, which analyses pre-established and pre-determined variables of a fixed social reality, qualitative scholars are interested in the unfolding experience, mediated by culture, language, symbols, and networks of meaning, while navigating complexities emerging at different stages of the research (Nowell et al., 2017). The knowledge obtained throughout qualitative venture is informed by reflection and interpretation rather than by inferences from numerical measurements and analysis of causality (Agger, 1991; Khan, 2018; Khan & Raby, 2020). In essence, it is a social interrogation process whereby a researcher seeks to learn how people make sense of their reality and interpret their experiences (Smith et al., 2014).

Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative inquiry is subjective, inductive, and interpretative, driven by identifying gaps and lacunae in understanding the phenomenon (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The strength of an inductive approach is that it allows the researcher to reveal an alternative explanation of experience. It was not based on pre-conceived theoretical assumptions about what the findings might be but rather led by the participants' stories and analyzed data as it began to emerge.

The qualitative process is driven by astonishment, mystery, and breakdowns in one's understanding (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). As Teman put it, after years of working with quantitative methods, embarking upon the qualitative journey felt inspiringly liberating: "It was a beautiful moment. I felt freed, liberated, and unshackled" (Teman & Lahman, 2019).

The process of inquiry is based on the intimate relationships between the researcher and the subject matter of the inquiry. In contrast, the inquiry is shaped by situational limitations and socially constructed reality (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A qualitative researcher is engaged in a complex, holistic description of the investigated phenomenon or phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The picture emerging from the qualitative analysis is a mixture of ontological and epistemological contexts (James, 2013; Mykhalovskiy et al., 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

The qualitative method enables the exploration of ideas, meanings, and narratives, thereby constituting an adequate paradigm to study transnational couples through their narratives whereby they make sense of their experience as individuals. As a couple, a qualitative researcher privileges the view of the world as others articulate it, i.e., research participants (Cohen et al., 2002). This is a "natural inquiry" that emphasizes understanding the experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2014). This idea adheres with the interpretive research paradigm, which seeks to understand how the individuals pertaining to a certain social group make sense of their realities, as well as how those meanings, beliefs, and intentions contribute to constituting their actions (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

3.3. Reflexivity

Researchers' reflexivity constitutes a way of responding to the complexity of qualitative research and, therefore, one of the key factors contributing to its efficiency (Holloway & Biley, 2011). Reflexivity helps a researcher stay thoughtfully self-aware (Woodby et al., 2011). Incorporated in sociological thinking in the late nineteenth century, the initial conceptualization of reflexivity as internal perception was later replaced by defining it as an inner dialogue or inner conversation (Chernilo, 2016). According to the view of reflexivity as a process of inner conversation, a reflexive subject actively

participates in speaking, listening, and responding; reflexivity involves regularly exercising the mental ability to position oneself as related to one's various contexts (Chernilo, 2016).

To ensure that data are of sufficient quality and not just a result of their views, a researcher must make their perspective explicit through a reflexive practice, think critically about their standpoint, beliefs, and experiences, and develop an awareness of how those may have affected the process and results of a specific study (Evans et al., 2018). Although the problems of how to be reflexive and how to practice reflexivity still exist (Holmes, 2010; Karakayali, 2004), researchers have already come up with solutions. For example, in a case study, Evans et al. (2018) describe the procedure and clues of how to be reflexive. The authors claimed that researchers ought to address their subjectivity in three ways: 1) the insider perspective, 2) their partiality towards a stance group or political viewpoint, and 3) the outsider perspective.

In the present study, I have opted for an emic/insider approach through direct contact with the participants, with the purpose of viewing the world through the eyes of participants. Furthermore, my transnational couples were eloquent and well-versed in their interpretations of reality so that I could obtain rich and substantial narratives of their experience, explore the meaning of their attitudes, beliefs, and decisions, and make sense of their stories and lives. One may argue that being an insider constitutes an advantage in the relationships between the researcher and their subjects. An insider has easier access, the ability to formulate more meaningful questions, and the ability to read non-verbal cues. Last but not least, an insider can project a more truthful and authentic picture of the culture in question (Merriam et al., 2001).

3.4. The research population and sampling method

My sample initially included 12 mixed couples of Israeli Arab Muslim men married to post-Soviet Slavic Christian women, aged 33-55, residing in various regions of Israel, mostly in the North. The couples were chosen in accordance with the criterion of capacity to provide rich material for case studies, the so-called "judgmental sampling technique," focusing on the characteristics of a group that are of interest to achieve a particular purpose

(Saunders et al., 2009). That is to say, I was especially interested in couples who were eloquent enough to share their ideas about cultural and social differences in their homes and familial environment. For the sake of protecting their privacy, I used pseudonyms and made some minor changes regarding their personal information. In the course of the interview, one couple decided to drop out as their relationship deteriorated, and they eventually got divorced, so I remained with the other 11 couples.

Couple 1: Rafik and Olga

Rafik, 55, met his future wife Olga in Kyiv, Ukraine, while studying at the International University in the Faculty of Dentistry. They have been married for twenty-seven years, with four children. The spouses run a dental clinic together. Both partners were calm, respectful, and eloquent during the interview.

Couple 2: Ali and Natalia

Ali, 55, met his future wife Natalia, 51, in Moscow, Russia, while studying at the Faculty of Cardiology. In Israel, Ali runs a clinic for treating PTSD, anxiety, and depression; Natalia, who did not graduate, is a housewife. The couple has two children. Unfortunately, the couple has been going through a divorce procedure, and for that reason, Natalia refused to be interviewed, so I conducted the interview with the husband only. Ali was friendly and open-minded, demonstrating a particular interest in the questions of mental well-being and readily sharing his intimate experiences related to his marriage.

Couple 3: Mike and Nina

Mike, 47, met Nina, 45, who was born in Kharkiv, Ukraine. They studied medicine but did not pass the final exam. Now, he runs a food factory production at Ivory. The couple has been married for twenty-five years and has two children. During the interviews, Mike was funny and, at times, sarcastic, eloquent, and very much concerned with his marriage. Nina works as an aesthetician in a dermatologist clinic. She was quite shy and restrained during the interview, speaking mostly about her country and life at home.

Couple 4: Raed and Anastasia

Raed, 48, met Anastasia in Moscow during his studies at a Law School. Anastasia holds a B.Ed from Moscow Pedagogical University; however, in

Israel, she works as a saleswoman in the lingerie industry. Raed is a lawyer specializing in family law and owns his practice in the City of Carmiel in Northern Israel. The couple has three children. During the interview, Raed was eloquent and very much preoccupied with his wife's integration into Israel. Both spouses were quite open when speaking about intimate issues of their marriage, as well as about their children.

Couple 5: Joan and Sasha

Joan, 50, is a clinical and forensic psychologist in a private clinic in Haifa. He met his wife, Sasha, 50, in St. Petersburg while visiting friends. They have been married for twenty-seven years with two daughters. Sasha works as a movement therapist in school for the Ministry of Education. She was proficient in Hebrew and Arabic; her husband was very much appreciative of his wife and her family. She currently works as a school movement therapist in the framework of the Ministry of Education. Her Hebrew was at a good level, and she provided substantial information about her family at home and her children in Israel. She had a kind and warming persona.

Couple 6: Mohammad and Marina

Mohammad, 43, is a Hebrew teacher in Arab schools. He holds a B.Ed and MBA. He met Marina, 33, a new immigrant from the Siberian city of Irkutsk, Russia, who arrived in Israel with her parents, one of them non-Jewish, in Israel in a discotheque. They have been married for five years and have two children; following Mohammad's condition, Marina converted to Islam. After her marriage, she also limited her work outside to part-time work to spend more time with her kids and husband at home. She talked mostly about her children and family life. Muhammad's responses were fast, and his discourse was eloquent. While shy when it came to intimate issues, he was open to discussing child care and house rules.

Couple 7: Feras and Elaina

Feras, 49, met his wife, Elaina, 39, while studying in Kyiv, Ukraine. They have been married for fourteen years and have one daughter. Feras gave a very long interview and seemed very comfortable talking about anything related to his marriage. Although Elaina spoke Hebrew quite well, she often used Russian when speaking about personal issues, and at times, she got quite emotional. Feras owns a construction company, while Elaine successfully runs her own beauty business.

Couple 8: Malik and Katia

Malik is 36 years old and holds a bachelor's degree in sports. He runs a pool and sports institute and has a business in swimming pool construction. He seemed distracted at times and was slightly reluctant to speak about intimate issues.

Katia is a 35-year-old Muscovite, and she identifies her religious affiliation as Christian. She holds a diploma in tourism administration. They met while she was on vacation in Israel. She was quite explicit about the differences between cultures. She was particularly keen to speak about the challenges she is facing in the marriage and her relation to her husband’s family. They have been married for four years and have two children.

Couple 9: Amir and Andrea

Amir is 43 years old and works as a manager of a construction and engineering company in Israel. He met his wife Andrea, 40, in Belarus while studying civil engineering. He is fluent in Russian and seems very well-connected and knowledgeable about Russian culture. They have been married for 14 years. Andrea, 40 years old, was born in Gomel, Belarus, and identified herself as Christian. She holds a bachelor's degree in law, but in Israel, she does not practice her profession. She was fluent in Hebrew, eloquent and communicative during the interview, very precise in her words, and seemed not too emotional about their relationship.

Couple 10: Saleem and Rita

Saleem, 55, studied mechanical engineering in Moscow and is currently employed as an electrical engineer. He was fluent in Russian, showing a great interest in his wife's culture and social life in Russia. They have been married for twenty years. She made an impression of a loving wife and expressed much care for her husband and their two children. Saleem seemed supportive of his wife and was a dedicated father. Rita is a 50-year-old immigrant from Russia. She also holds a B.Sc. in civil engineering but works as a saleswoman in Israel.

Couple 11: Noah and Lara

Noah, 54, divorced with three children, met Lara while on a business trip in the Russian city of Novgorod, where she worked as an elementary school teacher. They have one daughter together. The only thing that seemed to worry Lara in her marriage was the age difference.

It is important to keep in mind that my sample only partially reflects the overall distribution of transnational couples living in Israel. During the period when the research was conducted (from the summer of 2017 to early 2020), I was informed by the Russian consul that there were quite numerous transnational couples from the former Soviet Union in Israel; however, the exact numbers were unknown. Therefore, the participants represented just a fraction of the whole population of similar couples. Yet, their narratives constitute an important component in understanding the experience of other transnational couples living in Israel.

3.5. The research instrument

For data collection, I conducted 22 **semi-structured in-depth interviews** with the participating 11 mixed couples (One couple dropped out during the research and therefore refused to continue participating in the interviews). In-depth interviewing is an adequate instrument for seeking rich and personal data based on words.

The individual interviews, in general, and their semi-structured in-depth versions, in particular, constitute one of the most frequently used qualitative instruments (King et al., 2018); they have the potential to provide rich descriptive data. Moreover, the flexibility of the semi-structured format enables the researcher to combine between following a fixed list of subjects to be covered and being free to follow up on points (Thomas, 1966).

The questions in such an interview may easily deviate from the pre-established schedule, thereby generating new questions, as the interviewer intends further to develop the idea raised by the interviewee. Furthermore, the elasticity of the interview structure allows the participants to articulate the narrative of their reality without being restricted to a pre-established order, as the interview unfolds along the stream of thoughts and experiences of the interviewee and follows their "stream of consciousness" as it were. Therefore, the interviewee can maintain the autonomy of their narrative and, at the same time, be guided by the interviewer. Since in-depth interviews are based on an exchange of views and narratives on a given subject, they can also prompt the researcher to explore issues that have not been considered prior to the interview (Seidman, 2013). The questions are open-ended and give the participants the space to expand their answers as much as they wish.

There is an ongoing interaction between the responses of the participants and the questions researchers may ask as the interview unfolds, and both responses and questions are contingent upon each other.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Before commencing the interviewing process, the participants received explanations regarding the nature, purpose, and background context of the study. I tried to address everything the participants could be involved in and answered any questions so that they would feel comfortable. Participants were all given a participant information sheet that outlined the aims and objectives of the study, and they were asked to sign a consent form. Ethical approval acknowledgment followed the consent form and clarified that the participants were aware of the research aims, objectives, and who the research was being carried out for, as well as their role as voluntary participants.

The participants were further informed about their rights to withdraw from the research at any point during or after the interviewing process. It is the researchers' responsibility to protect the identity of the participants and ensure that the parameters of such protection are fully explained before the research begins. Participants need to be protected, and they should fully trust the integrity of the research (Israel & Hay, 2006). For this reason, details of participants, such as gender, occupation, and other details, were only used upon acceptance from participants, and names were changed to fake ones to keep their anonymity. This section briefly explains the ethical principles of this research. The next section begins to introduce the participants and reveals some issues encountered in the field.

3.7. The research procedure

Initially, I contacted husbands by phone with a subsequent email that explained in detail the nature of the project; at that stage, I could not know for sure who would agree to participate. After establishing communication via email, I received responses from those who were willing to participate in the research. Then, I carried out brief “intake” interviews with the potential

participants, asking them, among other things, whether they could recommend participating in the projects to their friends in a similar situation. Only a few months later, I interviewed the wives for the first time; all of them agreed to participate, except for one woman who was going through a divorce procedure and refused to take part in the project.

Since my direct contact was established first with the husbands, who subsequently introduced me to their wives, there emerged a window time of months between the interviews, which significantly reduced the probability of husbands influencing their wives' narratives. The interviews were conducted with husbands separately from the wives to give individuals a chance to express themselves in an open, private, and honest conversation without any pressure from having the other partner present. The majority of the interviews with the husbands were conducted at their workplaces when it was convenient for them. One interview was conducted in a coffee shop, and another one at my working place/ clinic. Interviews with wives were conducted at my clinic, but the majority were done in the privacy of their homes.

The duration of the interviews varied from 90 minutes to two hours. Although the participants were aware of the recording taking place during the interviews, I attempted to begin recording prior to their arrival in order to avoid embarrassment and unnecessary shyness. Indeed, the participants very soon forgot they were being recorded and felt quite comfortable sharing their life stories. In addition, as the interviews unfolded, I registered the patterns of body language and facial expressions; I never forgot to stay committed and focused through attentive listening, empathic interaction, and responsible observation, as recommended (Spinney, 2015). The ability to listen constitutes a critical strategic element for carrying out and subsequent understanding of the interviews. Indeed, it would have been impossible to gain mutual trust and enable rich discussions had I not been listening carefully and showing genuine interest in the experiences of my participants (Råheim et al., 2016).

The conversations with all the participants were carried out in a mixture of Arabic, Hebrew, and Russian. While equally fluent in Arabic and Hebrew, many husbands preferred to express themselves in Hebrew, only sometimes making references to concepts, things, or places in Arabic. They tended to use Arabic mostly in colloquial expressions or referring to

religious matters. In addition, they tended to speak Arabic while expressing their feelings of patriotism and love for the homeland. Other husbands, though, preferred to use Arabic as their dominant conversational language, with some Hebrew references to specific concepts, when they could not immediately find an equivalent in Arabic.

The women spoke in a mixture of Russian and Hebrew; although they were learning Hebrew in subsidized courses, they felt much more comfortable speaking their mother tongue; some of them used a mixture of languages, depending on the context. Although I am bilingual and fully proficient in Arabic and Hebrew, I have very little knowledge of Russian and Ukrainian languages; therefore, I feared misinterpretation regarding the cultural meaning. As language is essential to conceptualizing ideas and discussing values and beliefs, I felt the women could fully express themselves, not being restricted to speaking one language. For this reason, I had a Russian-speaking assistant to help me with translation. Her presence, too, affected the atmosphere during the interviews, making it more intimate and enjoyable: the translator acted as a cultural broker, helping me interpret social cues, behaviors, and contexts. After the interviews had been transcribed into Hebrew, the translator and I met to review the transcripts: we sought to reach conceptual equivalence between certain Russian and Hebrew translations, words, and phrases. This method, known as the "back-translation" technique, is a suggested adaptation to the blind translation that enables conceptual equivalence between the terms (Cha et al., 2007).

Using a language other than the mother tongue ("one's own") during an interview may bring forth an issue of mutual capacity to convey all the necessary data in a conspicuously foreign language. Therefore, in the process of interviewing, I relied on the content and the underlying message rather than on the correct use of grammar and idioms. Being multilingual facilitates understanding the message despite "false friends" slipping into the conversation (Čeginskas, 2016).

I kept a journal specifically dedicated to some of the participants' working timetables and availability. I was reluctant to interrupt participant's working timetables, so having annotated dates of meetings and other deadlines enabled me to plan and schedule meetings around those busy and stressful periods. That was particularly evident in the husband's cases since

they all worked outside the house, while the majority of the women either held part-time jobs or were homemakers. The awareness of this fact was significant in building a relationship of mutual trust.

The private setting in which the interviews occurred allowed for fluid conversations about their lives in Israel and abroad, their families back home, the challenges and motivations they faced, their memories, and their associations. Perhaps more importantly, for some of the participants (both men and women), this was the first time they could openly speak about their ideas of marrying cross-culturally and share their personal experiences. There was a particular case with one wife who was initially reluctant about conducting the interview and re-scheduled it three times. When she finally accepted me in her house for an interview, I found our conversation one of the most meaningful and productive discussions I had during my fieldwork. Overall, conversations unearthed very emotional memories - for both husbands and wives- some were joyful, and others were sad or remorseful. It was important for this study to capture these emotional moments, which created meaningful discussions.

The participants would place a special emphasis on the subject of tensions and conflicts, both within the family and with the extended family and the surrounding community. Some women, in particular, spoke about being ostracized from their families because of their choice, yet not many of them regretted choosing to marry despite their parents' disapproval. The participants often referred to those tensions as a part of the overall narrative depicting a "success story."

In addition, I noted that husbands were more focused and organized in their thoughts and in articulating their personal and marital issues. For example, almost all of them spoke about their life as a couple in chronological order and how they met. Under those circumstances, they married, relocated with their wives to Israel, began family life, and reflected on the experience of marrying someone else from a different country.

Interestingly, listening to the female participants' stories, the focus was more on their relocation to Israel and the challenges they faced as international citizens- language, social and cultural habits, and as wives to Israeli men. They spoke mostly about their life at home and how much it had changed since they relocated. Conversations conveyed a sense of land and

family attachment. Female participants would speak about their roles as wives in a familial, inter-faith, and transnational marital context. Their views enabled me to go on a visual journey through spaces and places that were part of their daily life in both Israel and home.

When conducting the interviews, I gently tried to guide participants in a certain direction to infer the themes that I intended to cover, still being aware of a semi-structured format to ensure that I covered important topics. I would ask them to discuss whatever was on their mind, give me insights into their past and everyday experiences, and reflect upon those experiences. Occasionally, I would focus on a particular experience and ask the participants what they thought of or felt, creating space for self-reflection.

When conversations began to stray from the topic or digress in focus, I would bring the participants back and comment on a related subject in a deliberate yet natural and non-intrusive way. This was particularly evident in the case of women, who talked more than men about their emotions. To some participants, my prompts sometimes evoked memories of home and ideas of land and family attachment and living abroad.

It is worth mentioning that the women often spoke about their awareness of being international citizens in Israel, which shaped parts of the theoretical framework and analysis of this study. The discussion touched on factors that were sometimes emotionally draining, such as distance from their families, learning new languages and religious practices, and adopting a social lifestyle as challenging.

Overall, I note that whereas couples (as individuals) tried hard to answer my questions to the best of their ability, none spoke about what they had in common (covered in the interview guide), except for their children and home responsibilities. The interview guide asked specifically about the couple’s intimate experiences, and most husbands and wives concurred that throughout the marriage and the raising of children, priorities changed away from the intimacy of early married life. I also noticed that they were more focused on their role as parents, as well as social roles/commitments towards their families, than as a couple sharing an intimate relationship. This idea will be unpacked in the data analysis and discussion chapters.

3.8. Data analysis

Journal and field notes are very important for data collection and subsequent analysis. Personal reflections in the form of a journal related to my feelings and emotions on the spot, as well as other thoughts I had immediately after the interview, often turned out to be very helpful. The same goes for audio recordings, as it is difficult to keep track of the complex sequence of situations mentally. The effectiveness of this strategy of recording interviews depends both on a researcher's personal preference and on how comfortable the participants feel about recording (Emerson et al., 2011). The chosen setting, in a private atmosphere, meant that all participants would frequently employ colloquial language to describe their thoughts and experiences. To avoid any difficulties during the transcription and analysis of the recorded data, I had to ask participants to make it clear what they had in mind when using physical gestures or facial expressions rather than words. In addition, I had to make sure the translator assisting me with some women's interviews was clear about their sentences and the words they used to describe certain situations or feelings expression. I took notes to make sure references to 'there' or 'here' in descriptions of countries were made explicit or when participants were speaking about their lives before and after marriage. I ensured that particularly significant parts of the conversation were highlighted and noted specific repetitions of words or thoughts that would appear during the conversation. This procedure was important to ensure what the participant was referring to when analyzing the interview transcripts (Carpiano, 2009).

Hence, it was critical for analysis purposes to expand any records or mental notes into descriptive field notes as soon as possible after conducting interviews to avoid misremembering or forgetting important elements as time passes by (Spinney, 2015). There is a gap between writing at the moment of occurring and writing about what has occurred, i.e., the two records are not identical (Merriam et al., 2001); therefore, taking notes in combination with recording turned out to be the most effective for further transcription and subsequent analysis.

3.9. Transcription and analysis

The data collected was transcribed alongside initial thoughts and ideas, which had been noted down and constituted an essential first stage in the analysis. This first stage of analysis, which by itself constituted an interpretative act whereby the initial meanings were developed, has been a key phase of the study. I thoroughly organized and reorganized the transcripts and field notes to facilitate further understanding of the data and convey the findings in the most optimal way possible. An analysis is not confined to a specific phase of the research process but rather is integral to the entire investigation, as most studies tend to evolve and change as they proceed, leading to eventual findings (Pole & Hillyard, 2016). In essence, it is a process wherein interpretation is subject to a continuous transformation to grasp the participants' narratives in the context of the study.

In addition to verbatim transcription, the research should perceive the nuances between the lines and go beneath the surface structure of the participants' narratives, in a sense, to peep behind the scenes (Silverman, 2013). This perspective is based on the three sub-processes approach to qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984) reducing data by extracting relevant parts out of the totality, 2) displaying data by bringing the information together, and 3) concluding by interpreting the findings, thereby providing the reader with a piece of easily accessible evidence.

The first step was to translate once, print the interviews and paper, and read each transcript carefully. After this first stage, I began color coding, adopting a system where I brought all the interviews next to one another on a table and began the manual comparison. I did this in three stages: first, I looked merely into the husbands' interviews and color-coded the main topics. I did the same with the wives' interviews.

Second, I began to mark the similarities between husband and wife. What they would commonly agree or disagree with, and what points between them were not addressed. Finally, I looked at all the interviews from all husbands and wives and began to notice, in a general sense, what sharing ideas/thoughts they had in common.

Once I had read the data several times, the ideas began to crystallize, take shape, and connect, breaking the data into sections. After that, I would reassemble it as I searched for patterns, correlations, and meanings (Miles &

Huberman, 1984). I focused on the relationships between the couple's themes and the emerging arguments, making them representative of the ideas the husband and the wife, couples in general, and individuals, in the process, were conveying.

Finally, when compiling the analysis and drafting the findings chapter, I selected relevant examples from the data to illustrate these key themes. I wanted the extracts to be contextualized within an analysis that told the stories of both the couples and individuals but also goes beyond mere description of the data (Willig, 2007).

Thus, I took time to organize data in themes and materials from the large amounts of information that lay in front of me. This inductive approach generated greater depth during analysis to facilitate the emergence of findings from the central or significant themes (Patton, 1990). Yet, when comparing the product with the literature in the context of this study, I found that some of the themes that I had anticipated were cast aside as the inductive approach to refine and understand my concerns and sense of direction. The expectations I had of what I was going to find before conducting interviews changed once the analysis began. I started to make other thematic and analytical discoveries due to the iterative, in-depth engagement with the material.

After the interviews were conducted, printed, and translated, common discursive patterns emerged out of the narratives: most patterns **suggested tensions between family and family expectations, gender roles, religious aspects, and socio-cultural differences, and in the case of the wives, an attachment to home and a reluctance to fully engage with the cross-cultural lifestyle.** Certain words were constantly mentioned by female participants, such as 'home' or 'family' and 'language.' In contrast, male participants would refer to 'religion' and 'social activities' or even 'emotional support' in relation to their wives. Participants spoke about similar things, too, and shared similar tones; for example, a male participant mentioned that they picked up on the fact their wife would not engage in his family's social activities, while his wife talked openly about how she saw her social position in Israeli societal environment in relation to their status at home.

The questions were formulated chronologically and sought to hear the story of the interviewees, starting with their acquaintance, description of the beginning of the relationship and its founding, and the relationship between

the two parties towards the relationship. I also asked about the joint arrival in Israel and the cultural adaptation for both spouses, the social and cultural interference, home and family issues and interpersonal relationships, and any major difficulties and perceptions of the transnational marriage. Again, a new analysis of data inferred that this indeed was the case. However, that process was fraught with complexities and required a substantial amount of reflexive time for the researcher. Although ambivalent, Holliday refers to reflexivity in this type of qualitative research related to "both how researchers think and act, and to social phenomena themselves" (p. 8). In other words, it is important to acknowledge the mixture of political, social, and cultural contexts in which the researcher is immersed. Following Archer (2007), reflexivity was key to understanding how these couples, as individuals, think about their marital life and the challenges and joys it brings.

Confronting the positive aspects and challenging aspects of their marriage can help couples define strategies and choices that underpin an emerging transnational marriage experience. Examples of these incidents will be discussed in the Findings chapter. Before beginning the analysis of the data, the transcribed and translated interviews were first prepared for this analysis, and then a process of *'data cleaning'* (Saunders et al., 2009)was undertaken, whereby all transcription errors were checked and corrected. Following this, the data analysis process could begin with the main aim of *'comprehending the meaning of text or action'* (Ibid: 478).

3.10. NVivo coding

NVivo is an efficient tool whereby large amounts of textual data are organized and represented in an orderly fashion in meaningful categories, which definitely enables the researcher to see the emerging patterns more quickly and clearly. In addition, the data can be easily modified in the interpretative process. Furthermore, a researcher can write down observations and comments and store more facts by using a memos section and an attributes section. The observations, comments, reflections, and memos enrich and deepen the analysis (Higginbottom, 2015; Iedema et al., 2015).

During the initial stage of the analysis, data was coded into broad categories while the information was packed into descriptive labels. Then, the descriptive labels were organized into smaller subsets for patterns to identify codes, showing similar and different patterns. The re-occurring relations between various elements of the data constituted the emerging patterns that could explain those re-occurrences. Other data was identified as "outliers" and used to examine the remaining information. The process of developing themes and codes is further illustrated in **Figure 6** and **Figure 7**.

Figure 6: Process of developing themes and codes using NVivo

Nodes

Name	Files	References	Created On
Factors affecting marriage outcomes	8	17	06/10/2020 09:50
Economic	6	8	06/10/2020 09:51
Ethnographic	2	3	06/10/2020 09:51
Historical	2	2	06/10/2020 09:50
Societal_cultural	3	3	06/10/2020 09:50
Integration of immigrants	13	37	06/10/2020 09:51
Community	3	4	06/10/2020 10:47
Culture shock_link to gendered roles	6	9	08/10/2020 10:25
Homesickness of wife	5	5	06/10/2020 10:20
Israel policies impact	1	1	06/10/2020 10:09
Long-term integration different to initial impressions_link to inno	5	6	06/10/2020 10:01
Wife isolation_check positioning_link to language and communit	7	12	06/10/2020 10:04
Interviewee background	10	28	09/10/2020 11:15
Partner selection and decision to intermarry	20	95	06/10/2020 09:49
Relationship development and role distribution	19	76	06/10/2020 09:50
Research notes_break down	1	1	06/10/2020 10:43

Figure 7: Screenshot from NVivo exemplifying a coding framework

3.11. Situating myself in the research

While natural scientists distance themselves from the object of the study, present their conclusions as objective truth, and more often than not, in the third person narrative, the results of research in social science are a product of interaction between the scholar and the participants, especially in a qualitative study. The way a researcher perceives their role in the community significantly impacts both the research process and the interpretation of the findings (e.g., Elliott, 1988); thus, the researcher's personality and individual characteristics constitute an important factor to consider in understanding the findings that are all composed by personal views of reality, constructed and re-constructed through the process (Tindall, 1994).

A researcher's epistemological approach and paradigms also play an essential role in understanding the research findings and analysis, as the choice of the paradigm is foregrounded in the individual set of beliefs, values, and preferences; naturally and inevitably, the researcher's interpretations of the behaviors are influenced by their attitudes and

experiences (Evans et al., 2018). The perception can never be "immaculate," while any text is always open to further interpretations (Van Maanen, 2006).

Given this, I must address my place in the space of this study as honestly and self-consciously as possible since I should be able to identify potential biases in the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. My personality might have affected my respondents' attitudes, which subsequently affected their willingness to provide information and to select the information they were willing to provide.

In this context, my background should be introduced: I am a polymath, well-trained, skilled, and versed in a variety of academic and professional fields:

- I am a practicing lawyer specializing in family law and global immigration laws;
- I am a qualified psychotherapist working with families and adolescents, using CBT therapy and EMDR techniques to treat anxiety, panic attacks, and PTSD.
- I am a practicing family therapist and mediator, as well as a qualified counselor; I believe in a global identity beyond gender, nationality, and religion, advocating for human rights and believing in social justice.
- As an expert in immigration and family laws, I work closely with Embassies and Consulates all over Israel, in particular in the Haifa region. I met most of my male participants in the Russian Embassy. My public identity as a responsible lawyer positions me as a person of integrity and commitment.

As an Arab Christian, I am fully proficient not only in the Arabic language and culture but also in the social and religious traditions of the male participants; thus, I can identify with their narratives to a greater extent than with the wives from FSU, even though I am quite familiar with their cultural heritage and social habits. On the other hand, I identify with females, hence duality as far as the identification with the research subject is concerned. Last but not least, I am single, although I was engaged and involved in a number of romantic relationships.

This position may have enabled the participants to feel confident to share their life stories with me. Furthermore, some female participants desired to continue the interviews and even asked for private counseling sessions. I firmly insisted on separating between my position as a graduate scholar and my role as a professional counselor, so I kindly turned down

their request to maintain the ethical boundaries of my research. Dewalt and Wayland (1998) spoke about ethical concerns related to the relationships established by the researcher when conducting interviews, which could be difficult to maintain in the future. It is quite common for a researcher to spend time with a certain group or individuals to establish friendships, some of which may last over a lifetime, while others are brief and last only during the period of the study. In our case, my participants and I developed relationships that lasted during the research period and then became limited for reasons previously explained. I did my best to balance friendly informality and objective detachment while participating in co-constructing knowledge, as mutual trust and integrity were crucial for the relationship to flourish (Råheim et al., 2016).

However, I should mention I am still in contact with some of them in the framework of attending social events at the Russian Embassy; the contact mainly consists of holiday wishes and does not extend beyond being formal (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). I made this decision precisely to ensure that issues of interest to the community are being addressed and that the research findings are shared with the community, rightfully acknowledging their input to the research (Marshall & Batten, 2004).

As opposed to the Arab participants, an important common denominator between female participants and myself was my being Christian, raised in a Christian family, and familiar with all the religious traditions and practices. An additional aspect that linked me to the female participants was the fact that I had been previously involved in a romantic transnational relationship. My own experiences of a transnational relationship with a Muslim partner contributed to the empathy and solidarity on the part of the wives. Sharing and matching similar aspects of cultural backgrounds and social experiences, as well as speaking the same language, significantly enhanced the effectiveness and created more depth, implying openness and credibility (Chavez, 2008; Ritchie et al., 2003). Although not married, I also dealt with issues concerning relationships and social status, work, money, and family issues within my relationship. For this reason, I could empathize with the participants and traded stories with the couples I met. We laughed over the similarities of our experiences and also wondered about the challenges and differences. Overall, these interviews were both professionally informative and personally rewarding for me.

During the research, I stayed loyal to the social constructionism perspective, assuming that there is no single truth hiding in a nutshell or waiting for me at the end of the study; rather, I braced myself to a plurality of truths, realities, and interpretations of the same event (Pring, 2000). My personal experience and professional backgrounds enabled me to guide my participants along the subject matter of my research toward their past; they were encouraged to address their twofold cultural and religious exposure and their resulting sense of identity. In response, the participants shared their memories, at times resorting to a song or a specific reminiscence as a part of an associative chain. In a certain sense, I can compare the interviewing process with the dialogue between a therapist and a client. The latter engages in a free association by voicing memories, thereby reconstructing and processing their complex emotional experiences. They were open about their doubts, fears, and uncertainties, but they could also laugh about their experience, taking an ironic distance. Often, they would over-analyze the question, intending to present their interpretation of what I might mean by asking. To avoid losing eye contact and interrupting their monologue, I took notes only when necessary. I would also refrain from commenting on their answers when their point of view on a certain event differed from mine to avoid bias and distortion.

I was confident in their honesty since the interviews presented them with an opportunity to reflect on their lives and to redefine themselves through telling their story; they were invited to think of questions they would not think about on a daily basis. Indeed, human agency is derived from continuous interactions with pre-existing social structures; those interactions are essential in shaping one's trajectory of action; in these terms, reflexivity, or so-called "meta-reflexivity," i.e., one's ability to re-appraise past inner dialogues (Chernilo, 2016) constitutes the marrow of the dialectics between agency and structures.

Through the stories of these couples and individuals, I sought to understand their world and gain insight into my world. And as they unfolded to be true to the complexities and multiple perspectives, as well as respectful of their thoughts and privacy. Therefore, when I gathered the data, I wanted to be sincere and authentic and be able to value their viewpoint in terms of both how I interacted with and interpreted them (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011).

4. Findings

This chapter unravels the versicolored panorama of findings, structured in accordance with NVivo categorizations, including the categories addressed by the interviewees and the main themes that emerged and crystallized throughout the analysis. The first section of the chapter exposes the process of partner selection and developing a relationship, whereby the decision to intermarry becomes consolidated. The reactions of the environment and the respective families arise. Once the first obstacle – making a decision and handling the family's resistance is overcome, the couple enters the next stage of their intermarriage, described in the second section; that is the stage of actual coping with the challenges it poses to both husband and wife through major avenues of adaptation: language, religion, home ambiance, and the challenges of the interaction with the new in-laws. The third section describes major themes that resounded throughout the interviews: the culture shock, frustration and professional failure, dependence, alienation, loneliness, and nostalgia among the wives, power struggles between the spouses – fighting for the cultural identity in terms of culture shock, socio-economic disappointment, and successful adaptation by managing expectations and amending behaviors. This is described in the **third** section of the chapter. The section particularly addresses the notion and the phenomenon of "**culture shock**" experienced by the wives.

4.1. Processes of partner selection, making a decision to marry, coping with the family reaction

4.1.1. Demographic profiles of the spouses

All of the husbands interviewed occupied professional positions, the majority holding Master's degrees in various fields; however, all of them earned salaries below the average in Israel. In terms of religious affiliation,

they were all Muslim, yet not all of them actually practiced their religion, and some of them even identified themselves as secular and Communist.

Joan and his wife described themselves as hardly practicing Islam in everyday life, although they married under sharia law. According to Joan, his father-in-law had been baptized some ten years ago, and his link to Christianity was very loose, perhaps because of the ruling Soviet ideology that did not approve of being religious. Other couples married according to a civil procedure in Moscow, as the wives' parents insisted they do.

In their turn, the wives mostly came from a "very modest conservative family of low financial status." In terms of education, two wives held academic degrees – BA and MA. Rafeek's wife worked as a dentist, and Joan's wife was an M.Ed.; however, Nina, Marina, and Rita belonged to a lower economic status. They were all Christians, except for Marina, who had later converted to Islam, but very few of them actively practiced the religion.

4.1.2. Meeting and the development of relationship

Ali, Amir, Noah, Mike, Rakeek, and Saleem met their future spouses in Moscow during their studies, Amir, Raed, and Feras – during their studies. Also met in the Dead Sea while both working in the tourist industry, or at a discotheque (Marina and Muhammad), through mutual friends, or (in one case) when they came down with illness and met their future wife while she was providing the first aid (Ali). There was a remarkable age difference in several cases. The development of a relationship between the spouses varied in terms of duration. While in most cases, the future spouses were friends in the beginning, some of them moved to cohabitation quite fast (e.g., Nina and Mike).

As for the main reasons for emerging attraction between the future spouses, the respondents named physical attraction. As Ali told us,

> "Her hair was long and beautiful… I told a friend I like the girl's dress; she has got great taste and is always in high heels."

The women also described an immediate physical attraction they felt toward their future spouses:

> 'My husband was handsome, with blue eyes and blond hair; he did not look typically Arab. Beautiful in good taste, even today it looks good, although bald' (**Sacha**).

The women were very much interested in the socioeconomic position of their future husbands, as they explicitly saw in an intermarriage an opportunity to leave or, in some cases, flee the post-Soviet world, devastated by instability, poverty, and crime.

Lara initially refused advances in relationships and motivated her refusal by the question of self-respect, amid the stereotypes held by *"all the foreign men who walked around the university thought the girls were easy to get. I had respect for myself and did not like this attitude of him"*. Marina knew that Muhammad had been seeing other girls, which did not stop them from continuing the relationship: *"I said in my heart – if falling in love with me would make him not to look at others, this is what matters*."

4.1.3. Making decisions

The husbands confessed that they had no intentions to marry, especially a foreign woman, either because of age or religious differences. As Mohammad put it, *"I had no intention to marry whatsoever. Marriage was not in my head, especially not a non-Arab woman"*. **Read**, in his turn, had no intention to marry **Anastasia** because of the age difference:

> "I never promised her marriage; I explained to her more than once that I would not marry her and that I wanted to marry an Israeli Arab from Israel, so she had no expectations, but fate intervened…"

The age difference produced dependence even in the early stages of the relationship, as it highlighted differences in mentality:

> "My husband, too, is older than me. He also belongs to a different generation, so he understands my grandmother and my father. He still had a typical Arab man mentality. He loved my grandmother and father's education, and that is why he offered me to get married. It didn't matter to him who loved him, so of course, I fell in love with him over time, and I was very dependent on him."

In many cases, integration with and befriending parents was an important part of the development of the relationship. In addition, husbands performed 'testing' their wife-to-be real feelings and their commitment to the relationship; in some cases, husbands warned about their financial position, as well as warned about managing expectations of what life would

be like once they moved to Israel, to ensure that the woman did not just seek to improve her financial position by marrying:

> "It was important for me to check that she was not with me to improve her financial position. I did a lot of tests for her, and luckily, she showed loyalty and love. She supported me financially and socially, and despite all the warnings, I was convinced at the end of our relationship that we had a special connection." (Amir).

Other husbands posed the conditions for getting married; thus, Marina converted to Islam.

4.1.4. Family reactions

On the whole, all families reacted with hostility and expressed unwillingness, at least in the beginning, to accept their children's choice to intermarry. The reactions varied between fathers and mothers in Arab and Russian families, respectively.

4.1.4.1. Arab families – husbands

Malik's family was not only reluctant but also explicitly startled by the external appearance of their daughter-in-law, the wife of their son, as she looked outrageously different:

> "It was summer; she was wearing, I remember, very short shorts and a tank top. I remember my mother staring at her with such disapproval. My mother did not love it; the atmosphere at home was tense" (Malik).

Mike's parents, too, were deeply shaken by his choice (being the first-born, Mike had a lot of expectations from him in terms of his marital choices and prospects); they were stricken by the salient "otherness" of the "foreign woman."

> "My parents' first sentence was a parable: "Menton Bladk wire Ah, Dadk." A literal translation from your country's dirt covered your face, and the meaning will marry from your own country."

Saleem's family, despite identifying itself as secular and even Communist, found it very difficult at first to accept their son's choice

precisely because of the religious difference. Despite their secular orientation and adherence to the Communist ideology of "equality" and 'internationalism,' Saleem's parents did not deny that they would still prefer a Muslim mother for their grandchildren rather than a foreigner.

> "Although my parents are not traditional and their affinity with our distant religion and they are ideologically communist, I am still not so able to cope with this situation and mainly wanted to spare society and family criticism of this marriage. Over time, they learned to accept us."

Mohammad, who in the beginning did not even introduce Marina as his wife-to-be but presented her as just a friend, quoted the same phrase from his parents upon learning that he intended to intermarry. As Marina recalls,

> "He didn't introduce me to his family at first as his fiancée or future wife. I was just a friend, not even a girlfriend. Later, I understood that he hadn't decided by then; he wasn't sure about the decision and wanted to get feedback from his family."

Yet, once Ali had made up his mind, the parental objections did not affect the husband's decision to marry. As Ali put it, "*My parents knew that if I decided, I would not give up, and so they accepted the fact of our marriage*."

However, not all Arab parents were so discouraged by their children's marriage choices. Some families recommended that their sons marry an Israeli woman but were quite positive about their sons' relationships with foreign women, and there was no reason to hide it from them (Joan). Moreover, Feras' family did not at all object to his choice; he characterized his parents as "*free, liberal people*":

> "My family accepted her very nicely. They did not oppose the wedding and were not surprised. They had always known I had a Russian girlfriend. Her being Christian did not bother them, as they were not traditional and did not practice Islam" (Feras).

However, the future in-laws placed a lot of social expectations upon Feras' wife: they expected her to stay in close contact with them, visit them frequently, befriend the extended family, and attend weddings and other social events.

In general, in Arab families, mothers tended to be more reluctant to accept the intermarriage of their sons, as compared to fathers, while in

Russian families, it was the other way around: fathers took their daughter's choices much harder than mothers.

4.1.4.2. Russian families – wives

As said above, unlike the husbands' families, in the Soviet families, it was the father who mostly opposed to the mixed marriage. Thus, Ali speaks about his wife's father, who "rudely opposed and even fought to separate between us." It took him a long time to accept Ali in the family. The wife "would always ask me to be patient until her father finally accepted us because of his complex and difficult personality." Mohammad, too, complained that

> "Marina's parents were against our marriage; the objection was to my parents and my extended family. The resistance was very hard to stand; I heard so many "compliments" from them; they did everything to make me change my mind."

Still, despite the resistance and objections, the reactions of families varied. It was found that the wife's family significantly affected the relationship and the early period after marriage before the couple moved to Israel. In the case of Rafeek, his future wife's parents suggested the couple move in with them, which eventually strengthened his relationship with his in-laws. Amir recounts that Andria's family accepted him despite their conservative religious background and the tradition of marrying fellow civilians of the FSU, even though, in the beginning, they were somewhat fearful. Anastasia's parents were "thrilled," too until they managed to accept the intermarriage. According to Elaine's story, her mother particularly liked Feras, and they had a very positive relationship with him.

In her interview, Rita points out that her parents "objected and were a bit afraid, but finally accepted it with love." She implies that their reactions and her wishes should be understood in the context of the post-Soviet societal realities of the 1990s.

> "They thought and realized that life in Israel would be better, with more money and job opportunities. It was 30 years ago in the USSR; it was really uncomfortable. I wanted to leave for a better life, and everything everywhere looked better than staying there."

The future marital union of three couples was cemented by their coping with an unplanned pre-marriage pregnancy. Mike and Nina concealed their relationships because of the pregnancy and informed their respective parents only after having engaged; the parents' reaction was all but enthusiastic— "My family and her family received this message very hard," says Mike, who visited his wife's parents only once in his life. Nina described this period in her life and their life as a couple as extremely challenging:

> "The pregnancy period was not happy to have studies and responsibilities, and there was a big secret that we hid. It was not easy to live with such a big secret without help, without support, without motherly bits of advice. I was there for him, and he was there for me; we had a powerful bond."

She went on to explain how their joint coping brought the couple together and served as a bonding experience.

> "We had to deal with everything on our own. During pregnancy and birth, we were not just a loving couple but also best friends and family of each other. Our relationship was strengthened with the growth of our common girl." (Nina).

Joan and Sacha, too, hid the pregnancy from her parents and informed them only after marrying at a mosque in Moscow; the reaction of Sacha's father was bitter; however, after the girl was born, they accepted Sacha's position:

> "Then my dad learned…and there was a serious fight at home, so I had to confess to my parents that I was pregnant. I gave birth to our first daughter in Moscow, and my parents helped me raise her."

To understand the implications of families' reaction to marriage and pregnancy for successful integration into the Israeli societal fabric, it is useful to focus more on the husband's family reaction once the "imported wives" have arrived in Israel, as it paves the road for the future integration or, conversely, alienation. In addition to the family reaction, a wider social circle of the husband did not remain indifferent to a "transgressive" action of one of their members. In Andria's words, to win her husband, she had to confront not only his family but also his wider circle, his friends, as well as their stereotypes about the "women from Russia":

> "In retrospect, I realized that many of his friends from Israel were trying to separate us; he had a prejudice rooted about women from FSU – they are believed to be exploitative, money-loving, and cunning. I was genuine and do believe in the relationship."

4.2. Coping with the Consequences

4.2.1. Culture shock

Upon their arrival to Israel, many women felt deeply traumatized by what they consistently addressed in the interviews as "**culture shock**." The culture shock resulted from the acute discrepancy between the mentalities – the habitual world of meanings, actions, and behaviors of the post-Soviet women was confronted with the Levantine mindset and appearance, unfamiliar diversity, and total communication alienation because of the language barrier. Furthermore, there was a clash between what they understood and performed as women's social position in their native country and what they saw in Israel. Culture shock is expressed in three major domains: 1) language and communication, 2) socio-economic dissonance, and 3) radical differences between customs and habits, including the roles and expectations of women. As Olga described her first impressions of the 'Promised Land":

> "When I arrived in Israel, I was shocked. It was so different from what I expected. I was in the life market. I will never forget that moment. Today, women and girls come out freer and travel to the guy's country to check it out, not like me. The shock I received was tremendous."

The need to reside in cheaper locations, often in less luxurious or under-privileged neighborhoods, did not match the image of the country described by the husband. Thus, for example, **Rita** described her house as feeling like a *detention center…A nightmare, a simple nightmare, nothing was beautiful to me*. As her husband **Saleem** commented, '*Our life together in Israel was very difficult to start with…I guess she was expecting a different, better life*.' Marina recalls her first experiences with the immigration:

> "Adapting to the new country was difficult. It was not easy; we were startled at first – the dream turned out to be a gloomy reality. My parents had worked

> in an academy, but in Israel, they had to work in a factory. I worked a little and lived in the environment of the newcomers from the Soviet Union, mostly Jews."

Ukraine-born Olga was stricken and confused by the well-known Arab tradition of preparing stuffed vine leaves, which includes the women's social gathering. It contradicted everything she was accustomed to in her native country in terms of social gathering, eating, and drinking:

> "In Ukraine, we would sit and eat for three hours with different alcohol, music, and atmosphere. There were also guests. Suddenly, I came to a different culture, for example, the stuffed vine leaves (a familiar dish in Arab society). Women sit for hours to roll and prepare, sit for 3 hours to prepare, and people eat for 5 minutes and get up. Culture shock simple" (Olga).

Olga speaks of another culture shock related to an exaggerated closeness of her husband to his family:

> "At first, it was a shock to me that he was so close to his family. He loves the encounters of his brothers, cousins, and sisters; he finds himself there. I'm not against him. There were days it bothered me. No longer." (Olga).

It seems Rita has not fully overcome the culture shock: "I was frozen and angry," which describes her profound distress upon landing in Israel. She adds that her frustration has only diminished over the years, but it has not disappeared completely, and she is not satisfied enough with her life; *"I have never been."*

> "A simple nightmare, a nightmare, astonishment. Nothing was beautiful to me. He had described me the sea and the sun, but we landed in Acre in the neighborhood with people lacking culture and manners, as we had been looking for a cheaper location. People speak so loudly they put songs on a high volume. Any little village was more beautiful in my eyes; in Acre, there is a sea, a port, an ancient city; my husband is passionate about it, but I felt like in a detention center, not in the house!"

4.2.2. Language

Language immediately became a major barrier to overcoming and even addressing the culture shock. The situation was further complicated by the need to learn two languages simultaneously—Arabic, the native language of

the husbands and their surroundings, and Hebrew, the official language of the State of Israel, in order to integrate fully.

Amir describes his wife, who encountered multiple difficulties with the extended family, friends, and neighbors because of language problems; those language problems resulted precisely from differences in habits, mentalities, and life perceptions. Therefore, it was often impossible to translate every word from Arabic into Russian:

> "The extended family, friends, neighbors, communication problems, language. She could not explain herself and spoke only Russian. I had to translate everything, including customs and habits that some things never realized because of the language barrier and because of differing mentalities and perceptions of life is different."

The interviews demonstrated that the majority of the couples spoke Russian at home, while the wives attempted to speak Arabic when communicating with their in-laws and in public. In some households, the children spoke Arabic with their father and Russian with their mother (e.g., Amir and Raed´s families). Some children were proficient in four languages. Olga says:

> "My mixed marriage did not hurt the children at all. Children get along fine, speaking four languages. They're familiar with and exposed to different and diverse cultures; they also understand the challenges in my relationship with their dad and know that life is not honey."

Other wives (e.g., Andria) were proficient in the spoken language but not able to write. The process is long and cumbersome, according to Olga,

> "It took me quite a while to learn Arabic and Hebrew and learn to examine and adapt to the environment. It was imperative to absorb two languages, one of which was not enough." (Olga)

Saleem recounts that

> "over time, she began to adapt and learn Arabic to communicate with her family and neighbors. In addition to Arabic, she also learned Hebrew in the studio. I was worried about her integration into employment and that she could not find a job." (Saleem)

However, other wives still find learning the language difficult after years of living in Israel, which makes them feel helpless and isolated. Thus, Lara confesses to her inability to master either Hebrew or Arabic.

> “I am still learning Hebrew in the studio, and Arabic I do not know almost because who will practice with me? My husband is busy, and I have no one to practice the language with.” (Lara).

As a result, she is accompanied and assisted by her children, whether in the community or at the doctor's, if she comes down with sickness. Sadly, it was precisely the language obstacle that prevented Amir’s wife from working in the field of law, as she was not able to pass the Israeli Bar examination. In his turn, Feras claimed that the language barrier constituted one of the reasons for the poor quality of their marriage.

> “My marriage is bad! My wife does not speak Arabic at all. She understands everything but does not speak it, and she has no self-confidence. She is ashamed to laugh at her Arabic. With my family and the Arab environment, she speaks Hebrew, and everyone knows Hebrew.”

To sum up, quite logically, language mastery is one of the major determinants of maintaining a successful marriage and achieving professional and social integration.

4.2.3. Religion

The attitude to religion was mixed. Mike identified their family as completely secular; Ali, Amir, Malik, Mohammad, and Rafeek celebrated both Christian and Muslim holidays: they decorate a Christmas tree and prepare the house for Easter; they also celebrate Arab holidays - Andria occasionally attends the Church, while her husband does not attend the Mosque at all. However, quite a few women found it difficult to adjust to their husbands' Islamic religious affiliation. **Elaina** confessed to feeling a sense of split in her religiosity – “*I feel more Christian than Jewish, or something like half Jewish, but closer to Christianity*.” **Marina** recounts that they celebrate Christmas at home and Muslim holidays with Mohammad´s family:

> “He was very clear with me and made it clear that he had the requirements to marry at an Islamic wedding and that the children would be Muslim, but

> he had no problem getting to know the Christian religion. Nor would he mind me visiting the Church and celebrating all the holidays for me."

Unlike Marina, Olga did not convert to Islam and remained Christian. She was also quite explicit and outspoken about "blocking her ears" to the call of muezzin. In Raed's words, observing religious practices was his private personal matter. However, his wife felt that her husband's behavior had changed as a result of his father's illness and advanced age: he began to pray five times a day and forbid eating pork in the house, which did not make his wife particularly happy:

> "Restricting myself to what kind of food to bring home makes no sense and isn't fair; for me, it looks so silly—all of a sudden, he changes all his rules and adopts new customs at home and new "food culture" … Sometimes I talk about that with my friend from the former USSR who married here or to my parents" (Anastasia).

Thus, in their case, religion suddenly grew to constitute a stumbling stone in their marriage, where it had not previously been.

An additional issue related to religion was the issue of children's religious affiliation. Sacha was quite disturbed by that issue:

> "The issue of religious affiliation has always been a challenge in our family, especially for me… it's quite a complex situation. There are no civil marriages in Israel; according to Islam, my children must register under the religion of the father who is Muslim, or, conversely, they can decide for themselves, but only after they reach 18 years old. However, today, my kids are much beyond that age but still haven't made up their minds about the religion they would rather choose."

Ali, Saleem, Amir, and Raed opted for the "deferred choice" (Barbara, 1994). Ali's children have not yet decided which religion to choose, although they have been baptized; they "*keep their options open*." According to Saleem, "*I made sure to balance the different values so that homeschooling is multicultural.*" Amir's children answer the question of their religious affiliation – whether they are Muslim or Christian, according to the situation, "*very diplomatic.*" Amir and his wife found a compromise regarding attending the Church by their children. Furthermore, Anastasia and Raed decided to let their children choose their religion. However, there is a crucifix in each child's bedroom, as well as Christian icons on the wall:

> "They know all about the religions; they know about both religions in the main lines. They have not yet decided which religion will be their affiliation; they keep saying it is not important or interesting. I will respect their decision."

Religious issues are also expressed through cooking and choice of meals. In Ali's home and other mixed households, Russian food was dominant; however, as some wives had learned to cook from their mothers-in-law, the Russian menu was combined with Mediterranean cuisine. Most couples drank alcohol. However, when the in-laws were visiting, the family would refrain from eating pork or drinking alcoholic beverages (e.g., Amir). Still, Rafeek's family did not interfere in the adherence to Muslim religious practices or pork and alcohol. Despite mostly reaching a compromise on the food issues, Katia was "furious" when Malik asked her to stop cooking pork. The conflict around food expressed Katia's desire for independence:

> "We don't really get along as a family; maybe I was too spoiled, maybe it was because he left me with his mother for a whole week of therapy in the kitchen…claiming I'm not family enough".

4.2.4. Home Ambience – "linking objects of nostalgia"

"*Our home is decorated with great taste*" was a common refrain in all the interviews. As the wives ruled on the domestic front, most houses re-created Russian décor and general atmosphere. **Ali** noted that "*the atmosphere at home is very Russian; you can feel it as soon as you enter the house*.' **Anastasia** describes:

> "Our home is tastefully decorated; I make it look like Moscow. In which a Russian atmosphere in colors in decorative objects, in a wallpaper that is very common in our wallpaper."

Katia claims: *"I made sure we had all kinds of pictures, art details, a crucifix in every room, things I brought from Moscow to accompany me here."* Only Joan's household was not explicitly Russian in its tone:

> "The design in the house is more European than Russian, a kind of modern style: we collect decorative objects, art items, and accessories during our trips around the world; of course, there are also Russian souvenirs."

The women tended to talk a lot about their past life in FSU, proudly demonstrating and describing their home décor; they also described their holidays spent with family and leisure activities, with much sense of homesickness. **Andria**'s ritual of an annual travel to Russia is described as a respite that enables her to recharge and return to Israel. Olga also describes her holidays in her homeland as "giving [her] the strength to go back and start if we were getting married and starting over":

> "The love I received at home was for me, the anchor that gave me the strength and strength to continue my life in Israel. My parents were anchors for me. I would imagine my dad reaching out and holding my hand so I would go on living and surviving difficulties. And survives the difficulties."

Sacha also spoke about the benefits of taking a sabbatical from work and being able to travel to Russia frequently to see parents and other relatives. That was a "recharging experience". The Russian décor, furniture, and ambiance betrayed and underlined the sense of isolation, alienation, and nostalgia for the irretrievable past. Lara, who has no contact with her neighbors, feels lonely and estranged:

> "We run a kind of commune in our house; the moment you enter a Soviet-designed home, you can feel Russian flavor. There is no trace of Islam; I hardly ever attend Muslim holidays, only if invited by his brothers and sisters, which happens only rarely, as my relationship with them is very superficial, almost non-existent."

Others live in a spacious house for the family, yet their social connections are extremely poor, proving that one can feel isolated even when surrounded by people and social engagements. **Anastasia** complains: "*It was not easy for me to adjust and work, so I was at home the whole day...between the walls, bored counting the hours until his return*". Saleem agreed with this perspective and even felt responsible;

> "The kids are her priority, she just decided to flow with the existing situation for them, but that doesn't mean she's happy. That's why I'm trying to make up for it."

4.2.5. The In-laws challenge: the interaction with the husbands' family

Upon their arrival in Israel, quite a few couples had to cohabit with the husband's family due to financial difficulties:

> "We came to a situation where we had no choice but to live there with them. This beautiful house you are sitting in now was also no money we would not have taken a loan from the bank; I did not come to a place of prosperity." (**Rafeek**).

Olga recalls her life with the in-laws as a nightmare:

> "Before we built this beautiful home, we moved into renting, the relationships with the extended family were an unbearable and challenging situation. That led us to decide to move out, and we chose to move on rent, and then we built this beautiful house; even during this time, my relationship with my husband was good, despite all the difficulties with his extended family. We were able to separate from them."

Katia was quite furious about living with her husband´s family

> "In a small place whether everyone knows about them. The atmosphere does no good to me in the soul, and it is probably transparent."

For some couples, that was a period of particular hardship when the newly arrived wives, and sometimes even husbands, suffered from a lack of privacy. **Ali** confesses that they had to move to rent a small apartment after two weeks of cohabitation with his parents:

> "We lived for two weeks in my parents' house but couldn't survive. We moved to rent in Acre and lived in a small apartment."

Saleem also recounts his wife's difficulties in adjusting to the new reality:

> It took her a while to adjust to the new reality," he said, shocked. "The difficulty was also due to the fact that we had to live with my parents in the same house."

However, other wives seemed to have adapted quite well to the new family while enjoying their husband's support and understanding:

> “We arranged a separate entrance to the ground floor, and we lived there temporarily as a young couple. It was not easy to start life with a girl and commitment, even though my parents were in good financial condition, so they helped us financially. She studied cooking and Western food from my mother. Olga adapted quite nicely. She got involved in Arab society around friends; she also learned the Arabic language.”

Amir was also conscious of the emotional burden on his wife of living in such close quarters (in this case, a two-room apartment in front of his parents’ house) with his parents, who used to visit without prior notice and intervene in the couple’s personal life. His wife's learning of Arabic and Hebrew helped in setting boundaries for the in-laws.

The burden of living with parents also had a positive side, according **to Raed**, which further facilitated the adaptation and integration of his wife: learning to cook, adapting to cultural expectations and the language;

> ”my wife learned to cook all my Arab food from my mother. We ate with my parents daily, learned Arabic, and practiced with the family. So the living quarters helped her master the language; she learned Hebrew in the studio.”

Even after moving out to live independently, the spouses had to live up to the parents’ expectations of regular visits (every two weeks, sometimes weekly – according to **Ali**). As **Feras** explained, “

> My family’s expectations are social – they expect my wife to contact them, pay visits, befriend the extended family, and attend social events, such as weddings.”

At first, many in-laws were reluctant, distant, and even hostile to the foreign wives. Elaine describes the first encounter with her in-laws as cold. She tried to change that in the beginning but very soon had to give up her efforts: “I respect them, but there is almost no connection; of course, I tried a little at first, but I quickly realized that it was not for me.” **Mike**, too, recounts that his family *“hated”* his wife in the beginning; to change that, she had to realize that she ought to adopt a “different mentality,” in particular, to change her dressing style to a more conservative attire. Unlike Elaine, she managed to win the hearts of her in-laws. According to **Mike**, “*Today, their relationship is great; she takes care of them as a loving respecting assistant does the shopping every month for my parents.*’

However, **Ali** describes how initial distrust and conflict grew into acceptance. At the same time, **Saleem** claims that his parents eventually became 'accustomed to the valley of equality' despite initial clashes and misunderstandings and assumes that "Arab culture is a culture that embraces the difficulties." **Malik** depicts a great relationship, with full and cordial acceptance by the in-laws: "*My mother accepted her…her relationship with my parents is excellent, and it made it easier for her to adapt to my father's village*". Moreover, he stresses, "*She calls my father "daddy" and my mother "mommy*." In her turn, **Anastasia** describes her relationships with her "complicated" in-laws as "perfect."

Interestingly, **Andria** describes her relationship with her in-laws as even better than with her husband since he works in the center of the town and is not a part of the immediate community. **Neena**, too, claims that her relationship with her in-laws is much better than with her husband, who does not even accompany her on her annual visits to Russia.

Yet, not all wives were as flexible and willing to undergo a cultural change: **Rafeek**'s wife, for example, refused to change her behavior, claiming that concealing her true feelings toward her in-laws was a mere hypocrisy she was not willing to accept. Her refusal came as a response to his begging to try and adopt a more "relaxed" attitude, attuned to Arab culture, featured by "*more warmth, closeness and sharing beautiful words*" (**Rafee**k). In a similar vein, **Marina** claimed that her personality "is a little more introverted compared to him," which might have prevented her from easily socializing with her in-laws. **Olga** confesses that she tried her best to cross the cultural barrier, particularly relating to her father-in-law's attitude toward women:

> "I tried to understand why they behave this way or analyze their behavior so that I could love or accept them at most, but I did not accept them and did not particularly like his father."

4.2.6. Social life – at the junction of integration, isolation, and nostalgia

The interviews revealed mixed patterns of socializing. Some couples led an active social life: **Malik** talked about their Russian friends, with whom they went out for shared entertainment. At the same time, **Mohammad and Marina** also described socializing with both Russian friends and friends

from the local community, including Christian and Muslim Arabs. Malik added that "*there are family commitments, events, such as weddings, especially in the summer, and to remain accepted by the society, we have to attend those*." **Amir** described his wife as having good interpersonal skills: "*Our house is always open, always ready to welcome the members of the community*." He noted, though, that her social ability was not typical of Russian women, who, in his opinion, as well as in his friends' opinion, had poor social skills. That was revelatory of an additional theme, quite prominent in the husbands' discourses: the prejudices towards "Russian women."

An important aspect of village life consisted in sustaining integration and forming a social circle for the wife while the husband was at work. **Andria** depicts successful management of this aspect, emphasizing that she knows her village "more than her husband," who works in the center and does not know the environment:

> "With his family today, I get along well and know the whole village, the village more than my husband, who works in the center and does not know the environment; I with the children—a beautiful villa—we have and are in contact with his grandmother and his parents. We have classes for schoolchildren, shopping, and arrangements. It has its livelihood and financial interest, payment banks, and savings."

However, not all couples were as successful in managing the social aspect of their life. Some wives found socializing extremely challenging or preferred to remain very selective in regard to their social acquaintances. **Feras** felt quite helpless and frustrated at the face of his wife's self-isolation and not attending social events: "*I can't plan anything with my friends because she just won't come*," he complains: "*She rarely attends family events, such as weddings or funerals, memorials, or joy. These practices of sharing joy and grief are very important in Arab society*," he emphasizes. **Elaina** knew her unwillingness was making her husband sad, but felt she could not help it; she would make up for the feelings of isolation and conflicts with her husband by "*shopping trip with the girl pampering myself with clothes and wasteful gifts*." '*I make very good money*," she admits, "*but spend everything, mostly shopping for the girl and myself*." Elaina invested most of her attention into her child as a way of coping with the sense of isolation and loneliness; in addition, as her parents and several friends had also immigrated to Israel, "*this was a strong point and safe place for me*."

Rafeek, too, had a hard time convincing his wife of the importance of attending weddings and funerals in Arab culture. **Raed** describes his wife as "*not very sociable, rather introverted; she would prefer living more privately as a family with the children; she does not need anyone else.*" "*I am very social,*" he complains, "*I love going out with friends, I love family dinners, so she sometimes does this for me while being uninterested. So, I gave up in order to pressure her*". In her turn, **Olga** restricted her social circle to friends from FSU or other women from European countries who also had intermarried. She explained her choice by sharing "a common mentality and similar adjustment difficulties." "*We are all Christian,*" she said, "*we dealt with similar issues, and that naturally made us a very close group, something like a support group*."

Interestingly, some husbands described having opted for ***privacy, independence, and autonomy***, quite against the dominant culture of the village. This was most probably out of respect for their wives' desires and for the ultimate sake of facilitating integration and success in marriage.

Mike told us that they keep their privacy and "*do not accept guests without prior notice*." "*We have a private house with an electric gate that is closed most of the time,*" he says. That clearly challenges the "*very regular habit in Arab society*" of surprise visitors, he adds. According to **Joan**, even though their house is open, they are hospitable and friendly, and "this habit of Arabs visiting without earlier notice is not found." He continues, "*You have to call or make a reservation in advance and coordinate with my wife and me to see if it is appropriate for us to host and when. We have no surprising visitors that are unacceptable to us.* This indicates acceptance of the wife's culture. However, **Joan** made sure that "*he blocked options*" of Sacha's contact with Russian and European women, whose intermarriages had failed, with the purpose of helping her faster integration into Arab culture.

> "Many women who came from the former USSR in that period drove back to their countries after a short time and dissolved their marriages. Therefore, I learned from the experiences of others and made sure to do everything to the full integration of Arab society. I have kept her away from basically all the close groups of mixed-marriage couples like ours. So she learned to connect with people of all kinds and had no other options; I blocked the other options."

It is interesting to note that while husbands saw their wives' interactions with other women from mixed marriages as both a threat to their

marriage and an obstacle to their integration, the wives found such contacts helpful for their survival in a new country, even at the expense of integrating into a new culture.

> "Being at home increased her sense of disappointment and frustration, and after moving into the new home, privacy and independence had a positive impact on her and our relationship, while our financial situation also improved greatly and stabilized" (Saleem).

4.2.7. Coping strategies – managing expectations, adjusting and amending behavior

During the interview, we could hear **Katia** look back with nostalgia while recalling their dating stage:

> "It was a gorgeous period devoid of responsibility, full of fun, love, a kind of nostalgia, and a big challenge: phones constantly, sex, calls, and ensuring Whatsapp; we were more engaged in the media and mobile than in our income."

Both Katia and Malik refer to the times of traveling between the ex-USSR and Israel as initially an "exotic" experience. However, Katia notes that everything changed after the proposal and subsequent marriage: *Until the proposal of marriage and consent, everything was dreamy and beautiful.* The husband described the same situation as above in terms of managing expectations of how life would change once they were married:

> "I explained to her about life in the country and the mentality, about my parents being traditional and conservative, my mother in particular praying five times a day. I knew it would not be easy for them to accept her as a Christian, with a Russian mentality and a different national language religion. My parents speak only Arabic and Hebrew and have had a very difficult time communicating with her."

The cooking issue triggered even more conflicts between the spouses, as Malik felt that his wife did not prepare family meals in particular or perform the expected role of the wife in general:

> "She does not think her husband works hard from morning till night and hasn't eaten the entire day; when I come home hungry, and there is no food,

> it bothers me. I told her that many times, but all in vain. I felt helpless and desperate."
> "For me, it is a critical issue," he added, "I am surprised by her indifference and apathy regarding this matter."

The wives interviewed described different strategies they employed to cope with the new and unfamiliar societal, economic, and cultural reality and maintain their marital relationships and family functioning. Some of them readily adapted to their husbands' needs and the expectations of the local culture, while others remained estranged and withdrawn.

Along with the cultural shock and professional frustration, most wives spoke about the efforts they had to make to adjust to the new environment, which required amending their behaviors and sometimes their worldview; some of them mentioned their resistance to do so, as in many cases they had not only to adapt to the rural Arab culture, very different and unfamiliar, but also to give up their native habits and renounce their customs. However, none of the husbands minded decorating the house with Russian (Soviet) décor and furniture and recreating the "Soviet" ambiance at home.

First and foremost, the wives were requested to **adapt their "dress code" to a more "modest" and conservative Arab style** while socializing, especially with the in-laws. Malik's family was not only reluctant but also explicitly startled by the external appearance of their daughter-in-law, as she looked outrageously different.

> "It was summer; she was wearing, I remember, very short shorts and a tank top. I remember my mother staring at her with such disapproval. My mother did not love it; the atmosphere at home was tense."

Mike's family "hated" his wife in the beginning, and to change that attitude, she had to realize that she ought to adopt a "different mentality," and in particular, to change her clothes to a more conservative attire. **Mike** notes that his wife succeeded in doing so:

> "Today, their relationship is great; she takes care of them as a loving, respectful assistant and does the shopping every month for my parents."

Joan, too, feels very much satisfied with Sacha's adaptation to the rules of the place:

> "Fortunately, she has a very respectable English style since she works in a school, so she does not go too short and not too exposed. She also considers the population living around us; you cannot ignore them."

According to Ali, "I can say that her attire is conservative, not revealing; she adapts her attire to the place."

Sometimes, husbands also participated in the process of adaptation, as they tried to preserve the common habits and preferences they had developed with their wives during their relationships. According to **Saleem**,

> "We eat pork at home, but not in the presence of my parents, so as not to hurt their feelings. Another example is that my parents don't drink alcohol, while we are used to drinking at home. But we got used to the fact that my parents had no pork and no alcohol out of respect for their feelings. As far as her attire was concerned, she wasn't so modest in the first place, neither too provocative nor too revealing. And so its external appearance has not changed."

The additional stumbling block on the way to adaptation was **the communicative behavior** of the post-Soviet wives. Thus, for instance, Olga was asked by her husband to make her discourse more ¨delicate¨ and ¨diplomatic¨, that is, not to speak her mind directly and use more euphemistic and polite expressions. In her husband´s opinion, the habit of being too straightforward, bordering with disrespectfulness and even lack of manners, is very much characteristic of all women who come from post-Soviet countries. According to Feras,

> "I wonder if my wife's behavior in our relationship is due to the Russian culture or her personal culture. I think it is both together. The Russians have a hard time connecting with others (Feras)."

As Raed put it, referring to their common daughter,

> "The girl is very similar in personality to her mother… she has similar behaviors to her mother, who has a Russian culture, for example, very straight and non-diplomatic; they both claim that ¨flattering hypocrisy¨ doesn´t suit them." (Raed)

Joan was an example of managing expectations: he had prepared **Sacha** for what she might see and find in Israel. Even though that was extremely helpful, his preparation did not prevent her from some "shock":

> "He coordinated my expectation, knowing what I was getting into, but in retrospect, I was still surprised by many things. There was nothing I could do about it".

4.3. Role distribution – private and public

The distribution of roles in the family operates both on domestic and public levels. All the interviewees unanimously depicted a traditional gender roles division, invariably maintained in all households. In that division, the wife is responsible for the domestic realm, while the husband is responsible for providing and bringing the income. The division of roles is explicit, clear-cut, and easily followed. They leave no room for doubt, confusion, or ambiguity regarding what is expected from each member of the family. As **Ali** put it, "*The house was her domain; she is solely responsible for all home affairs, like childcare… a home is her territory*." According to **Amir**,

> "My wife handles those matters—household, cleaning, and childcare. It is my job to support the family. The division of roles in the house is very defined, which makes it easier for both of us."

If the family "*enjoys a high financial status and pretty good living conditions,*" says **Amir**, there is no need for the wife to work at all. In essence, Amir makes sure his wife is financially independent because he can afford that:

> "My independent wife has her vehicle, separate bank account, credit card, and financial independence. Although not working, she conditioned the division of duties at home, provided she did not work outside. She wanted to be free to make all kinds of financial decisions without my intervention, and I, of course, agreed."

Anastasia readily describes the clear-cut role division, which she finds quite comfortable for her; she is conscious of her living within a gendered culture, but that does not bother her:

> "There is a gender culture here. I take care of the home, food, cooking, errands, shopping, children's education. I decide everything, even renovations, repairs, furniture, home décor, the garden, everything. In terms of bank accounts and payments, at the beginning of the relationship, he probably led the matter, and so it went on, not that I wanted to bear this burden. He has always been a generous person, though I do work. I own a separate bank account, but if I am missing money, it is a direct deposit into

> my account, and nothing is lost. Respectful, he has a password he can use to log into the account if he is moneyless and alone entrusts me."

However, in some families, the roles of spouses interpenetrated the boundaries of the division: the husband contributed to domestic labor. At the same time, the wife had some say in financial decisions related to the household and children's education. **Raed**, for instance, expressed empathy and guilt around not joining his wife in the household ordeals: "*I feel guilty for not helping her at home*." Yet, despite certain autonomy and working outside the house, all the wives were financially dependent on their husbands, which did not bother them that much. In Anastasia's words, she would rather not bear the burden of providing for the family despite earning her own money, as the husband is the one "who led the matter."

Marina also finds the role division very convenient and feels very comfortable about staying at home; moreover, she thinks her adaptation to her husband's culture assures the quality of her marriage:

> "Our marriage is very good; in terms of the division of roles, he manages everything and makes financial and non-financial decisions. I still feel like we were friends but with children. We have only been married for 4 years. I do not work, so he makes a living. We speak Hebrew at home, and even with his family, it is easier for me in Hebrew, a little Arabic now and then. I take care of the children, their shopping, cooking, cleaning, and everything. They lack nothing good for us together. I go out with him for shared entertainment; we have friends from the former USSR and friends from the community, Christian Arabs and Muslims."

Katia also "did not care" about the financial side of running the household, as Malik took responsibility for everything. Despite some blurring of the boundaries, the decisive vector invariably remains the same: "*I do involve her in serious decisions and investments, **but in the end, I decide***" (**Malik**, my emphasis).

4.4. Professional integration - thwarted dreams and frustrated ambitions

Andria complains about how this gender-based division frustrated her career ambitions:

> "There are quite a few heated arguments. I have no career on the one hand, but I do have a caring, faithful husband on the other. I work full-time as a housewife, but I would rather be a lawyer."

While Andria uses the phrase 'working full time as a housewife," managing the household and domestic tasks are not considered "work" in Arab culture.

Andria depicts an inner conflict of identity she undergoes: the role of wife and the professional role of lawyer seem mutually exclusive; she negotiates with herself the benefits of each role, as the choice is either/or, with no compromise possible. As she failed the Israeli Bar Association exam, she could not work as a lawyer. She was qualified in her country of origin. The failure to pass the Bar haunts her as a personal failure.

Even though **Malik** encouraged **Katia** to open her own tourist business, assisting her in office rental and logistics, Katia, too, felt that her dreams had been thwarted, as, in her view, she wasted all her energy and resources on adapting to a new country and childcare:

> "My dream was once to set up a travel agency, but it has also been shattered. The load of adapting to the country pulled out all my energy; I remained empty; my ambition disappeared."

Not all wives reported professional frustration, though. **Elaina** has her own manicurist business; she spends her income on herself and her only daughter, being totally separated from her husband. However, **Elaine** mostly enjoys her role and is satisfied with the general state of affairs in terms of role distribution and financial milieu. **Olga** is satisfied, too, as she works as a dentist in a private clinic with her husband.

Sacha is probably most satisfied of all wives – she works as a geography teacher and art therapist: *"I love my work very much,"* she confesses**. Joan** welcomes her attitude and agrees that work significantly facilitated Sacha's integration:

> "Most importantly, it was work; work made it much easier adapting to the country and had a favorable impact on her mood and emotion."

Moreover, **Sacha** also enjoys a true financial partnership with her husband. As **Joan** put it,

> "My wife is involved in all the financial decisions at home. We have a joint bank account and another separate one. She is a true partner."

Still, although Sacha agreed that "they were true partners in everything," she also pointed out that she takes care of the entire household alone despite having a housekeeper. It can be argued, then, that the division of labor is not affected by the fact that a wife works outside.

4.5. Childcare and Education

The childcare was the wife's responsibility. In some situations, the wife's parents helped with the childcare before the couple's traveling to Israel:

> 'They helped a lot, in particular in raising the child to allow us to successfully complete the studies. Her sister, who is seven years older, also very much helped in raising the child, especially in the first two years' (**Rafeek**).

While the wives and their families dominated the childcare domain, some of the husbands reported becoming more involved as the child grew older (**Saleem**). The wives were also responsible for choosing a proper education; all of them emphasized the importance of the Soviet heritage of education and cultural upbringing. For instance, Elaina involved her aunt from her ex-homeland in her daughter's education; the influence of the Soviet system was evident in the language spoken, the format of education, and even in hopes for marriage prospects. However, Elaina also felt that her daughter "has grown into a different reality than mine" and was sad because that was the reality of a deep discord between the parents. However, not all husbands were especially happy about transmitting the Soviet legacy to their children:

> 'The girl is very similar in personality to her mother and has a friend now. I am actually a little worried about their relationship. She has behaviors similar to those of her mother, who has a Russian culture; for example, she is very straight and non-diplomatic. Lots of flattering hypocrisy, and it doesn't suit them' (**Raed**).

Ali expressed his concern "*for the children to give them her legacy to marry only the Russian. The boys are not considering marrying Arabs at all*".

Furthermore, Ali shared his deep regret about letting his wife dominate the field of his children's education:

> 'If I regret something about the children's education, I was not involved when they were small, and now it is too late to fix. I was busy earning a living, and she, unfortunately, took the reins into her hands.'

Marina describes a bicultural approach to children's education, "even though **Mohammad** has made it very clear to me that the children would be Muslim, he had no problem getting to know the Christian religion." Their children speak Arabic and Russian, she says, and both parents make sure to work with them on being bilingual. **Rita** has gone even further with her children's education:

> "Adorable children. Globally speaking four languages, they are fully proficient in all four. They are close to my culture and local culture in the same way. They knew how to blend in beautifully and develop their own culture with an amazing acceptance of different cultures and languages. As far as religious affiliation is concerned, they believe in humanity and God Almighty. At school, they are exempt from religious classes, yet they know everything they learned in an Arab school, so they have a full command of Christian, Arab, and Muslim cultures. They developed a great acceptance of different cultures and religions. They live in the community and are very much socially involved. Sometimes, I see them talk to their dad about issues I would never dare talk about. We have three men who are fond of Arab Muslim culture, but, on the other hand, they can behave completely European; they feel comfortable in both worlds."

Anastasia claims that they decided to let the children choose their religion, yet "*there is a crucifix in each child's bedroom and Christian icons on the wall*." "I wanted them to remain Christians," she confesses, but since her firstborn daughter has been dating an Arab Muslim friend, Anastasia has been worried.

> "I made sure to take them to the church to celebrate Christian holidays. They are educated, well-bred, very polite, and book lovers. They have all the knowledge about different religions, but they have not decided yet about their religious affiliation, claiming it does not make any difference to them. I will respect their decision, whatever it might be".

Lara's daughter, however, attends a Russian Jewish school that does not teach Arabic. They are both entirely absorbed by their Russian heritage:

> "Mostly, my girl and I have old Russian stews that my grandmother taught me. Russian food. Real Russian cuisine. Home-cooked dishes from my culture, and so is the whole Russian home".

Natasha, the Russian wife of Ahmed, a Muslim physician, doesn't want to send her five and six-year-old kids to a public school. She insists on letting them join a missionary Christian school. She threatens her husband, saying: "I will leave your village and take my children to live in Russia."

The participants' opinions about their children's marriage decisions vary: Joan would not oppose any decision by her daughter regarding any mixed marriage.

> "The little daughter asked me recently, "Dad, what would you say if I decided to marry a Christian or a Jew? I explained to her that with a Jew, you will have a very hard time because the Jewish society will not accept you and hurt your husband. With this Jew, your children will suffer from discrimination and racism, and your daily coping will be difficult. But that's your decision. And if you decide to marry a Christian, I don't see any problem in that; as far as I'm concerned about my openness and acceptance, you're free to marry your choice."

Others opposed marriage choices of children, remembering difficulties in their mixed marriage (**Saleem**'s son who brought a Romanian girlfriend home);

> 'Although we had no language to communicate other than my bad English and body language, I conveyed the message to her. It is hard for this type of marriage; it contains so many challenges to endure, and I do not wish this for you and my son. My husbands and I suffered a lot…'.

4.6. The Quality of Marriage

Quite a few couples reported that the quality of their marriage had deteriorated in recent years. In **Ali**'s words, "Our relationship probably survived because of concessions." Both spouses, **Elaina** and **Feras,** had been considering a divorce but stayed together because of their daughter: according to **Feras**, 'the girl is the mistake that held us even though it is the most beautiful thing in my life." In Elaina's words, she felt no satisfaction but understood the need to hold on to the marriage because of the child: "*We have one child, and she is the only beautiful thing that came out of this marriage*.

"The spouses slept in different bedrooms, and Elaine confessed that divorcing was "*just a matter of time*." **Ali** and his wife were going through divorce proceedings at the time of the interview.

Katia and **Malik** were both deeply disappointed and unsatisfied with their marital life. Still, they agreed that her annual trip to Moscow somehow "kept it going": "*The annual trip to our Moscow, we travel every summer that keeps my sanity¨´.* Moreover, she also confesses: *"Motherhood is not easy for me either*." Malik was a bit more positive about their marriage, mainly in terms of the benefits for the children: "*I see a good future for our relationships, as I am very satisfied with the education of my children*." **Katia** was much more pessimistic.

> 'I want to save some money and move to Moscow again. I don't rule out that one day, I will get up and leave with the kids. My mind goes from time to time; my husband says I have to go to couple counseling to deal with many issues that have burdened me, and maybe he is right.'

Anastasia was bluntly explicit, both during the interview and with her husband, that if anything happened to him, she and her children would immediately return to Russia; '*I'm here for him and the kids. I won't miss anything here.*' Both **Anastasia** and **Raed** characterized their marital life as "ups and downs." In their turn, **Olga** and **Rafeek** also describe their marital life and a series of ongoing cultural debates and cultural disagreements as the major source of conflicts:

> 'There are ups and downs in our relationship. There are quite a few frictions and quarrels, but we end up reconciling…It is important to note that most of the debates and quarrels are about issues related to extended family or society in Arab culture, with cultural differences that are undoubtedly a matter of concern.'

The spouses related a lot to the question of physical attraction, as the beautiful appearance had been what initially brought couples together but declined over the years. Anastasia mentions that the intensity of physical attraction and desire had decreased over the years of marriage; in her case, it was Raed who became overweight. However, says Anastasia, "after having a bariatric surgery, adopting a healthy lifestyle, dressing nicely, their relationship improved. On the other hand, Raed confessed to not being able

to interact emotionally with his Russian wife even after seven years of marriage:

> "I can't find any sexual emotions during our intercourse, which makes me bored and indifferent in the process, and I think that is a result of unbridgeable **differences in race cultures.**"

Joan admitted having some difficulties but could not point at "anything special." Sacha became occupationally independent, fully integrated (as a public servant), and defined her marriage as "happy" and "successful":

> "I integrated very quickly into work after learning Hebrew in the studio, and I had a private Arabic teacher. It was a smart step, and my husband was very supportive and pushed me to pursue a career. I have a career and self-realization at work; I went on to study and did my master's degree in Israel. I am a Ministry of Education worker and an organized civil servant with all rights, and it gave me security, space, financial independence, and a separate personality. Together and alone. I'm not dependent on my husband."

Lara was sometimes sad, *"because I wanted more children, but it may be because of the age difference, I don't know."* Amir defined his marital life as challenging but satisfying:

> "I am aware that our relationship is more successful or slightly different than most couples who have gone through at least the same, but it is also proof that such a relationship can succeed in some circumstances." (Amir).

Amir further unfolds his opinion on the determinants of the quality of intermarriage:

> "This experiment of living together should be in the country and not in Russia to reflect the potential for shared life and the chances of the couple's success. This in itself can reduce the number of mixed marriages but perhaps double the number of successful marriages and reduce the number of divorces in marriage."

Amir especially pointed out that the state of marriage should be appraised from a subjective viewpoint rather than attributed to national, ethnic, and cultural factors as potential barriers.

> “This experiment of living together should be in the country and not in Russia to reflect the potential for shared life and the chances of the couple's success. This in itself can reduce the number of mixed marriages but perhaps double the number of successful marriages and reduce the number of divorces in marriage.”(Amir).

Unlike them, **Raed** described his marital life as “good” despite

> “different opinions and life views that affect our relationships and lead quite a bit to arguments and accusations. On the other hand, my wife is very dedicated to me, and the children are excellent, and they are not suspicious housekeepers.”

Rakeek also claimed that his marriage was relatively more successful than other mixed marriages. Saleem said that their relationship recently improved after his wife had stopped working outside. Mike was very satisfied with the quality of his marital life: ‘I am satisfied, we have a double great family, I am pleased one *hundred percent, we have a real intimacy.’*

5. Discussion

The discussion presented hereafter unfolds the main themes that emerged while analyzing the findings, recapitulates them in accord with the theoretical and empirical literature on intermarriage, and comes up with a number of interpretations. The recapitulation of the findings is presented in the first subsection as follows: 1) **Making a decision** – from overcoming resistance to coping with consequences; 2) **Coping with culture shock, the dissonance between expectations and financial ordeals**; 3) **Gender aspects of acculturation – "one is not born a wife, one is made a wife**," 4) **Stereotypes vs integration – "Oh those Russian,"** and finally 5) **The children of intermarriages – fostering biculturalism and mixed identities.**

The second subsection represents major conclusions drawn from the findings: 1) **acculturation styles (either by adopting integration via biculturation, or separation;** 2) **the degree of adaptiveness of women and flexibility of men;** 3) **suggest avenues for future research and** 4) **address possible limitations of the research**.

5.1. The findings – summary and interpretation

This study ventured an in-depth qualitative exploration of the intermarriages between the Israeli Arab Muslims and post-Soviet Slavic Christians residing in Israel. The first group are natives, but their relationships with the Jewish hegemonic majority have been ambivalent and complex due to the permanent conflict. In contrast, the second group consists of non-Jewish or mixed Jewish-Christian immigrants from FSU.

The objectives of the study were to examine the processes of negotiating identities in the context of ethnicities and cultures, quite opposed to each other; to identify the acculturation styles adopted by the spouses and

the strategies whereby inter-married couples negotiate the issues of cultural clashes, religious discords, and differing opinions on children's education; to analyze sustaining intermarriages between two groups with different statuses (natives vs immigrants), both problematic, using the conceptual framework of diversity, bi-culturalism, and hybridization of identity. To fulfill those objectives, the study examined the processes of intermarriage, from deciding to intermarry, managing reactions and resistance of the respective families, the dynamics of coping with the consequences at the beginning of the relationship before and after arriving in Israel and throughout the years, negotiating differences and managing conflicts inside and outside the family, figuring cultural discrepancies, religious issues, and tensions related to children's upbringing, and eventually, the degree of marital satisfaction and stability.

The qualitative thematic analysis of the findings, extracted from the in-depth interviews, revealed several prominent themes. First, I identified two main determinants of quality and stability of mixed marriage: 1) distancing from in-laws and extended family, preferably to the more developed area, and 2) women's adaptive ability. Second, the sense of despair of being not wanted and not belonging: the women expressed pervasive feelings of loneliness, estrangement, and nostalgia, while men expressed bitterness and frustration

5.2. Making a decision – from overcoming resistance to coping with the consequences

Welcoming and acceptance by social circles – family, friends, colleagues, and the community have an essential impact on the retention of autonomy and free choice to decide which aspects to exclude from or include in the daily life of the couple (Abu-Rayya, 2007). Thus, the future of the marriage depends to a large extent on the initial reaction of the respective families of the mixed partners, i.e., whether the union will be rejected or accepted, which plays a significant role in determining the quality and stability of intermarriage.

All the respondents indicated that their families did not welcome their children's choice in the beginning: the initial reactions of both families to intermarriages between their children varied from hostility to bewilderment,

which eventually became accepting or, at least, tolerating, as relationships themselves are not fixed and change over time. In some couples, the original objection to the marriage by the parents of both spouses persisted and continued to be a source of conflicts (e.g., **Joan and Sacha**). The findings are very much in accord with Therrien's description of relationship dynamics between mixed couples and their families in Morocco, as quoted in Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017.

Indeed, the research literature has consistently shown that mixed couples invariably arouse a certain degree of disapproval – they are viewed as "different" and transgressive. They may evoke diverse reactions, from curiosity to rejection and even threats of physical violence. Transnational marriages constitute a threat to the social order since they challenge collective identities and the hegemonic endogamous social norms, thereby creating new spaces that undermine social hierarchies (Fogiel-Bejaoui, 2017). Moreover, mixed families are capable of forging new communal boundaries and establishing attitudes and behaviors that have not been previously acceptable by their family members (Fogiel-Bejaoui, 2019). Furthermore, mixed marriages put the collective survival in jeopardy in terms of culture and demographics; in this context, women are viewed and treated as fundamental to ensure the reproductive growth of the collective (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McDoom, 2016; Mac Ginty, 2017).

The findings revealed that the prevalent motivation for choosing husbands by women was *socioeconomic*, as women sought to leave and sometimes even to flee FSU; therefore, they were motivated by the economic and social benefits of mixed marriage with a native, a determinant of a spouse selection (Furtado & Trejo, 2013).

In accordance with the interracial model by Foeman & Nance (1999; 2002), the couples in my research also learned to adopt and employ strategies that helped them deal with a society that does not readily accept transnational relationships. Some couples used proactive strategies, while others employed reactive ones. Truly, the coping stage proved itself critical for the marriage's existence; this stage determined whether a couple would survive and later thrive, suffer a marital discord, or even decide to terminate their marriage. Those couples who managed to maintain an equilibrium between their ethnic, cultural, and social identities strengthened their bonds naturally by handling challenges from society together. Others, who were

not willing to compromise or adjust, failed during this stage, which resulted in poor marriage quality, profound disappointment, bitterness, and resentment, and, in some cases, brought the couple very close to divorce.

5.3. Coping with culture shock, the dissonance between expectations and financial ordeals

Upon their arrival to Israel, many women felt deeply traumatized by what they consistently addressed in their interviews as "**culture shock**." **Culture shock** was a *prominent theme* that emerged from the interviews. The culture shock resulted from the acute discrepancy between the mentalities – the habitual world of meanings, actions, and behaviors of the post-Soviet women was confronted with the Levantine mindset and appearance, unfamiliar diversity, and total communicative alienation because of the language barrier. Furthermore, there was a clash between what they understood and performed as women's social position in their native country and what they saw in Israel. Culture shock is expressed in three major domains: 1) language and communication, 2) socio-economic dissonance, and 3) radical differences between customs and habits, including the roles and expectations of women.

The **dissonance** between the expectations about the imagined life in Israel and the harsh reality has been one of the prominent themes that emerged during the research (e.g., **Saleem**, who referred to the economic situation in Israel in the nineties of the last century, as well as to the frustrations it caused to his marriage, including raising their young daughter). One of the major causes of the frustrating dissonance that hindered the integration was the professional fiasco experienced by the immigrant wives, referred to as a "traumatic experience."

As a result of the traumatic experience, quite a few wives grew introverted, withdrawn, and extremely shy, which further prevented them from attempting to adjust themselves. The husbands were bitter about their wives' difficulty in accepting and adopting local customs, habits, and ways of living; they mostly attributed it to cultural resistance and differences, while it could have been a consequence of cultural shock and professional failures as well. Even if the wife did participate in social events, thereby making the dynamics between the couple and their wider social circle more

positive, that did not guarantee her satisfaction with family life, as her husband felt her dislike of the Arab society and environment.

The experience of loneliness, alienation, and nostalgia was a pervasive feeling that galvanized all the women's narratives. Quite a few of them complained about isolation and feeling alienated from the community; they had no social life, friends, or entertainment and led a lonely life. For instance, Elaina described her home as a "hotel" and her everyday routine as monotonous and boring, conveying a sense of homelessness and homesickness at the same time.

The findings are consistent with what Bhugra argued (2004a): the well-being of immigrants depends on the following variables: the length of time of the relocation, the similarity or difference between the culture of origin and the culture of settlement, language, social support systems, acceptance by the culture of "majority," employment, and housing solutions. The Slavic women felt isolated from their culture and unaccepted by the culture of the "majority"; they lacked social support, necessary language skills, and employment. This resulted in the consequence sense of rejection, alienation, and poor self-esteem. Moreover, culture shock, the sense of loss and grief, a disparity between expectations, reality, and achievement, and lack of acceptance (Bhugra, 2004a) contributed to the mental distress, identified by the husbands as unhappiness, lack of satisfaction with marital life, and refusal to do anything about it. The post-Soviet wives, who did not manage to fulfill their expectations and failed professionally, felt deeply frustrated, unsafe, and lacked self-confidence. On the other hand, those women who succeeded in their careers expressed a much greater sense of integration and satisfaction. Those who succeeded in their careers were explicitly proud of their achievements and life quality, as compared to those women who did not manage to overcome the language barrier.

The findings support both Bhugra's argument on the variables that are likely to cause distress and Lijtmaer's suggestion to view the experience of immigration precisely as having a potential to build character and resilience and her claim that immigrants are "forced" to become more respectful, tolerant, and flexible (Lijtmaer, 2022:415). Indeed, those couples who remained resilient to the obstacles and hardships, as well as employed communication strategies of mutual agreements and negotiations, were definitely more satisfied with the quality of their marriage. For instance,

Andria was quite independent in her adaptation process and had no complaints: "*He just threw me into the water, and so I learned to swim*." Her statement corroborates Lijtmaer's and Pacheco's argument for replacing the notion of "**culture shock**' with the idea of "**culture learning**" (Lijtmaer, 2022). Pacheco, too, suggested an epistemological transition from the culture shock approach to the culture learning approach (Pacheco, 2020).

5.4. "One is not born a wife; one is made a wife"

The narratives extracted from the interviews demonstrated that the adaptation to a new marital life was expected from and invariably done by women: indeed, as Collet justly claimed (2017), negotiating the social order in intermarriage is also a question of gender. The findings corroborated Fogiel-Bijaoui's claim that strategies and negotiations are embedded in the inequality of status of the two partners (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). They also support Collet's argument that regardless of her status, *it is the woman who adjusts herself by adapting to the man's culture, and it is not important whether he belongs to a majority or a minority in mainstream society* (Collet, 2015).

Inequality is a given point of departure in the acculturation process since cultures and ethnicities that come in contact during intermarriage rarely have the same level of social prestige; following this inequality, parents are found in an ongoing process of making choices and decisions: the place of living, the division of roles and responsibilities, the language(s) to be spoken at home, the religious affiliation, the number of children and their names, the cultural transmission to those children, the relations with the in-laws, extended families and friends, and even the furniture style at home and culinary/musical preferences (Caballero, Edwards & Puthussery, 2008). The findings indicate that inequality, and even the sense of inferiority, indeed, constituted a given point of departure in the acculturation process the Slavic Christian wives had been undergoing in Israel. When **Lara** claimed that her transition and adaptation in Israel were quite comfortable, it was because she "*did not argue back.*" The fact that all the wives were dependent on the husband's salary also suggests power struggles for resources within the family, according to Lindsey's conclusions (Lindsey, 2010).

However, not all wives passively accepted the need to adjust themselves. Quite a few of them actively expressed their unwillingness to

amend their "way of being." They attempted to resist renouncing their cultural identity in favor of adaptation, as their husbands required, which resulted in multiple tensions with their environment and conflicts within the families and subsequently in poor quality of marital life. All the immigrant wives, even those of them who had some occupational autonomy, underlined their eventual **dependence** on the husband's professional success and salary. The husband's successful career constituted a factor enabling the couple to achieve a degree of independence from the husband's family, which was described as **beneficial** for most marriages. As will be discussed later in more detail, moving away from the in-laws constituted an important stage and condition of marital success.

In terms of three types of ideology in marital roles, described by Hochschild & Machung (2012), 1) traditional, 2) egalitarian, and 3) transitional, the women interviewed were mostly adherent to the traditional ideology and identified themselves mainly as wives and mothers, preferring to have less power than their husband. There was a correlation with the husbands' self-identification as "traditional." Some women, however, were more "transitional" in their self-identification and represented a certain blending of traditional and egalitarian roles, trying both to care for the home and help their husbands earn money. None of the wives could be described as egalitarian in her views on her role, yet, similarly to Hochschild & Machung's respondents, there was a certain discrepancy between what the wives said about their roles and the way they felt about them. Thus, there was a certain common denominator between the way husbands and wives see their role in the family. Another aspect related to the family structure and division of roles was the centrality of motherhood, a finding that other researchers have also addressed (Al-Yousuf, 2006; Crippen & Brew, 2007): as mothers are entirely responsible for the upbringing and educating children, their cultural and, to a certain extent, social impact is more significant.

Still, the issue of power relations and seeking power balance in the relationships was also quite prominent. Some husbands complained about their wives' refusal to accept the husbands observing the Islamic rituals and prohibitions, which caused much frustration and bitterness. It is quite plausible that the wives' resistance was an expression of their desire to reach a power balance and regain some control in their marital union rather than motivated by religious differences; both partners did not have a strong

religious affiliation, as they had grown up and received their academic and professional formation under the aegis of the Communist secularization and internationalization. Indeed, we learn from the findings that other couples managed to reach an agreement on religious issues through dialogue and mutual compromise, having found a status quo that satisfied both parties based on the respect for the in-laws on the part of the wives.

In our case study, tensions between the spouses can be attributed to the power struggle often expressed by the introverted wife's passive-aggressive behavior rather than true religious matters. Indeed, all husbands drank alcohol and celebrated Christmas at home.

5.5. "Oh, those Russians..." – stereotypes, integration and marital quality

Quite a few respondents addressed negative prejudices concerning "Russian women" and their character and nature. The prejudices rudely generalized all the women from the post-Soviet space, regardless of their real ethnic belonging (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, or Moldovan were "all the same"). Some husbands unquestioningly adopted the stereotypes (according to Malik, '*think she wants to get it all on a gold platter*,' without motivation to accept help to set up her own business. Assumption of the economic privilege of Israel as compared to their home country, and Malik resented having to bear the full burden of meeting these standards). As Malik resentfully saw it, his wife does not work because she '*became lazy after pregnancy; I understand that according to her mentality, the man needs to support her and provide everything. She does not feel the need to work or share the living expenses of the family*. Malik compared this behavior to the past, before they got married, when '*she was considerate, loving and indulgent and had no material requirements*.' Romance is definitely easier than reality!

Husbands being resentful of their wives not fulfilling their financial role was rare. **Malik**'s resentment might have to do more with the quality of his marriage [i.e., if they were happy, he might be happy to pay for everything?! Equally, if his wife was happy, might she be more willing to go to work?]. However, though **Malik'**s wife was perceived as lazy in terms of being materialistic, her husband praised her understanding of differences in culture and the influence of Muslim religion and tradition. Her husband

described him as 'very considerate of her speech, behavior, traditional dress, and codes of ethics, and he tries to adapt to the environment as much as possible. '

Other husbands seemingly disagreed with the stigma, yet they insisted on juxtaposing two cultures and attributed marital difficulties to the "Russian character": although **Raed** referred to Russians in general as having '*good traits,*' with '*good*' meaning devotion to family as a priority, he still complained about such distinctly "Russian" character traits of his wife, as being stubborn and introverted, which added to challenges in their marital life. While Slavic wives saw the discourse rules of Arabic culture as hypocrisy, their husbands saw their straightforwardness as what they considered a negative trait of the Russian character, i.e., completely lacking diplomacy, politeness, and manners. Thus, mutual misunderstanding led to tensions and discords between the spouses, attributed to their respective cultures.

The women's stubborn desire to speak their minds was not among the traits valued by the husbands interviewed. For instance, **Amir** felt that his wife caused friction between parents and teachers at their children's school by openly disagreeing with the teachers. **Rafeek** noted that his wife did not abide by the Arab culture of discretion and compliments, which his wife considers hypocrisy, and keeps clear boundaries in terms of her privacy. However, other husbands did not mind those traits of their wives as potentially originating in homesickness or difficulties in integration, though **Rafeek** did state that his wife's behavior '*is no doubt linked to the culture of the Soviet Union.*' A particular difficulty consisted of the need to connect to the rural atmosphere, pace, and customs of Arab culture for all the women. **Firas** pointed out that his wife still finds it difficult to connect to the rural atmosphere, pace, and customs of Arab culture: "*Almost nothing has changed since she arrived in Israel*." That implied that he was more dissatisfied with the quality of his marriage than with the "Russian" character of his wife.

Obviously, **Amir's wife** won the approval of her husband for having fully assimilated by renouncing the heritage culture. It is also noticeable that husbands were more likely to address the stereotype of "Russian women" when their wives were poorly integrated into society, and the quality of the marriage was low. We may suggest that the spouses tended to attribute the low quality of marriage to the national characteristics and unbridgeable

cultural differences. In contrast, the successful marriage was explained by the individual qualities of the spouses rather than by their belonging to Russian (Soviet) culture.

The findings support a significant ramification in the intermarriage research, which has shown that mixed marriages per se do not signify or eliminate ethnocultural prejudices and stereotypes but rather reflect and perpetuate the pre-established discursive imperatives and prejudices, informed by colonial ethnocentrism (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015).

In light of the above, the findings suggest that the socioeconomic background of the husband and his family may significantly affect the consequences of the marriage. Next, the location of the couple's settlement also had a great impact on the outcomes of the marriage; it appears that the majority of the couples began their marriage life living either with or in close proximity to the husband's family, but over the years improved economically and had their own home in more urban areas and more distant from the husband's family. It can also be concluded that the more successful the couple is in their marital life, the less likely the husband is to attribute the success of the marriage to cultural characteristics. In contrast, those whose marriage was more successful spoke about personal qualities rather than ethnic features.

5.6. The children of intermarriages – fostering biculturalism, hybridity, and mixed identities

The findings indicated that children's education was quite successful, by and large, and usually, both parents were satisfied with the "outcomes." They expressed pride in their children's multilingual abilities, their openness to new spaces, and their ability to adopt multiple identities with ease. The consequences of intermarriage seem more positive for children belonging to higher-status families (Kalmijn, 2015). It may be suggested, in this context, that the participants were indeed of a respectable social status and position; hence, the children enjoyed the positive effects of intermarriage, especially in the social and economic aspects of their integration. According to the interviewees, their kids were very successful; many of them spoke more than two languages, were socially active, and were involved in community life. Moreover, the findings show that intermarriage produced children with a

multicultural heritage – they were able to interact across various groups and to navigate between different identities and environments; in addition, they adopted more flexible and fluid cultural identities and tended to choose partners for marriage from the majority group (Brunsma, 2005; Kalmijn, 2015: Lichter & Qian, 2018; Tomás, 2020). We may argue that the children of our mixed families developed mixed and multiple identities (Song, 2015).

Since we relied on parents' reports only, we do not know how the children of those mixed couples were identified by their environment and whether there was a certain "identity mismatch" between how they identified themselves and how the environment viewed them (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2015; Alba & Foner, 2015). However, all the parents interviewed emphasized that they had given their children a "deferred" choice, in Barbara's terms, as far as religious affiliation is concerned, as well as a free choice regarding the choice of a romantic partner. Thus, the question of agency was quite pronounced, as the children could, in fact, determine their own identity, religion, and marital choices.

Even though, as members of a deeply divided society, living in a society with a patrilineal system, those children mostly inherited their group identity and status from their father (Hilker, 2012), in our case, unlike in the classic patriarchic society and despite the patrilineal system, the mother figure was much more relevant and significant. The post-Soviet wives had on their shoulders the entire responsibility for their upbringing and education, and they tended to opt for Soviet education. Though all wives preferred Russian schools to Arabic, they did so for fear of gender discrimination rather than out of resistance to learning Arabic culture. Thus, it may be concluded that the mothers contributed quite a lot to enriching the identities and cultural resources.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the children were more "advanced" and "advantaged" than their parents: as Elaina put it, "*My daughter grew into a different reality*." It is also evident that some of the ethnic, cultural, and religious prejudices became eroded. The children of mixed couples were more ready to be in a relationship with individuals from "mixed/multiple ethnic groups" (Arnett, 2014). Thus, **Saleem**'s son brought home a Romanian girlfriend, even though his mother made it clear that intermarriage is full of challenges and, therefore, undesirable. However, **Joan** claims he would not oppose any decision by his daughter regarding the

mixed marriage of whatever kind. Other parents referred to the enriching potential of biculturalism, which operates by the mere presence of father and mother, each of whom belongs to a different culture; children, in this case, clearly benefit from a twofold exposure to languages, religions, countries (Sadiya, 2018). Malik made a remarkable observation, quite in the vein of biculturalism as enrichment: '*The combination of our different and similar language cultures adds to life and enriches it.*'

In light of these findings, it is clear that we need to explore the transmission processes of mixed couples' twofold cultural references to their children further to identify and describe the elements that make up the new cultural zone, informed by a synthesis of parental content.

5.7. "If I were you..."

Remembering their arduous experiences, the overwhelming majority of the participants would not recommend a mixed marriage. The husbands who explicitly objected to transnational marriages were quite specific, referring to marriages with women from FSU – such marriages, in their view, were doomed to failure since those women are both incapable and unwilling to adapt to a husband's culture. Most husbands were pessimistic, suggesting that the profound differences in mentality, language, values, and practices between the spouses were too complex to be overcome; such a relationship required too many concessions and compromises from both sides, and more often than not, the spouses turned out to be strangers to each other throughout the years. In their turn, the women complained about a constant strain and conveyed a feeling of disillusionment and discouragement. From the Slavic wives' perspective, the difficulty in integrating lies in the problem of balancing power within both the marriage and wider community; for many women, that means the unwillingness to accept the cultural fact in Arab society that women "*will always be number two never number one*" (**Olga**). Even conflicts around eating or not eating pork at home seem to articulate this strive for balancing power between husband and wife from the wife's side.

However, some women expressed cautious optimism. **Marina,** for instance**,** even recommended a mixed marriage, such as hers, but suggested that managing expectations and trying out the relationships were essential conditions for success; Sacha, who was also optimistic about the future of

mixed marriages, brought an example of her balanced relationship with her husband and emphasized the importance of balancing and compromising in maintaining a mixed transcultural marriage.

5.8. Major conclusions

5.8.1. Acculturation styles

In terms of Collet's model of three main patterns of strategies adopted by mixed couples, the respondents can be situated on the continuum between the extreme of fully adopting the dominant culture while minimizing the attributes and practices of her original culture and the quest for balance in relationships through egalitarian and mutual exchanges, thereby constructing new spaces situated beyond the fixed venues (Collet, 2015). The extreme of the majority partner slipping into the culture of the minority spouse was not present among the respondents; however, being able to integrate while retaining her own culture and language (Sacha) requires a significant degree of autonomy and independence.

In terms of acculturation styles, the findings indicate that the predominant acculturation styles of the wives were either **integration by biculturalism** or **separation**. Prominently, none of the women felt fully assimilated, nor did they renounce completely their native culture. The findings support Abu-Rayya's conclusion (2007), which found that those women who had adopted a separation style were not particularly happy; those who rejected their husband's culture also reported a low level of mental and emotional well-being. In contrast, those wives who acculturated by integrating their own heritage culture and creating a bicultural space were most satisfied: in Abu-Rayya's study, they reported the highest levels of self-esteem, positive affect, and a high degree of marital satisfaction and intimacy.

5.8.2. Determinants of consequences – success

The consequences of the mixed marriages between Arab Christian men and Slavic women living in Israel are embedded within the context of a deeply

divided society; previous research has shown that, as a result of living in such a society, spouses from mixed origins have much less choice in their negotiations, choices, and strategies (Conrad, 2014; Hilker, 2012). Therefore, if mixed couples wish to avoid conjugal conflicts and create their own private space, they must navigate very carefully among social practices and everyday acts and decisions (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). The analysis of the participants' narratives (interviews) in my case study revealed the following determinants of the quality and stability of transnational marriages of my unique research population: 1) the degree of **separation and distancing** from the husband's family and, preferably, the village (**autonomy**) and 2) the degree of adaptiveness of a wife and the degree of a husband's ability to compromise (**power balancing**):

5.8.2.1. Autonomy – the degree of separation and distancing from the husband's family and place of living

Separating from the husband's nuclear and extended family constituted a sine qua non to maintain the marriage and make it thrive. In a sense, the ability of the husband to "cut an umbilical cord" signified his ability to create a new (bi) cultural family space on his own. Geographical distancing – moving to another region of Israel (preferably to the North), where more professional opportunities exist – was found even more rewarding than simply moving to live in a separate home in the same village. In other words, the decision to move to live on their own and the decision to leave the village were found essential in assuring marital success, satisfaction, and intimacy. Moving from the village to a more advantaged location in the North improved the quality of life even more than the distance from the "in-laws."

On the other hand, when the husband preferred living in the village in proximity to his family, the wife felt her needs and preferences being ignored and hence became frustrated and even more alienated. Thus, we have seen that when **Katia**'s resistance to living closer to her husband's family produces no result, she feels frustrated and unhappy and has "*no choice but to agree with his will*" as her agency is subdued to her husband's will, she finds it more difficult to integrate, which only deepens her alienation. The need for separation/distancing from the in-laws echoes the need of many wives for more independence. In this case, when the wives and the husbands were

united in their craving for independence and autonomy, as well as made decisions together, it positively affected their marital life.

To conclude, the cooperation between the spouses who had a common craving for autonomy and independence in a wider sense positively affected their marital life.

5.8.2.2. Power balancing - the degree of adaptiveness and the will to compromise

The ability to adapt and the readiness to compromise are not really ethnic or cultural variables but rather belong to the individual qualities of the partners, in particular, to their capacity and willingness to communicate, negotiate, and cope with emerging issues by mutual compromise and to reach a balanced solution. The wife's adaptiveness turned out to be crucial for marital success and wider integration. When there was an agreement on what was expected from each spouse in terms of their role as a married individual, there was more satisfaction and a reported sense of harmony. Furthermore, the husbands evaluated the wife's ability to dialogue with them about their work and lives as a key to success in their marriages.

Still, the wife's "consented obedience" was not enough to make the relationship entirely satisfying and rewarding. The fair balance in marital life was maintained only when the husbands, too, could adapt to their wives' need for privacy and autonomy, to the extent of changing the habits in their home, such as preventing guests from visiting without prior notice.

The conclusions echo the notion of the coping stage in the model of the interracial relationship (Foeman & Nance, 1999): according to the model, the coping stage is crucial, as it determines whether a mixed couple will separate, survive, or thrive. It is during this stage when the couple develops their definitions of intermarriage, thereby strengthening their bonds; usually, the transnational couple does so by adaptively handling challenges faced by the outside society (Foeman & Nance, 1999:552).

To conclude, acting jointly for the benefit of the family as a *separate* unit requires both the **adaptive abilities of the wife, as well as the husband's readiness for "transgression" and propensity for taking action independently of his native community**.

To sum up, the two determinants – **autonomy (separation and distancing)** and **power balancing (ability to adapt and negotiate)** – are interdependent and contingent upon each other. In other words, it is impossible to maintain a successful and satisfying marital life if communication is lacking or when separation from the "nest" from the husband's side does not occur.

5.8.2.3. East is East, and West is West – figuring cultural fissures

Even those couples who reported harmony, love, and satisfaction saw themselves as inherently and inevitably different from each other due to different cultural heritages. The cultural disparities severely curbed communication and harmed understanding between the spouses. As Ali, who "lives and breathes Russian culture," put it, his wife will always remain a foreigner and a stranger to him.

> **"We are very different. There is a great cultural difference even though I quite like and breathe Russian culture. She will never be able to understand Arabic and Muslim culture in particular'.**

Ali's words are quite emblematic: they imply an embedded cultural distance that cannot be bridged even by intermarriage; they also imply the deep-seated inequality of the spouses' positions: while Ali has a full dominion of Russian language and culture, his wife is not capable of mastering and understanding his own culture, which causes Ali a bitter sense of eventual loneliness.

5.8.2.4. Between the Soviet Union and Palestine –double mourning: the theme unspoken

Regardless of their degree of integration and marital satisfaction, all the wives felt alienated in some way or another. At the same time, the husbands pointed out that they were, in fact, married to an eventual stranger. While the women talked a lot about their motherland and homesickness, their husbands did not explicitly address their homesickness. Yet, as I argue, their mourning for Palestine was *present in its absence*. I furthermore argue that this common mourning constituted an *unsaid bond* between the spouses, which glued them together despite all challenges.

Although the women needed their yearly travel home, in their words, to recharge their resources by reconnecting with their families and familiar environment, the possibility of traveling home was a mitigating factor in their overall experience of otherness and being strangers in their husband's land. However, the Soviet Union, where they grew up, did not exist any longer, nor did the familiar environment, which was characteristic of that epoch. The dramatic changes that occurred after the dismantling of the Soviet Union resulted in a complete change of the landscape. With each trip back to FSU, the environment became less and less familiar, and their authentic place of origin was, in essence, lost forever. Olga painfully describes this loss as

> "a weird feeling. Now, when my parents passed away, I traveled to Ukraine and felt a stranger there. Here, too, I still feel alien; it's not an easy feeling. Neither here nor there, half-divided, I don't think I feel belonging to any state or place; I have only memories of that belonging.

Their engagement in the adaptive acculturation process did not leave them enough space to mourn their past and accept that their homeland - the phantom Soviet Union - became unrecognizable, different, and unfamiliar.

In their turn, Palestinians could not mourn, as the essential part of the mourning process is remembering and coming to terms with the irreversible past; however, according to Lacey, whenever past events are recalled, the traumatic memory of humiliation is re-activated and re-lived (Lacey, 2011); hence, one avoids mourning as it involves remembering. As Said put it, even though detachment or exile can be converted into an empowering experience, its pain can never be defeated:

> "those different arrangements of living and eccentric angles of vision that it can sometimes afford [...] are far from "alleviating every last anxiety or feeling of bitter solitude" (Said, 1993: 122).

Palestinian memoirists, who had not themselves suffered a direct assault of expulsion by Israeli forces, were still emotionally afflicted by the Palestinian experiences of war, trauma, and dispossession after 1948. What they experienced was the ultimate loss of homeland, the experience described by Edward Said in *The Politics of Dispossession* as "the place of our common origin" (1995: 110). Said expressed his self-identification with the

collective experience, depicting his rupture from his loci of origins and his multiple displacements; his emotional link to the collective Palestinian tragedy was both geographical and positional (Qabaha, 2022). For Said, exile epitomizes an alienation from home, suffering, and loss; it signifies rupture and absence rather than attachment to multiple places. Said describes his experience of exile as "*the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home*" (Said, 2001: 173).

Moreover, Palestinian scholars and intellectuals are not enthusiastic about the advantages of being multicultural; rather, they see cultural, social, and geographic diversity through the lens of loss and double estrangement; they do not speak of connecting and enrichment but rather in terms of being torn between countries, cultures, and languages (Qabaha, 2018: 55). For them, the presence of multiple identities implies the ultimate detachment from the original birthplace, the homeland, with no possibility to return. As mentioned earlier, 33% of Israeli Arabs report *no clear self-identification*, with 31 percent and 30 percent viewing themselves as Palestinian, respectively, and only 7 percent of them identifying themselves as both Israeli and Palestinian (Telhami, 2010). These patterns of blurred self-identification, along with hybrid self-definition, disclose what I would define as a sense of perennial homelessness and not belonging.

One can sense behind the narratives that the Arab Muslim respondents of our study do not feel entirely "at home" and constantly seek a "place" to settle down and construct a private familial space – distant from the village and the extended family. As a Christian Arab myself, I could "hear" that, despite financial success and impressive property, Arab Muslim husbands continue to experience a deeply ingrained feeling of suspendedness and dispossession.

Most husbands met their wives-to-be when far away from the Middle East while studying in foreign universities, "*in exile*," as it were, hoping to return home one day with a prestigious diploma. They are fully proficient in Russian, and often in other European languages, and capable of communicating in accord with the Soviet cultural identity and even of adopting the Soviet (Russian) habits and traditions to some extent. Meeting their future wives in the space of "nowhere," in terms of Palestinian scholars, was inspired by being detached from themselves and rootlessness. Women, on the other hand, secularized and internationalized by the fallen Soviet

regime, also found themselves in the space of “nowhere” and uncertainty, culturally, socially, and financially.

In this context, the “Russian” décor and taste of the mixed homes represent an attempt to freeze the past to the present and to hold on to something that does not exist any longer. I want to suggest that the cultural heritage of the post-Soviet wives is quite temporary and looks more like an attempt to construct a “time machine” to restore and preserve the feeling of “home.” Most probably, because of the intense secularization they had undergone in FSU, they also found it difficult to identify with the importance of observing religious rituals and practices, nor did they manage to be sensitive enough to the ethnic uniqueness

5.9. Avenues for future research

Looking into the future, one can predict with much confidence that various forms of intermarriages and transnational partnering will continue to increase; moreover, it is evident that future social networks, especially in the areas particularly marked by diversity, will be increasingly characterized by multiple and often overlapping forms of *mixedness*, thereby undermining the dichotomy of “mixed” versus “mono-ethnic” or “mono-cultural.”

In this context, an important avenue for further research could be a more specific form of transnational marriage, called *cross-border marriage*, an additional by-product of globalization and transnationalism, defined as a marital union between a citizen of a particular country and a foreigner that has constituted an excuse for one of the partners’ relocation (migration) from their country of origin (Chiu & Choi, 2020; Deniz & Ozgür, 2021; Said & Kaka, 2022). It has been argued that such a marriage enhances connections between people, producing new family relations that are intercultural and interethnic (Statham, 2020), in particular, being an expression of a woman’s quest for personal happiness (Chang, 2016). However, cross-border marriage also replicates a power imbalance and inequality between rich and poor countries, thereby paralleling global migration flows; as a result, it has been consistently shown that the migration experience reduces the individual’s agency and harms their capacity to act independently (Said & Kaka, 2022). The cross-border marriages between specific and unique groups, such as the

population of the present research, have been understudied and, therefore, deserve further exploration.

An additional important avenue for further research on transnational marriage is to continue exploring its consequences for the progeny and the way the children of mixed couples construct their identities in the context of deeply divided societies based on the determinants of "deferred choices," agency, and autonomy. Addressing the next generations of intermarriages forces us to reconsider the meaning of intermarriage by exploring the number of generations we should go back until "mixedness" becomes insignificant, either because of suspending the minority heritage or the large amount of ethnic minority ancestries in family trees. Future research will be able to distinguish between forms of mixing that result in hybridized strata of both difference and communality.

A methodological recommendation for examining the dynamics and consequences of intermarriages could be using a "Paired in-depth interview," a type of interview that has received relatively little attention so far but still has a lot of potential; those interviews unfold as the participants interact with each other in the process (Houssart & Evens, 2011). Such an instrument can advance a gender-based analysis, informed by marked differences in masculine and feminine constructions of the experience: the husbands' narratives were more coherent and organized, focusing on the chronological sequence, while the wives were mostly interested in describing various periods in and aspects of their life, their sensations, with little attention to chronology. In addition, while the men were precise in describing their mixed families and intended to analyze their experiences, the women were associative. They used a lot of imagery to describe their lives.

Future studies of intermarriage should also consider intersectionality, including various bases of difference that are not as salient as racial, ethnic, or religious but still constitute an important dimension of mixedness in terms of gender, status, and power. Suppose we used to assume that visible and palpable differences are fundamental in mixed families and partners. In that case, we may need to renounce this notion as rather simplistic, as a shared cultural upbringing will constitute a powerful bonding experience. (Caballero, C., Edwards, R., & Smith, D. 2008; Luke and Luke 1994).

5.10. The research limitations

I suggest that the major limitation of this research, which relies on interpretation, is foregrounded by the very limits of interpretation. The narratives of the interviewees relied on their memory and sought coherence through recalling. As psychoanalysis and, later on, the theorists of postmodernism taught us, one's memory cannot be trustworthy; rather, it is conspicuously selective and contingent upon a variety of factors and circumstances, just as nostalgia is, in essence, a distorted, and sometimes, even imaginary version of the past, pained with idealization.

Therefore, nostalgic memories are very far from representing reality; rather, they convey one's feelings about that reality. Furthermore, some thoughts and occurrences might have been omitted from the narratives, either unconsciously or deliberately, as they were either too traumatic to remember, or just forgotten, or not complimentary to the speakers. In addition, the researcher could easily over-impose her hermeneutic conclusions, which could have resulted in the danger of over-interpretation, as Umberto Eco called it in his fine work "*Interpretation and Over-Interpretation*" (Paolucci, C. 2018). Different subjectivities can produce different reactions and results; if a number of researchers had conducted the research, different interpretations would have emerged.

6. Contemplating A Swinging Pendulum: A Summary

In the contemporary world, the view of mixed and the patterns of mixing are heavily influenced by geopolitical and economic vicissitudes; those dictate the direction for migration currents, and the flows of transnational migration parallel the power imbalance between developing and developed countries, reflecting a deeply ingrained global inequality (Dindia K. & Baxter, L.A. 1987). That, in turn, affects the patterns of intermarrying and determines their motivations and consequences.

The quest of the research on exogamous (mixed, interethnic, transnational, etc.) unions resonates with other avenues of scholarly thought, informed by an epistemological shift from the colonial positivism of the "objective" empirical reality and structuralism with binary oppositions to the post-colonial constructivism, with qualitative phenomenology, social constructionism, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. Across those pathways, mixed families have been perceived on a continuum between a "panacea for social harmony and cohesion" (Rodríguez-García et al., 2016) and an encapsulation of the existing society, its "micro-laboratory" (Rodríguez-García. 2015).

The "*melting pot*" ideology that was popular at the beginning of the last century in the United States and later in Israel and the Soviet Union believed in the possibility of creating a new uniform ethnocultural subject by evaporating the unique ethnocultural, social, and religious distinction out of the melting pot. While the scholars in the United States envisioned an emergence of a "new American nation" devoid of differences and prejudices, Israeli ideologists advanced the project of creating a "new Jew" by doing away with the diasporic differences and diversity; the Soviet doctrine, in its turn, aspired to create a "new Soviet nation," precisely by encouraging

interethnic marriages between the various nations and ethnicities inhabiting the territory of the Soviet Union, and condemning ethnical uniqueness as "capitalist relics" to be eradicated. The projects turned out to be quite utopian, and the metaphor of the "melting pot" has become replaced with that of a "salad bowl" where the ingredients (ethnocultural distinctness) do not evaporate but actively participate in the "salad," i.e., "mainstream" host culture, by enriching it with new flavors and adding new colorful shades to the societal mosaic (e.g., Rodríguez-García. 2015; Lee, 2015)

In such a way, one may suggest that a mixed family marks both transgression and conformity. While it is capable of blurring the pre-established societal boundaries, it also can accentuate and strengthen them. Indeed, mixed unions across a variety of human parameters (race, culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth) embody a society whose boundaries are flexible and permeable, where no prejudices exist, and which promotes individualism and universal values. In such a society, intermarriages articulate the free will of two autonomous subjects who decide on their destiny independently of parental authority and social constraints (Kalmijn, 1998). However, it is also true that mixed couples themselves can represent **an embodiment of that very stereotype they are supposed to subvert** and thus reflect, reinforce, and perpetuate the existing societal systems of stratification, distances, and prejudices.

In terms of all said the findings of my doctoral research project clearly situate the mixed couples along the pendulum swinging between traditionalism and egalitarianism, between fully adopting the dominant culture and the bicultural integration and separation, whereby the spouses are constantly seeking to balance power and negotiate differences. In this way, mixed families can definitely construct new avenues beyond the fixed schemes (Collet, 2015) while at the same time continuing to sustain the existing societal distances and boundaries, informed and fed by prejudices and stereotypes.

7. An afterword

A wise person said that every doctoral dissertation is a personal story, paraphrased from a researcher's secret diary. That is to say, a doctoral research question is the ultimate personal question a researcher has been seeking to answer ever since she/he decided to embark upon a scholarly career. My work on this project enabled me to see what the wise person meant. While reading and re-reading the narratives of my participants' life stories, I became aware of my quest, which dominated not only my personal life but also my professional and academic affinity and action. I would describe this quest as a desire to understand "*what makes family a family*."

As I identified with every participant's experience, I observed my subjectivity at work. I understood how my reading of those stories helped me not only interpret their societal and sociological meaning but also address my questions on the same matter.

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9. Appendices

9.1. Appendix 1 – The Interview Format and Questions

The interviews conducted with wives and husbands slightly differed in terms of the questions presented, according to their relevance to either's experience: wives were asked about their rapport with the in-laws and the extended family of a husband, while husbands were asked to describe their overall experience of being married to a Soviet Slavic woman. The sequence and the formulation of the questions were modified and adapted to the narrative flow of the interviewees.

Wives:

- **Could you please describe yourself and your background? How did you meet your husband? How did you decide to marry and relocate to Israel?**
- **How did your parents react to your choice?**
- **How did his parents react to his choice? How did they welcome you?**
- **Tell me about the relationship with the extended family.**
- **Did you have any religious discords? If you did, how did you manage them?**
- **Tell me about the division of roles at home and children's education.**
- **How do you describe your relationship? What would you name as the main sources of conflicts?**
- **Tell me about your social life**
- **Could you say a few words about your children? How do you educate them?**
- **Would you recommend a mixed marriage like yours to others?**

Husbands:

- **Could you please tell me a bit about yourself? How old are you, and what is your education and profession?**
- **Could you please tell me about your wife's "profile"?**
- **Do you have common children?**
- **Where do you live now?**
- **How long have you been married?**
- **How did you meet? Could you please tell me about the circumstances of your meeting?**
- **Could you please describe the first years of your life in Israel?**
- **Could you please describe your family: the home you built, the norms of behavior, the division of responsibilities?**
- **Could you please describe the experience of being married to a woman from FSU?**
- **How would you define your relationship?**
- **Would you recommend a mixed marriage, based on your experience?**

9.2. Appendix 2: Interview with Olga, Rafeek's wife, 55

- **Tell me about yourself and your background. How did you meet your husband? How did you decide to marry and relocate to Israel?**

We met at Kyiv University, where we both studied dentistry, still at the times of the Soviet Union. We had a lot in common and shared similar interests as colleagues, friends, and partners. Then, I got pregnant with my first daughter, Sofia. Getting pregnant during academic studies was a trend at the time, as we planned to have time for careers after graduation. My parents helped with raising Sofia. Today, we have four children: twin daughters, then another daughter, and a son. Those times were challenging; the Soviet Union had just collapsed, there were times when basic food products were lacking, and the weather was so cold, snowy, and harsh. I had always wanted to marry a foreigner – it was an entry ticket abroad, to Europe. I was dreaming about exotic weather, the sun, and a lot of fruit. I still have hard memories of that time. There was no romance. I just wanted to get out of there.

We live in the village of Majd El Chrom, located in the North of the country. The house is beautiful and spacious, as you see, we have been married for 29 years now. When I married, it was not like today; in the former Soviet Union, life was different. There were no direct flights to Israel, and we had to travel via a third country, Turkey or Cyprus, so I had not been in Israel before I got married because it was not quite feasible. But when I arrived in Israel, I was shocked. I was so different from what I expected; I was in the life market, and I will never forget that moment. Today, women and girls come out more freely and travel to the guys' countries, not like me. The shock I received was tremendous. I expected to see a modern, European country, but instead…. My husband is so connected to his country, to the land, traditions, people, and relatives; it also shocked me.

I must say, despite all the hardships in the Soviet Union, my parents married out of mutual love. I remember those good days; we were dancing at the sea; there was music, art, and culture! We had a culture of food, happy drinking traditions, and joyful nightlife. In Ukraine, we would sit and eat for hours, with different drinks, music, and atmosphere. Guests were coming to visit. Suddenly, I found myself in a different culture: take an example of the stuffed vine leaves – the Arab women sit for long hours to roll and prepare them, then people eat them in five minutes, get up, and go away. Culture shock is simple.

When we arrived in Israel, he bought me a gorgeous white dress party, but the party we had had rental rates, Na closed, and the road Muslims were not doing weddings. The halls were very primitive. Another day is still a bit, but not like many years ago. That party on the street was the second shock.

- **How did your parents react to your choice and decision?**

Thank God, we got married in the Soviet Union before we came here. Of course, in the beginning, my parents strongly opposed the marriage; there were investigations, inquiries, and questions. My mother even wanted to pay money to separate us and did all sorts of tricks to divide us. There, she had all kinds of trickery to separate us; she would try all sorts of ways to leave me inventing stories to smuggle him not only from Ukraine but from the USSR at all (smiles). But all was in vain. They could not change my decision. They knew that if I wanted to marry him badly, that was it.

- **How did his parents react? How did they welcome you?**

My husband's family is so different from mine. My husband's father is married to two women; there is no contact between some brothers and sisters. They lived “as a clan” as a kibbutz, everyone together. We came to a situation where we had no choice but to live with them. This beautiful house you are sitting in now did not exist in the beginning. We had difficult times with no money to start our lives and to open a dental clinic. We had to take a loan from the bank to survive. I lived with this complicated family for 5 years; all the brothers got married during those years, and there were about 15 children altogether; each family had a home of their own but a shared yard in a challenging environment with No privacy. There was interference in private life, which was a high-rise building. Shared courtyard houses are in the driveway, where everyone sees everyone. My husband's father was married to two wives. While his father and the new second wife lived in the same building and my husband's mother-in-law was on the middle floor, his brothers were in nearby houses.

If my mother-in-law wanted to reach out to us, she had to pass by the door of her children's father, her husband's father, and his new second wife. And never going into her husband's and his second wife's apartment; of course, the bond has been severed since he got married. Before we built this beautiful home, the situation with his family had become unbearable. We moved on to rent together with the extended family, and only later did we build this beautiful house.

However, I must say that despite all those difficulties, my husband and I maintained good relationships; we were able to separate from his family. I tried to understand why they behaved this way; I tried to analyze their behavior so that I could at least accept them. But I couldn’t understand how his father could bring a second wife and make children from two women living near each other; in my opinion, it was an emotional catastrophe for those women.

Although my dad had his moods and was not perfect, there was love between him and my mother. The love I received at home was, for me, the anchor that gave me the strength and strength to continue my life in Israel. My parents were anchors for me. I would imagine my dad reaching out and holding my hand so I would go on living and surviving difficulties. And endure all the challenges.

What mattered to my father was his daughters, my sister, and me; in my husband's family, it was the other way around. That is why I never respected his parents, especially his father. I could see their tough life as an excuse—my parents had always been through many ordeals.

- **Tell me about the relationship with the extended family.**

Relationships with extended family, my husband's family, and then the rest of Muslim society. I feel like I changed a lot; I am not myself any longer, I neglected myself, and there was a period when I was severely depressed. I tried to follow the advice given by my friends, who told me how I behaved and how I looked.

- **Did you have any religious discords? If you did, how did you manage them?**

I did not, of course, convert to Islam. My husband did not insist that I convert; I am more secular than religious; we grew up in a secular communist regime; there was a prohibition to marry in the church in the Soviet Union. But I still can't listen to the shouting of the prayer in the mosque, so we usually go out on Friday before the prayer.

Once, I was in the pool in the morning. There is a pool in the village, and there is music in the background. I remember someone sitting there and telling the rescuer that on Friday, the music in the background should change in the pool area. You have to change it for prayers from the Qur'an. I heard this and went crazy. I cannot be a diplomat. I say everything straight in the face.

I just said I do not want prayer to have a mosque. God meets in a mosque here; you have no right to force God or the prayers on us. Do not you dare do this. It is not a place designed for this prayer pool! I went to my husband later, and they said I was impudent and I have no god... My husband did not relate so much; he just told me, "You can say what you want more acceptably... it is politeness... He always says I have no access. And I suppose It is all inside and not diplomatic, and all the women who came from the former USSR behave the same. "

- **Tell me about the division of roles at home and children's education.**

We divide authority; he is more in the practical part, and I'm more in theory professionally. I took the qualification exams in Israel when we arrived in Israel; it was challenging for me to review because it was in Hebrew; it was not a neat format like dentistry today. Moreover, Israel had to pass a final test again according to Israel's rules.

We are very democratic, my husband and I; we never tell our kids what to do, and we do not dictate to them; we tell them what we think and let them decide. For example, our children do not want to study Medicine. My daughter got married at a relatively early age, 25, and fell in love with a person. She asked for my opinion, and I told her to decide; I did not intervene. The husband is from a secular Muslim family; they have danced together in a dance class since the age of ten. What I had to say was the address. Been friends and in love for quite some time. That is fate, too.

My husband and I had no arguments other than about what was related to his family, and we raised the children together. My husband came out in the morning and came back in the evening when the children were small; he was helpful and especially supportive of the attack that I had to study and pass the Health Ministry exams. Not a simple time. It took me quite a while to learn Arabic and Hebrew, to examine Hess from medicine, and to adapt to the environment. It was imperative to absorb two words, one of which was not enough. I have been worried about cooking until today. I cook Russian, Ukrainian, and Arab meals every day. Very caring for this house is my sole responsibility. But about the money savings banks, institutions know nothing we consult, but he decides, and under the circumstances, we got used to it, and it goes on. I have no problem with it.

It's a weird feeling; what can I say? Now, when my parents passed away, I traveled to Ukraine and felt a stranger there. Here, too, I still feel alien; it's not an easy feeling. Neither here nor there, half-divided, I don't think I feel belonging to any state or place; I have only memories of that belonging.

I have a practice of years. Every year, I have freedom for a whole month. I go to Ukraine and Moscow alone. I do not want my husband to travel with me. For a whole month, I am without it, giving me the strength to go back and start as if we were getting married now and starting over. I like that this temporary disconnect helps me keep going.

I think kids are lovely not to have understood the problem. In connection to the challenges that we always share and talk about, we have many calls to people who know and understand the responsibility for their decision they will receive and bear the consequences as I decided and carried the outcome. They have to be aware of the expected outcome. Considering the challenges these kinds of mixed transnational sayings have, although I guess today is much easier than in the past.

- **How do you describe your relationship? What would you name as the main difficulties?**

For me, it's similar to any other relationship, with ups and downs. Of course, in the beginning, I was shocked by his closeness to his family. He loves meeting his brothers and cousins so much. I am not against him. There were days when it bothered me, but no longer. What bothers my husband is that I am honest and always say what I think; he gets angry and calls me "not diplomatic."

- **Tell me about your social life**

We have mutual friends, as well as separate friendships; my friends are mostly from FSU or other European countries, married to Israeli Arabs. They are more friendships of necessity; I don't think we would be close if we lived in Ukraine. Here, we have a common mentality and similar adjustment difficulties. We all share the same experience of being foreigners. We are also Christians, even though we don't practice religion that much. We cope with similar issues. So, it's more like a support group.

I try to avoid participating in local social events, such as funerals; however, I sometimes attend weddings. My husband is okay with that and does not expect me to make an effort. I take part in social events to the extent of my abilities, but it depends on my closeness to the invitees and my mood on that day. However, I do love to visit elderly women who remind me of my own grandmother, and I love listening to their stories.

- **Could you say a few words about your children? How do you educate them?**

My daughter studies at the University of Haifa and lives alone outside the village, returning home once a week. All weekend before that, the first comes

back; we are going to visit the RIE from a friend. May her memory be blessed. I do it willingly and emotionally from the heart. My daughter and I consider ourselves genuine and straightforward people; we do not like hypocrisy.

My mixed marriage issues did not harm the children at all. They get along brilliantly, speaking four languages, and being exposed to and familiar with different and diverse cultures. Understand the challenges of my relationship with their dad and that life is not honey. We speak Russian and Hebrew at home. I spoke Russian, and the Arabic children with Dad also learned Hebrew in school, and they worked out well.

- **Do you recommend it? .....**

No, and that's it … And in case you really want to go for it – a woman must know what awaits her; she must be aware of all the difficulties and challenges. Some men are able and willing to help women adapt to their new lives. A woman should also be aware of the situation in Israel to know what she expects; it is the most significant, as she gives up her own country. It seems to me that living together for some time in Israel can help us process our life experiences. In addition, living together gives a clearer picture of the expected future they plan together.

However, today, we are living in a different epoch. Life changes from generation to generation; the younger generation may have it easier than I did. Yes, life evolves from generation to generation, but basic things remain: mentality, education, childhood…. Sometimes, I see men who had studied with me in Ukraine but came back to Israel as if they hadn't ever left the village. The link to their childhood is firmly embedded in them.

The beginning is always hard; when I was with a baby who was crying because my husband's milk would have told me to go to my mother (I was fighting for him) and say "milk," and she would make you. I was forced to communicate in all kinds of ways and get along. It was not an indulgence that was a survival adaptation, but eventually, it was adapted. Today, I get along and even feel like I belong to certain things. However, in general, I don't feel I belong here; I have difficulty with that feeling. After so many years, I still feel like a stranger and always in the background behind my husband. That's why I don't recommend that no matter what you do, even though having Israeli citizenship may be worth it. You will always be number two, never number one.

9.3. Appendix 3 - Interview with Ali, Natalia's husband

- **Could you please tell me a bit about yourself—how old are you, and what is your education and profession?**

I specialized in cardiology, but currently, I am not practicing medicine; I own a chain of hostels for PTSD patients in the North of Israel; in addition, I studied for two years in Moscow's diplomatic academy; I founded there a business of import and export. In 1997, I returned to Israel and established the hostel chain. Today, the business has grown and expanded to founding employment centers for those patients. These centers are considered among the leading projects in Israel. 12 years ago, I was elected as a representative of a Christian Orthodox Palestinian non-profit organization engaged in social activities on the international level that is despite the fact that I am Muslim. Ten years ago, I was appointed as a Russian Consul of Honor, and some three years ago, I became a general consul; I occupy public positions, in addition to administrative related to my business.

- **What could you tell about a "profile" of your wife?**

My wife is 49 years old; she is a housewife; in fact, since we married, she has never worked outside the house. She studied medicine in Moscow for four years but had to quit her studies as a result of giving birth to our first child, who was born with CP; since then, she has never completed her studies nor studied anything else. Even though I strongly suggested that she acquire a profession and work in one of my hostels, she never did so. My wife is Muscovite; she came from a relatively fine socio-economic position; her father held a high military rank in the Soviet Army, and her mother was a medical doctor at the University where we both studied. She was raised in a very traditional, conservative, and strict way due to the military position of her father; when we met, her parents had been divorced, and she lived at her grandmother's. She has an arrogant and "elitist" character.

- **Do you have common children?**

Yes, we have two sons, aged 26 and 15.

- **Where do you live now?**

  We live in a very special private villa in Acre.

- **How long have you been married?**

  Overall, we have been married for thirty years but separated for the last four years, going through a tough divorce procedure in the family court.

- **How did you meet? Could you please describe the circumstances of your meeting?**

I received a scholarship from the Communist Party to study medicine in Moscow. I met her during my first year of studies; her mother was a staff member at the University, and there was a special track for the children of the staff, allowing them to work and study during some pre-academic year that was supposed to facilitate their admission. She was working at the Department of Physics. I liked her at first sight. I liked her long and beautiful hair; on some occasions, I told my friends that I admired very much her exquisite taste and dressing style; she would also walk in high heels. One day, I was not feeling particularly well and fainted in the middle of the campus; later, I learned that she had been there to give me first aid; when I woke up in the hospital, I learned that she had saved my life. I bought her flowers and invited her for dinner; it was on March 8th. Our first meeting… then the rules were different; she needed to get permission from her grandmother; the grandmother consented on the condition that I would bring her back home in the same evening. Then we went out to a big party, and that was how our relationship started.

We registered our marriage in the civil registrar's office in Moscow; there was a humble ceremony. My parents were not present, but they knew and, in the beginning, objected very much; they told me that I ought to have chosen a local Arab-Muslim girl. They tried to convince me of the advantages of marrying an Arab girl and of the disadvantages of marrying a woman from FSU; they repeated over and over again the Arabic proverb which you are obviously familiar with: "Min tin baladdak hut ahdaddak" – "cover your face by the ashes of your land," that is, "marry a girl from your land." My parents are Communist, open-minded, and secular, although my mother made a pilgrimage to Mecca a few years ago; my friends and my parents are

mostly Christians; my grandfather had contributed a lot to the Russian Orthodox Church. However, it was not possible to change my mind, as I was stubborn and tenacious (I still am); my parents knew that once I made a decision, I would never give up, so eventually, they accepted our marriage. However, they insisted that we marry according to the shari'a law, and my wife would not mind that; yet, I was not convinced enough to do so.

In the beginning, we lived in Moscow, but following the economic crisis in 1997, we decided to relocate to Israel. Her mother did not object to our marriage, but her father was quite furious and acted with much rudeness; he did all he could to separate us, and it took him a long time to accept me as a family member. She had always asked me to be patient until her father accepted us because of his complex personality and his high military position at that time.

- **How would you describe the first years of your life in Israel?**

At first, we spent two weeks at my parents' home, but it was quite harsh; we barely survived and moved to a rent in Acre. At the beginning of our life in Israel, we lived in a small apartment; life was good and tough at the same time. For me, it was the beginning of my business. She suffered a lot because of the relocation: she had left her country, family, and friends and moved to a country with a totally different culture, unfamiliar family customs, and a language radically different from her mother tongue.

Our business thrived, and she was there by my side throughout all the business developments. On a personality level, she is a bit introverted and closed; she is not at all a social type, unlike myself. She finds it difficult to let strangers into the house; it takes her a lot to start trusting people. In addition to her personality traits, her Russian culture and upbringing affected her a lot; she did not grow up in a regular home; because of her father's position, perhaps she grew up too cautious and suspicious of everything and everybody.

Her rapport with my family, both nuclear and extended, is quite fine; their relationships are based on respect and appreciation, yet they are too formal; there is no intimacy nor spontaneity. She does not have many friends, and she is willing to accept only family relatives as friends. She finds it extremely difficult to get in contact with someone outside the family circle. She has no social relationships and cannot maintain social contacts. She used

to visit my parents once every two weeks, sometimes even once a week; she behaved properly and gave them the appropriate respect, but still in a very formal way. My parents loved her and loved her to this very day; although we have been divorced, they are very disappointed in her. They used to support her a lot, especially in the beginning. I will bring you an example: my mother-in-law and her partner could live for years in our house, but when my parents wanted to visit, they had to set an appointment with my wife first.

She speaks some Arabic and Hebrew, but, unfortunately, she is not at all proficient, as she had not been serious enough to invest an effort in learning the languages and communicating in Russian most of the time. However, when my parents would come for a visit, she always made sure to hide the pork from their sight out of respect, especially for my religious mother. If a woman did not drink alcohol, she wouldn't drink alone either, although in our house, we do eat pork a lot and drink a lot of alcohol. She respected the tradition and recognized the cultural differences; she accepted the cultural differences, at least in the beginning.

In the presence of my parents, she used to dress more modestly; she would never enter my parents' home wearing a mini skirt; in general, as I said earlier, she had exquisite taste and would always dress very elegantly and respectfully, always well-groomed and beautiful. I can't say that her way of dressing is conservative, yet she does not expose what needs not to be exposed. She knows to adjust her outfit to place and time. Our friends were mostly Russians, not really close friends, more just acquaintances or mixed couples like ours - Arab men married to women from FSU.

- **How can you describe your family: the home you built, the norms of behavior, the division of responsibilities?**

The home is entirely her domain; it is her exclusive responsibility – all the house matters and taking care of children. I am out for work, and the house remains her territory. She used to cook and still cooks mostly Russian food. Our children study with private Russian tutors, we have a permanent Russian housekeeper, and the Russian language is the dominant language in our household. We have a disabled child in the house, and the physiotherapists treating him are all Russians, too. The atmosphere in the house is very Russian, too; you can feel it immediately when you enter.

I don't share my financial and business plans and decisions with her; I am in charge of economic management. I give her a credit card, and she can buy whatever she needs, but I don't involve her at all in financial or business matters.

My wife did her best to create a very Russian ambiance in our house, which significantly affected our children's education. Because of his disability, our son mostly studied at home, tutored by Russian private teachers. Our second son studied for a few years in the Arab school in Acre, but it was very difficult for him, so we transferred him to the Russian school.

The culture of my sons is very Russian, and they are influenced very much by their mother: they speak Russian as their first language, then English, Hebrew is in the third place, with Arabic being the last preference, so their Arabic is poor. My sons were both baptized; the eldest did not have a circumcision. I was also baptized in Moscow, so I became a Christian; my children identify themselves as Russians! If you ask them about their religious affiliation, they will say they are Christians or laugh, saying they have no religion, so they haven't made up their mind.

At home, we celebrate Christian holidays, while my parents and my brothers celebrate Muslim holidays. We are very far from the Muslim religious rules and rather closer to Christianity. We speak only Russian, and the children use Arabic only when talking to my parents or to an extended family. They speak Russian even with their friends. Russian food rules in our house; there is always pork and alcohol.

The Arabic or Mediterranean general meals appear only if I decide to cook, which happens on weekends and during holidays. The music, too. We love classical music; there is no Arabic music, nor Hebrew, only Russian or classical. Our younger son listens to English songs, too. The décor and style of our house are all Russian – with matryoshkas, owls, and wall paintings – everything belongs to the Russian culture, with a lot of paintings by famous Russian artists.

We have a huge and rich library with books in Russian, Hebrew, and Arabic, too. I am fond of collecting artifacts, especially Russian ones with very little Arabic décor; there is an entire section in our house that is a kind of museum.

I would define my behavior and way of thinking as very European; I had never hesitated to help with housework when I had time, and the

housewife was absent. I would clean and cook, helping her with her housework. I remember, for example, when my father once entered our home and saw me in the kitchen wearing an apron and cooking while my wife was watching TV in the guest room; he was really shocked and infuriated: "Shame on you!" he shouted at me. Sometimes, I would clean the windows and the yard outside while my wife was enjoying herself with the kids and the neighbors were getting crazy.

If there is one thing I regret is not being involved in my children's education and upbringing when they were young, and now it's too late to fix it. I was too busy earning money and developing my career, so she took over the children's education. I should also mention that her mother and her partner had lived in our house for many years and helped with the children. No wonder then that my children were raised as Russian. I did not always feel comfortable with their presence in my house, yet I had to accept it because I cared about my wife, so I took care of providing for them. In fact, I took care of two families – food, clothing, airplane tickets, etc. When her father passed away, I helped with all necessary arrangements in Israel.

Today, her mother and her partner are in Moscow; recently, they have had no contact with me as a result of the divorce procedure, despite all the financial support I gave them for at least twenty years. I travel to Moscow once a month for business, yet her mother and her partner do not even bother inviting me for dinner. They are such ungrateful people; I am so disappointed by them.

- **How would you describe the experience of being married to a woman from FSU?**

The entire experience has, of course, been interesting and colorful, yet there were so many challenges I had to face over and over again for all those years; however, even now, at the stage of the separation where life continues to be diverse, there is no doubt my wife had given up on her life in Moscow for me when we decided to relocate to Israel. Still, since we did that, I have been making concessions over and over again. It is not easy to maintain such a relationship despite it being so interesting; at the same time, it's very exhausting. For example, I had to cope with and find excuses for my wife's absence from many familial events, such as weddings of friends and relatives, funerals, dinners, and so forth, because she did not feel like

attending them or it was inconvenient for her schedule. She had zero commitment to others, except for me and the children. We are very different, even though I love and breathe the Russian culture, unlike her – she will never be able to understand Arab culture in general and Muslim in particular. I am wondering whether the thing would have been a bit different had I come from a Christian family. Easier in social terms; I mean, despite the fact that I consider myself very much "Western" in cultural terms, the Russian culture is too different: for example, Russians can enjoy reading a book only without going out; they are not sociable. Their social involvement is limited, as compared to the Arab culture wherein social involvement is important – family visits, meals, and holidays are very important, and many commitments ought to be followed; they are an essential part of my culture, especially due to my public, social, and business position and status.

Arab culture is characterized by strong bonds between family members; there is much more involvement and expectation. Despite the individualistic tendencies of recent years, we are still very much remote from Russian culture. The difference is very much salient; I suffered the most from a lack of social and interpersonal relationships and ties during my marriage.

- **How would you define your relationship now?**

Well, our relationship has significantly deteriorated in the last years; we began a divorce procedure; she was very tenacious, stubborn, and determined to make our relationship work during the years, but most probably, I survived only because of many concessions and renunciations I had to make; I should say she gave up on very few matters, as compared to myself, while enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. These days, she embarked upon a war against me, being interested only in property and money; she cut off relations with all our common friends and relatives.

- **Would you recommend a mixed marriage, based on your experience? Would you give any advice to anyone considering a mixed marriage?**

I definitely wouldn't recommend such a marriage to anyone. In retrospect, I wouldn't have made this choice; today, I am paying a heavy price by divorce. Despite my suffering for all those years, I had no courage to file for a divorce, as I had always felt guilty because she had left her family and country for me. Until she initiated the step and applied to dissolve our

marriage; unfortunately, even the mediation was useless. Today, I am determined to dissolve our marriage as soon as possible and am even considering opening a new chapter in my life, this time with a local Arab woman; her religious affiliation is not an issue for me; I am mostly concerned with culture; I think I will eventually marry a Christian Arab woman, as I am more used to Christian traditions.

If you asked my wife, she would give you the same answer as me; she would always say that and never stop criticizing me. She made sure to pass her heritage to the children; they are determined to marry Russian girls, and Arab women are not an option for them.

Abstract

This project is about mixed marriages between Israeli Arab Muslim men and post-Soviet Slavic Christian women. However, my research aims to explore their marital life in Israel through understanding their own experience of life in a country considered a "deeply divided society (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017). To address the experience of those inter-ethnic, or, better, transnational couples, the research interrogates the classic assimilationist paradigm that has dominated the discourse on mixed marriages for a long time and adopts the poststructuralist notions of social constructionism of acculturation styles, suggested by Berry (2009; 2013; 2017), and of biculturalism and hybridization.

The research in the field of transnational marriages between immigrants and natives has consistently shown that exploring the individual experience and agency enables the researcher to find out how those couples manage to survive even in such divided societies while creating their vectors by constructing their own identities (e.g., Conrad, 2014, Mac Ginty, 2017). To put it simply, the studies conducted so far intended to determine the factors affecting either success or failure in such cases.

Furthermore, by going and living through the phenomenology of the individual experiences, the researcher learns to identify, locate, and map the strategies of acculturation that help mixed couples survive and get along in deeply divided societies. Identifying the acculturation styles helps detect and define the determinants of quality and stability of the interethnic (transnational) marriage, whereas examining the strategies whereby the mixed couples manage to sustain their relationships within the intricate familial networks helps understand how the partners negotiate their domestic and international living.

To achieve this purpose, I employed the qualitative paradigm with an emphasis on reflexivity. I used in-depth semi-structure interviews with the

initial sample of 24 subjects, remaining with 11 mixed couples of Arab Muslim husbands and Slavic Christian wives from FSU living in various locations of Israel. The majority of the research subjects had met during their academic studies at FSU at the end of the last century, registered their marriage in the USSR's registrar office, and subsequently moved to live in Israel. Each husband and each wife were interviewed individually for the sake of unraveling common patterns and themes and achieving a complementary picture without prior coordination between the sides.

The thematic analysis of the findings was performed using NVivo to organize and visualize large amounts of textual data in an orderly way, thereby highlighting the patters and ordering data in a faster way in meaningful categories; as new interpretations emerge, it is possible to store and change the data easily. The analysis uncovered the elements related to the quality and stability of mixed marriages, thereby surfacing the determinants for the successful outcomes of transnational marriage.

On the whole, the couples' appraisals of their marriages varied between bitter disappointment and gratifying satisfaction. All the spouses confessed having experienced multiple challenges and difficulties at various stages of their marriage – from indignant rejection by the respective parents to adjustment problems and cultural clashes. While some couples had been considering a divorce, others expressed a substantial degree of satisfaction with their marital life, consisting of a high level of intimacy, fine integration into a local community and a larger society, as well as professional accomplishment.

In terms of Collet's model of three main patterns of strategies employed by mixed couples, one can situate the participants across the continuum between the extreme of adopting the husband's (dominant) culture while renouncing the attributes and practices of her native culture and the quest for balance in relationships through making egalitarian exchanges, thereby constructing other spaces outside the existent venues (Collett, 2015). The other extreme, wherein the partner belonging to the majority adapts to and adopts the culture of the spouse belonging to the minority spouse, was not present. The invariable request that a wife adapt herself to her husband's cultural space and not vice versa has corroborated Collett's suggestion that mixed marriages between immigrants and natives are inevitably marked by inequality (Collett, 2017).

The partners who were disappointed by their marriage also suffered from a lack of mutual understanding due to language problems, with serious tensions and conflicts between the spouses, mostly around socio-cultural and religious issues, poor socializing with the husbands' family, and children's education. In those couples, both husbands and wives expressed their profound disenchantment and reported a low marriage quality, loneliness, isolation, and overall unhappiness. Quite a few wives felt that their dreams and ambitions had been thwarted. The husbands, in turn, ascribed the fiasco of their marriage to the irreconcilable cultural differences that prevented the post-Soviet women from seeking a balancing compromise and adjusting to a new reality.

All the female participants, including those who managed to maintain their marriage, suffered from the cultural trauma inflicted by immigration. They were unanimous in describing what they addressed as "culture shock," a collision between the imaginary life during the dating period and the harsh reality after arrival to Israel. All of them voiced a sense of bereavement over the lost home country. They conveyed a persistent feeling of nostalgia, expressed in constant ruminations about their past life in FSU, restoring and preserving a "Soviet" ambiance and décor in their homes. Many of them felt alienated from their environment. In their turn, the husbands were disillusioned and discouraged by their women's reluctance to learn the language and accept the local culture, customs, and practices. Some of the husbands explicitly acknowledged the absence of a real bond between them and their wives and described the unbridgeable cultural abyss between them. The findings corroborate Bhugra's claim that culture shock, loss, bereavement, a dissonance between hopes and achievements, as well as lack of acceptance by the host nation - all contribute to the subsequent feelings of rejection and alienation (Bhugra, 2004a).

On the other hand, some of the participants viewed the cultural challenges as the possibility to grow and eventually thrive, therefore corroborating Lijtmaer's suggestion that the experience of immigration is not only about overcoming hardships but also has the potential to build character and resilience; in her words, this experience may add "flavor, complexity, and adventure to one's life" (Lijtmaer, 2022: 415).

Furthermore, their successful coping with the “culture shock” supports Pacheco’s suggestion for a transition from the culture shock approach to culture learning (Pacheco, 2020).

In essence, each partner continued to live in their own imaginary space, informed by their cultural heritage and collective memories related to it, which had shaped their mindset and worldview. Yet, at times, the ethnic and cultural contents of the partners coincided: the post-Soviet women readily accepted the strict and clear-cut role division on a gender basis, characterizing the Arab society in general and the household in particular. Although the Slavic women from FSU had been raised on the Communist values of equality and communality, they were quite comfortable with the patriarchal cultural consciousness and the division of roles. In addition, the overlap between cultural contents left a space for negotiating roles and strategies of adjustment, which facilitated balance and stability in marriages.

On the other hand, the interviews showed that the initial motivation of the partners was mostly centered on physical attraction and economic considerations on the part of the women who sought to leave the post-Soviet space, ravished by economic crises, political instability, and crime. Those considerations may well have affected the interchange between the spouses, thereby making their marital union devoid of commonality and mutual trust; the husbands remained quite suspicious about their wives’ ulterior motives, inspired by existing stereotypes about “mercantile and calculated Russian women,” which undoubtedly contributed to never-ending tensions between the spouses. However, the spouses who initially had common interests and a vision of marital life or worked together did manage to reach an equilibrium between cultural differences and described their marriage as happy and satisfying.

In accordance with Berry’s model of acculturation styles, used as a conceptual framework of reference in this study, the immigrant women had employed either separation or bicultural integration styles; still, none of them felt fully assimilated, nor did they renounce their native culture: all of them had a compelling need for a yearly journey to the homeland to “recharge” their energies. The findings are congenial to Abu-Rayya’s conclusions (Abu-Rayya, 2007); those women who adopted a separation style of acculturation were intermediate on the score of well-being, while those who acculturated by integration while retaining their heritage

reported satisfaction in Abu-Rayya's research, those women displayed the highest degrees of self-esteem and positive affect, as well as of marital intimacy and satisfaction. On the other hand, those women who had rejected their husbands' Arab culture from the outset, refusing to adapt to the habits and practices of their environment, also expressed a lower level of mental and emotional wellbeing.

The ability to acculturate by integration required a significant degree of autonomy and independence from both partners. Indeed, the thematic analysis of the participants' narratives showed that the quality and stability of the transnational marriage were contingent upon:

- **Autonomy: separating and distancing from the in-laws**, as well as from the husband's extended family, resulted in the couple's thriving, especially after deciding to move from a village to a city, or the North of Israel or the more advantaged regions, with more work opportunities and fewer prejudices.
- **Power balancing:** The adaptive abilities of wives and their willingness to acculturate, coupled with husbands' flexibility and willingness to compromise, were additional determinants for marriage quality and stability over the years.

As far as the children's education and resulting ethnic identity were concerned, the respondents claimed that their children were "luckier" than their parents and did not undergo the challenges their parents had to undergo. According to the participants, their children felt quite comfortable about their biculturalism and hybrid identities. Even the parents on the brink of divorce expressed pride and satisfaction with their children's upbringing and results. Most parents granted their children a "deferred choice," in Barbara's terms (1994), on the questions of choosing a religious affiliation, as well as romantic partners, although some parents objected to their children's inter-ethnic choices, remembering their bitter lessons. As my research did not focus on the descendants of transnational marriages, learning about their experiences through the parental narratives, additional studies are needed further to examine the dynamics of biculturalism and hybridization as an outcome for the progeny of mixed marriages.

The Slavic women talked a lot about their homesickness. Although the possibility of traveling home every year constituted a mitigating factor in the women's overall experience of otherness and foreignness, one must

remember that the “Soviet Union,” wherein they had grown up, did not exist any longer; the familiar social and cultural environment, characteristic of the Soviet epoch was no longer there. The dramatic changes that occurred after the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in a complete change of the landscape. In fact, with each new travel back to FSU, the landscape was becoming less and less familiar, exacerbating the sense of foreignness and irreversibility. The women’s engagement in the adaptive acculturation process did not leave them enough time to mourn over their past, nor did they have time to accept that their motherland – the Soviet Union – had become a phantom pain, different, unrecognizable, and unfamiliar.

The Arab Muslim men, on the other hand, barely voiced their homesickness, i.e., the longing for the lost Palestine, which was, however, present by its absence. Palestinians, too, did not have an opportunity to mourn and come to terms with the irreversible past (Lacey, 2011). Qabaha (2018) reminds us that Palestinian intellectuals see multiculturalism through the prism of loss and double estrangement; they do not speak in terms of connecting and enriching but rather complain about being torn between countries, cultures, and languages. Thus, multiple identities imply the ultimate detachment from the original birthplace, with no possibility to return. 33% of Israeli Arabs report *no clear self-identification*, with 31 percent and 30 percent viewing themselves as Palestinian, respectively, and only 7 percent of them identifying themselves as both Israeli and Palestinian (Talhami, 2010). These patterns of blurred self-identification, along with hybrid self-definition, reveal what I have defined as a sense of perennial homelessness and not belonging; this sense is pervasive in both immigrant wives' and native husbands’ narratives. None of the participants felt entirely “at home,” constantly seeking a “place” elsewhere to construct a private familial space informed by individual contents.

As a Christian Arab born and living in Israel, I could “hear” that, despite financial success and impressive property, Arab Muslim husbands continue to experience a deeply ingrained feeling of dispossession. Meeting their wives-to-be while “in exile,” studying in foreign universities, hoping to return home one day with a prestigious diploma, was a meeting in the space of “nowhere”; meeting with the women, secularized and internationalized by the fallen Soviet regime, who were also situated in the space of ethnic, cultural, and financial uncertainty. As I have argued in the concluding

section of this study, the double mourning is what constituted the “unsaid” bond between the future spouses, which, in essence, cemented their relationships and, in many cases, helped them stay together despite all challenges.

To conclude, the study presented in this dissertation is a pioneering project that explored the vicissitudes of a unique transnational marriage between immigrants and natives in a deeply divided society in which both immigrants and natives feel inherently homeless. At the same time, their ethnic and cultural identities are manipulated “geopolitically.” The conclusions of the research may be described as twofold: on the one hand, the mixed marriages between Arab Muslim men from Israel and Slavic Christian women from FSU advance multiculturalism and social mobility by creating new ethno-cultural spaces. On the other hand, though, the union between two “homeless” partners only double their distance from themselves and multiplies the difference in their ethnic and cultural identities.

While the study confirms and reinforces the conclusions of the previous research on the subject by identifying acculturation styles, coping strategies, and challenges, it also poses deeper psychological and philosophical inquiries regarding the value of multiculturalism and hybrid identities in deeply divided societies. Further, it interrogates the autonomous quality of one’s ethnic and cultural identity in a post-modern globalized world.

Dr. Abeer Jiries is a licensed immigration and family lawyer and a certified specialist in family and couple therapy. She is also a researcher in the fields of family, identity, and migration in the global era. Her unique interdisciplinary perspective—combining legal, therapeutic, sociological, and psychological expertise—brings rare depth and empathy to the voices and stories she explores in her work.

The Double Mourning: Negotiating Selves and Reconstructing Identities in Mixed Marriages

What happens when love crosses not only cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries, but also the invisible scars of immigration, memory, and belonging? In *The Double Mourning*, Dr. Abeer Jiries explores the untold emotional and identity struggles of Israeli Arab Muslim men and post-Soviet Slavic Christian women who form families in a deeply divided society.

Based on in-depth qualitative interviews, this pioneering sociological study captures the voices of couples navigating the silent tensions of hybrid marriages—where difference is not always celebrated, and identity must often be rebuilt. Dr. Jiries, herself positioned between cultures, offers a unique lens into how individuals grieve lost homelands, negotiate social expectations, and build intimacy in the shadow of cultural rupture.

This book is not only an academic contribution but a human portrait of resilience, love, and the quiet cost of crossing boundaries. It will speak to researchers, counselors, and anyone who has ever loved across borders or felt the weight of being “in-between.”

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