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Patriarchy, political enmity, and domestic violence: Exploring abusive mixed intimate partnerships in a conflict zone

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Abstract

Mixed couples face more marital conflict than endogamous couples. Drawing on intersectional theory and narrative victimology, this study examines women's accounts of abuse in mixed heterosexual Arab/Palestinian–Israeli Jewish intimate partnerships amid the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The narratives of 25 women formerly in an abusive relationship are the primary data, which are supplemented by a comprehensive list of calls seeking advice or intervention from a non-governmental organization (NGO) that assists women in mixed relationships, and the NGO's recorded in-service training sessions during which social workers discuss clients' plights and abuse exposure. Consistent with research on mixed couples, the women's narratives connect their abuse to differences, dynamics, and tensions rooted in cultural, religious, and social beliefs and practices. Importantly, the narratives also highlight how the Israeli–Palestinian conflict amplifies and escalates the women's abuse. Intersections of gender, religion, and nationality as well as life in a conflict zone critically affect the abuse dynamic the women experience. The article concludes with a discussion of the relevance of narrative victimology and political enmity for intersectional approaches to domestic violence.

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Introduction and theoretical framework

Violence against women, particularly domestic violence (DV) or intimate partner violence (IPV),[1] is a global phenomenon that cuts across race, ethnicity, social class, religion, nationality, and geographical borders (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). DV/IPV takes multiple forms—emotional, physical, sexual, economic, and social—and its harmful impact on abused women and their children has been well documented (e.g. Holt et al., 2008; Levendosky and Graham- Bermann, 2001). Contemporary feminist criminology has employed the concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1991) to highlight how hierarchies of power are manifested through crisscrossing dimensions of social advantage and disadvantage, including through race/ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, and immigration status (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Erez et al., 2009). Across disciplines, scholarship on intersectionality has revealed how forms of privilege and subjugation, rooted in social identities and positions, operate simultaneously via structural inequalities and social interactions to shape women's experiences of abuse, justice, and injustice (Crenshaw, 1991; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Research on DV/IPV has confirmed that individual attributes, intersecting with familial, communal, socio-cultural factors and political contexts, contribute to, or exacerbate abuse (e.g. Erez et al., 2009). These characteristics and contexts, in turn, influence social and criminal justice responses to abuse (e.g. Erez et al., 2015; Snajdr, 2007).

This article extends intersectional work by considering the significance of ethno-religious identities in conflict zones (Henne and Troshynski, 2013), using narrative victimology (Pemberton et al., 2019) as a framework to explicate women's accounts of abusive mixed intimate relationships. Research on couples in inter-religious, inter-racial, or inter-ethnic relationships suggests that they face disagreements and conflicts stemming from seemingly incompatible beliefs and practices, including over child rearing (Binghalib, 2007; Luke, 2003; Taylor Curtis and Ellison, 2002). Compared to endogamous couples, mixed marriages are also likelier to end up in divorce or dissolution (e.g. Kaplan and Herbst-Debby, 2017; Racin, 2006; Shahar, 2017). Research on attitudes toward mixed marriages in highly conflicted societies has found that they receive little support from both partners' social networks and become heavily burdened (Hastings, 1990). Research on different religious groups in Israel (Muslim, Jewish, Christian) documents objections to intermarriages, with women in such relationships often being perceived as a 'national threat' (Erez, 2019) or as fraternizing with 'the enemy' (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017a; Yahya et al., 2016).

Research has also documented the impact of political conflict on the level of DV/IPV in the majority and/or minority populations (Doyle and McWilliams, 2020), noting the risk of community violence toward women and their children in mixed relationships during flare-ups of intergroup conflict (Ellsberg et al., 2021; Hartley, 2010). Prior studies have also identified unique DV/IPV risk factors associated with political conflict and documented how exposure to conflict affects or magnifies risk factors (e.g. Clark et al., 2010; McWilliams, 1997). Research has also addressed legal and police responses to IPV/DV in conflict-ridden areas (e.g. Erez et al., 2015; Snajdr, 2007). However, few studies have investigated how political enmity and ongoing protracted violent conflict are experienced by women in abusive mixed relationships, where the partners' natal groups are on opposing sides of the conflict. Intersectional analysis is well-suited to addressing this omission (Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen, 2012).

Employing Israel as a case study, we examine the accounts of Israeli Jewish women who have left abusive intimate partnerships with Arab/Palestinian men (the pairing for most mixed Arab–Jewish couples in Israel). Granted, there are mixed Arab–Jewish couples in Israel and elsewhere whose relationships are harmonious, content, and free of violence or abuse (e.g. Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2017a, 2017b; Karkabi-Sabbah, 2017; Racin, 2006). Yet research examining such couples has found that they experience unique problems affecting the degree of marital conflict, including perceptual differences between the partners, family pressure to conform to their religion, pressures about living location, and views on military service (Sela, 1992). Israeli Jewish women in mixed relationships have also reported that mixed marriages are more burdened than non-mixed relationships, listing, among other reasons, the protracted political conflict and related security concerns (Racin, 2006).

Recognizing the tightrope walked between Orientalism and Occidentalism (Cain, 2000) in pursuing this topic, suffused with competing versions of responsibility and blame for the unending Israeli–Palestinian political conflict, we employ narrative victimology to show the temporally ordered experiences and sense of injustice in the accounts of Israeli Jewish women who have escaped abusive relationships with Arab/Palestinian men. The role of political conflict in the women's abuse experience is noted, highlighting the impact of 'dichotomous oppositional differences' (Collins, 1986: s20) such as man/woman, Jewish/Arab, Israeli/Palestinian that in Israeli everyday life are simultaneously ethnic, religious, socio-cultural, and political. We conceive of DV in the broadest terms—encompassing emotional, symbolic, physical, and coercive intimate partner, familial, and communal violence—to reveal what distinguishes and complicates these narratives in intersectional terms, while considering the value and effects of life stories for the women who relate them and the audience that receives them.

The article reviews the political and socio-cultural relations, orientations, and contexts characteristic of the Jewish and Arab/Palestinian communities in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the communities' approaches to mixed relationships or marriages, and the impact of the prolonged Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the groups' mutual perceptions. The research methodology is presented, followed by an analysis of the women's life stories as informed by narrative victimology (Pemberton et al., 2017), supplemented by other data sources. The article concludes with a discussion of the value of narrative victimology for intersectional feminist approaches, and the importance of situating criminological research in a global perspective, where political strife and enmity are often a bedrock social reality.

The socio-cultural and political contexts as a backdrop for mixed relationships

The socio-cultural context: the status of women and DV-related issues

The Israeli Jewish and Arab communities[2] are internally diverse and broadly distinguished from one another, with certain characteristics prominent in each. Israeli Jews are 73.9% of Israel's population (Israel Census Bureau of Statistics, 2020), about half of which is secular, with smaller groupings representing different degrees of religiosity and adherence to Jewish tradition.[3] Two large waves of immigration, from Ethiopia (1980s) and the former USSR (1990s), further diversified the

Jewish community. Overall, Israeli Jewish society subscribes to an individualistic orientation that promotes self-identity, self-realization, and personal achievements (Ben David and Khatib, 2021). Aside from pockets of gendered segregation in the ultra-religious community, there are few gender-related restrictions on Israeli Jewish women, married or unmarried; they tend to work outside the home (Kulik and Rayyin, 2005; Yashiv and Kasir Kaliner, 2013) and their influence in family or other affairs is not restricted to the domestic sphere (Ben David and Khatib, 2021).

The Israeli Arab community (21.1% of the population)[4] is generally collectivist in orientation and organized around gender- and age-based hierarchies, wherein men are superior, and elders have higher status (Haj-Yahia, 2003; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1997). Women face degrees of patriarchal subordination (Hasan, 2002), are often restricted to the domestic sphere, have lower labor force participation compared to their Jewish counterparts (Fuchs and Friedman Wilson, 2018; Yashiv and Kasir Kaliner, 2013),[5] and are expected to conform to standards of modesty and sexual purity (Baxter, 2007; Hassan, 2005; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999), violation of which code may result in a so-called honor killing (Hassan, 2005).

The Arab and Jewish communities also differ in the extent of DV in their midst and in their responses to it. DV in the Israeli Arab community occurs more frequently and is more tolerated compared to the Jewish community (Ben-Porat et al., 2021; Daoud et al., 2020; Zaatut and Haj-Yahia, 2016). The groups also differ in their DV reporting practices and seeking outside assistance (Ben-Porat et al., 2021), with the Arab social and political leadership considering the law against DV as harming the Arab community in Israel (Erez et al., 2015; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999, 2000). In the Palestinian community of the territories,[6] women experience even greater degrees of gendered violence, and have limited options for receiving help or seeking redress (Chaban, 2011; Hamamra, 2020).

The political context: inter-group perceptions and hostilities

Politically, Israel is a deeply divided society (Ben-Porat and Gopher, 2013; Hasisi, 2008; Samooha, 2001:238; Waxman, 2012). Relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel have been strained before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and have continued to be tense, initially in connection with military conflicts between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries, and later hostilities with the Palestinians that have alternated between periods of low- and high-intensity violence and all-out wars. This violence has resulted in thousands of fatalities, physically and emotionally disabled victims, and deeply traumatized collective memories for both groups (Ben-Ari and Lavee, 2011: 2). Consequently, both groups perceive themselves as victims (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Erez, 2006), with fierce disagreements about how to resolve the conflict, and the nature and future of inter-ethnic relations in the Jewish state.

Both Israeli Jews and Arabs are mutually suspicious and distrustful, and view one another as violent (Samooha, 2017: 21–32). And while Israeli Arabs may complain about various deprivations or discrimination they face as Israeli citizens, the Palestinians in the territories view Israel as foreign adversaries who do not belong in the region. The protracted violent conflict has positioned Israeli Arabs as ‘others’, ‘enemies’, ‘a minority within’ (Hazan, 1997: 161)—a ‘trapped minority’ (Rabinowitz, 2001: 64) that is alienated from a state hegemonized by a Jewish majority. Furthermore, Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are lumped together by many Jewish Israelis as a homogeneous, potentially allied group who may support terrorism, resulting in blurred lines between Israel’s internal and external security (Bigo, 2001; Erez et al., 2015).

The Israeli Jewish community's objections to mixed relationships

Endogamy is the preferred practice among many religious, ethnic, or racial communities (e.g. Hastings, 1990), and Israeli society is no exception (Triger, 2009; Yahya et al., 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1993). Historically (Erez, 2019), and in contemporary Israel, objections to out-marriage abound. Some revolve around Israel's changing demographic structure and the problem posed by assimilation—the 'Silent Holocaust'[7]—in the face of maintaining a Jewish majority in the only Jewish state. While the religious and traditional Jewish communities oppose intermarriage with all Gentiles (non-Jews), because in Israel the Arabs comprise most of the non-Jewish population, prevention efforts have focused there.

Other objections reflect security rationales. The security establishment has voiced concerns about the possible recruitment and exploitation of romantic partners or the offspring of mixed relationships for terrorist missions, citing examples[8] of women or children being used to transfer weapons, place bombs, or participate in Palestinian prisoner exchanges (Tarnopolsky, 2017). The Israeli press has reported cases of Jewish women who use their 'privileged body' to shield Palestinian intimate partners involved in terrorism (Sion, 2014b).[9] Intermarriage was also considered disloyalty by some. One survey found that over half of Israeli Jews believe that 'marriage [of a Jew] to an Arab is national treason' (Nahmias, 2007).

Forming mixed relationships in Israel

Although majorities of both groups view intermarriages between Jews and Arabs as undesirable (Pew Research Center, 2016; Triger, 2009), and despite difficult inter-group relations and residential segregation that keeps the groups apart, intimate Jewish–Arab relationships do develop, emerging from contacts made in mutually frequented settings. These 'geographies of encounter' (Shtern, 2018: 9)—public (e.g. streets, parks), institutional (e.g. school, workplace), socializing (e.g. sports, political organizations), and consumptive (e.g. cafes, bars) spaces—offer ample opportunities for mixed intimate relationships to develop. The women's narratives recount relationships that emerged from encounters in these types of settings.

The scope of mixed Jewish/Arab intimate partnerships in Israel is unknown but it consists predominantly of Israeli Jewish women and Arab/Palestinian men.[10] The higher rate of marriages between Arab/Palestinian men and Israeli Jewish women can be partially attributed to the Islamic faith, which allows[11] Muslim men to marry outside their religion; Muslim women, on the other hand, can only wed non-Muslim men who convert to Islam (Islam, 2014; Leeman, 2009), thereby preserving the community's religious boundaries while protecting their daughters' 'honor'.[12]

Setting, data, and method

Research setting

The data examined in this study were obtained from one of several Orthodox/ultra-Orthodox Jewish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Israel that focus on countering assimilation. This NGO, which is funded by charitable contributions, has a small administrative and professional staff, including social workers, and many volunteers. Its work consists of mobilizing against Christian proselytization to Jews, aiding converts wishing to return to Judaism, offering spiritual guidance, and importantly, rescuing and sheltering abused and imperiled women in partnerships with non-Jewish men (mostly Arabs, but at times international guest workers or residents who are Christian, Buddhist, or of other faiths) and their children.[13]

The NGO's opposition to intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews has led some critics to claim that they are anti-democratic and racist, inflammatory, and contradictory in their claims[14] (e.g. Carmi, 2014; Gross, 2014; Guarnieri, 2011; Hakak, 2015; Timmer, 2011). Although the data are from an NGO mobilized against Jewish assimilation, the narratives nonetheless document subjective, first-person survivor accounts consistent with accounts given by women in abusive relationships elsewhere.

The data and sample characteristics

The principal data are videos and written records in which 25 Jewish Israeli women narrate their life story, including their relationship with an Israeli Arab or Palestinian man. The life stories were articulated without interruption by the social workers who elicited them. The women were informed that the videos would be used for training, teaching, fundraising, and research purposes, thus permitting the organization to make them available to the researchers.

The women suffered domestic abuse of varying degrees of severity and left their partner. At the time of narration, some women were living in NGO-provided housing, having recently escaped; others were settled and using the NGO's sources of material, psychological, or social support. The narratives document the women's meeting with, and initial attraction to, their partners, shifts in relational dynamics over time, the violence experienced, reluctance to report abuse or appeal for help, and dilemmas, struggles, and hardships in resisting or extricating themselves from abuse. Because the abuse modally occurs in a patrilocal environment amid a protracted political conflict in which the partners' natal families are on opposing sides, expressions of enmity and a dynamic of communal hostility underlie the abuse the women experience from their partner and feature prominently in the survivors' narratives.

The narrators' ($N = 25$) mean age upon meeting their partner was 17.8 years old, with a range of 13–35 years and a median age of 17. The women had diverse economic and cultural backgrounds: some were from comfortable families, others from disadvantaged or broken homes; some were raised in ultra-Orthodox religious families, others in progressive households. Almost two-thirds of the women converted to Islam. On average, the women lived with their partner for 11.8 years, with a range of 6 months to 30 years, and a median of 8 years. Most of the participants (80%) had children with their partner, with an average of 3 and a range of 1–8 children. Over half of the women (60%) lived with their partner in an Arab village inside Israel, where the male partner's family resided. One quarter (24%) lived with their partner outside Israel, in the Palestinian territories in the West Bank or the Gaza strip. The remainder lived mostly in mixed Arab–Jewish towns, and two couples resided in Jewish majority cities.

Of those who pinpointed the time of the initial abuse, 82% stated that it began either after being wed or after moving in with their partner in his hometown; 18% experienced violence while dating their partner. Most of the women (92%) reported that they left their partner because the violence/situation/relationship had become unacceptable.

The sample's representativeness is undetermined as the scope of Arab–Jewish intimate partnerships in Israel, and the partners' demographic characteristics, are unknown (Sela, 1992; Sion, 2018; Timmer, 2011). Estimates of the scope of intermarriages in Israel (e.g. DellaPergola, 2017) produce projections based on incomplete data because not all couples officially marry or report their marriage. The underreporting of mixed marriages (Sion, 2014a; Triger, 2014) stems from legal and cultural barriers and expectations.[15] The NGO indicated, however, that the sample used herein represents well the stories they hear from the diverse women they assist.

Supplementing the video-recorded narratives are two other sources. First, there is a comprehensive list maintained by the NGO that logged calls to a hotline with tips about Jewish women in a mixed relationship. The logs record the identity of the caller, their relationship to the woman who is the subject of the call, the circumstances in which the relationship came to their notice, and any other information that might help the NGO to reach out to or assist the women. Although the identity of the caller and the woman about whom they call are documented, this information is kept confidential to outsiders, including the present researchers.

The second supplemental source comprises recorded in-service training sessions in which the NGO's program directors and senior social workers discuss their work procedures, clientele, services, and the kind of advice or emotional and material assistance provided to interested parties. Personnel described abused women who became intimate partners of Arab/Palestinian men, and reviewed how these relationships developed and deteriorated, the women's decisions to escape, the aftermath of that turning point, and the help the women received from the NGO staff.

Analytical framework

The first-person narrative accounts are the focus of our analysis, which is informed by narrative victimology (Pemberton et al., 2019)—a constructionist approach (Ibarra and Adorjian, 2018) that complements narrative criminology (Presser, 2009). Whereas narrative criminology is focused on understanding the constitutive role that narratives have in offending, and how these stories inspire involvement or persistence with crime, narrative victimology focuses on the role and function of stories as survivors experience and resurface from victimization. The narratives identify the temporal structure of the victimization and indicate the emotional tenor and emergent insights associated with how the narrators process and make sense of their victimization and related trauma.

Analytic procedure

Analysis of the video-recorded narratives was conducted in two stages. First, the interviews were watched, then transcribed in the original Hebrew, and then translated into English. The transcripts were read several times to develop a holistic sense of the participants' personal histories and experiences. During the second stage, the transcripts were coded with the objective of discerning particularities of context, recurrent themes, turning points, victimization-related processes, and management of identity-related challenges. Special attention was given to the shifting constraints that shaped the women's intentions as their life stories developed or went off course, the moral meanings that emerged in connection with the abusive relationship, and the agentic horizons that emerged as their journeys unfolded.

The supplemental datasets helped ground the analysis of the women's narratives. The call logs situated the narratives in the women's networks, showing how their social relations—whether familiar or distant—were mobilized in response to their involvement with an 'outsider'. The training videos shed light on the dynamics of the abusive relationship, the incapacitating isolation the women experienced, the dilemmas faced in seeking separation, and the condition in which the women arrived at the NGO, seeking assistance and reintegration into Israeli Jewish society.

Findings: Israeli communal concern about Jewish women in mixed relationships

The NGO provided a hotline for the public to relay tips about Jewish women who may be in a problematic relationship with a non-Jew (in Israel these are mostly Arab men). The call logs offer a measure of the diverse persons who contact the NGO and their relation to the woman about whom they called. The logs also record how the NGO attempted to reach the women throughout their relationship's history.

Over one decade (2009–2018), the NGO logged approximately 1,000 calls annually pertaining to Jewish women in mixed relationships.[16] The caller logs document a range of observed encounters that seemed worrisome, advice sought on what to do, or requests for the NGO to intervene, such as via a wellness check, and in the most extreme case, a rescue of a 'captive' woman. The calls occurred relatively early as well as later in the history of the relationship, encompassing both courtship and marital scenarios. About half the calls (49%) were from non-family members and they were distributed as follows: 37% were placed by casual acquaintances, neighbors, co-workers, landlords, or employers; and an additional 12% were by various professionals (social workers, medical staff, teachers, counselors, rabbis, police) who encountered the women/couple in the context of their work. About one-third of the calls (34%) came from Jewish family members, most often parents and siblings, but also from more distant relatives, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins. In addition, 8% of the callers were from a close friend, 6% of the calls were direct requests for advice or help by the women involved in the mixed relationship, and 3% came from members of the male partner's family.

The relatively small percentage of calls placed by the women in the relationships is consistent with knowledge about the dynamics of DV. During the courtship period, the women are usually enamored with their partner and predisposed to build the relationship, while concerned others want them to discontinue it. Calls from teachers and counselors suggest that the women were young and at an early stage of the relationships. Later, as is well documented in DV research (for a summary, see Barnett, 2000, 2001), women who have been abused and learned to manage the violence will for various reasons avoid reporting: they hope that the abuse will stop, are economically or emotionally dependent on the abusive partner, feel embarrassed and ashamed, have privacy concerns, fear retaliation, and wish to keep the family intact for the sake of the children or fear losing them if they leave. The women also feel isolated and do not know whom to contact for help (Erez and Belknap, 1998; Fischer and Rose, 1995). The women in this study also refrained from seeking help because they feared no one would help them and felt guilt or shame for having crossed ethnic/religious/national boundaries in entering the relationships, over parental objections. The women's life narratives touch upon all these considerations.

Analysis of the women's narratives

Meeting and marrying Arab/Palestinian men

Central to the women's life narratives is the origin story of their relationship with the man who later became their intimate partner. Certain themes and emotional registers feature in this phase of their stories: they describe being swept off their feet by a young man who treats them 'like a queen' and who promises them romantic adventure as well as protection. The narrators understand they are rebelling against their parents' wishes, but the sense of 'being thrilled' (Katz, 1988) by what is unfolding—falling in love—is too alluring to resist; so, they are prepared to sacrifice their ties and comforts. Some courtship narratives, however, note elements of misrepresentation or even deceit that foreshadow where the relationship will soon be headed.

The women's stories depict courtships initiated in everyday interactions in social, institutional, work, or leisure settings. Some women met their partner while they shopped, worked side by side in supermarkets or factories, dined in restaurants, or frequented clubs or bars. Others met their future partner through friends, or in public squares, informal but demarcated places where young people congregate and socialize. Most of the women, who were teenagers at the time, lacked prior dating experience and were naive about dating and romance.

The courtship period was described as the high point in the relationship with their suitor, a time during which he was most attentive to their needs and made them feel special. For women from underprivileged homes, the economic aspect was important. As one woman explained,

> He identified the disadvantaged background I came from and showered me with gifts, nice clothes, and jewelry. I was elated. At long last, I found someone who invests in me.

For others, it was the partner's focused attention and friendship more than any material accouterments that made the relationship attractive. As one woman expressed it,

> Until I met him, I believed that an Arab is the enemy. After meeting him, I realized this is not the case, that it's possible to find a male friend there. And gradually he deeply entered my soul—he learnt everything about me, my sensitivities, my fears and worries, my daily schedule, and he began to prepare the ground for conquering me, for making me his own.

This woman sensed, in retrospect, that she was undergoing a kind of surrender, born of love, trust, and a profound sense of union.

The fact that the women's suitor was an Arab challenged the notion of 'the Other' to which they had previously been exposed. The Arab was no longer 'the one who sells vegetables in the market' or 'the enemy' but a loving, considerate, caring, and attentive human being. For other women, however, the issue was more complicated because misrepresentation of ethnic/religious identity was in play: when some of these women met their suitor, they were unaware of his Arab identity, that is, he claimed to be Jewish or half Jewish. These men introduced themselves with Israeli versions of Arab names such as Yossi—an Israeli nickname for Yossef—as a substitute for Yusuf; or Motti, a nickname for Mordechai, a Hebrew name in place of Muhammad, presumably to avoid being rejected at the outset. As the relationships deepened, the men disclosed their Arab identity. Other women knew their suitor was an Arab but were led to believe he was converting to Judaism. One woman stated,

> I did not know he was Arab. He looked Jewish and spoke perfect Hebrew. Six months after we met, he told me he is Arab and a divorced man with three children. Then he asked me to marry him. Even though my grandmother was killed by (Arab) terrorists in Beit-She'an [a Jewish town in northern Israel], I wasn't raised to hate anybody. So, I decided to marry him without any pangs of conscience, much to the dismay of my family.

The women were falling in love and did not want to sever the relationship just because their suitor was an Arab. As some explained, 'I was not raised to be a racist' or 'My parents always told me that all persons, regardless of religion or ethnicity, are human beings'. Others, however, believed their parents would object to their pursuit of the relationship and initially concealed the partner's identity. Indeed, once the suitor's identity became known, the women from intact homes[17] encountered disapproval from their parents, regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background. About half of the Jewish parents cut off all contact with their daughter, ejecting her from the home. In ultra-religious families, the parents sat *Shiva* (the Jewish custom of observing 7 days of mourning) for their errant daughter. Being so rejected, the women explained, only served to cast them squarely into the arms of their partner.

As the relationship deepened, and it came time to formalize the relationships, the men who initially stated they were in the process of converting to Judaism had an about face, claiming that conversion was too difficult or untenable.[18] Instead, they prevailed upon the women that it would be easier if they were to convert to Islam. Most women viewed their conversion as merely a practical precondition to being able to marry. As one woman put it,

> For me, it was a technical procedure. I converted not because I believe in Islam, and I did not feel that the conversion was going to change my life. I come from a very secular home, and we do not follow religious practices ... As far as I was concerned, he was a good guy who loved me, who treated me well, and it was not a big deal to change my religion for him. So, I converted. It took exactly one minute.

Women who converted described being coaxed into the act. The shift toward converting (as a prelude to marriage) was reinforced by promises of a life of love, happiness, and comfort, pitches that were especially appealing to women who came from challenging circumstances. Marrying would not mean abandoning their previous life, and yet, in other ways their lives would be better. The best of both worlds awaited them, both the familiar as well as something exciting and new. Some partners, for example, explained that wives in Arab society customarily are not expected to work outside the home. One young woman quoted her suitor as saying,

> 'In our community it is not acceptable that a woman works'. He was always surprised that my parents let me work. He said, 'if my sister would go out to work it would be a disaster. With us, the woman gets everything she needs. She does not work; it is the man that makes a living to support her. The woman just sits at home, raises children, and lives like a queen'. I was only 16 and a half, working hard to make a living, and was excited by what he described. So, I resigned from my job, and he took care of me.

The women described a honeymoon phase of the relationship, albeit with some tensions related to their natal families' disapproval. Social workers affiliated with the NGO, who had ample experience observing young women in these situations, noted that the women from Orthodox homes, where strict sexual modesty is enforced, seemed to experience a *frisson* from the 'double rebellion' of having premarital sexual relations, and 'with a *goy*' (a Gentile, or non-Jew) at that. The lingering effects of the rebellious stance colored their engagement throughout the exciting courtship phase. Thus, the NGO's social workers who reached out as part of a well-being check, were typically told 'my boyfriend is different', when they apprised the women of the difficulties associated with mixed intimate relationships, including the challenges women face in highly patriarchal societies.

Patriarchal violence, the new reality, and persistent vulnerability

The women's narratives often cited a turning point in their relationship with their partner that ushered in the period of escalating abuse that would soon follow. The mistreatment described name-calling, denigration with explicit or implied references to the woman's Jewish origin, threats, controlling tactics, use of force, coercive sexual activities, destruction of property, and additional restrictions on freedom, in any combination. The catalyst for the shift in the woman's treatment was the marriage, moving in with him, or the move to his hometown to join him as his spouse. An inkling of what was in store for her occurred when she learned of rules and expectations to which she would soon be held accountable as a married woman, compliance with which would be monitored by both her husband and his family, particularly his mother. A large share of the recounted abuse occurred under the auspices of a system of penalties triggered by putative violations of these gendered rules and expectations, accompanied by a 'piling on' effect whereby the resulting disciplinarity seemingly arrives from all comers. The women's narratives thus highlighted their isolation, unmoored from trusted sources of support, or prohibited from reaching out to the same, and so persistently vulnerable in the face of an unsympathetic collective.

Some women were forewarned that they would have to abide by rules with which they were not accustomed. As one woman who joined her partner's family and community explained,

> He told me that there would be a few things I would need to change, things that maybe I could do around Jewish people, but not Arabs. Like, for a woman, it's prohibited to go outside after dark without permission, and without a companion. [Rules and understandings about] how I should dress and how I should behave and what my place is.

Other women were not forewarned, however. They became aware of the prevailing rules and expectations after arriving at their partner's hometowns. For one woman, it meant that

> You cannot go out by yourself; you are not allowed to talk to anyone; you cannot have a phone. There are lots of things you cannot do.

The women's conduct was now being monitored by their partner, so much so that his presence was just as strong in its absence—by way of an internalized male gaze (Abu-Laban, 2015):

> He was always checking up on who I was talking with and how I was dressed. It became my new normal, my everyday expectation. It felt like he was a constant presence, always shadowing me, limiting what I could do, leaving me without the ability to make choices on my own. He made my choices for me, and I accepted that this was how things were supposed to be.

Nevertheless, it was not always possible to anticipate running afoul of gendered rules and expectations, or the penalties that were viewed by partners as justifiably delivered. Their stories describe themselves as metaphorically traversing a minefield—they were learning of the standards after they violated them:

> My introduction to the new reality I was living began the night he failed to return home until very late and I had gotten very worried. After he finally arrived the following morning, we had a heated argument over the fact that he hadn't told me of his whereabouts. This was the first time he raised his hand against me and said, 'I'll manage my life the way I want, and you're in no position to ask me any questions'. Over time, I learned it was better to not question him, but the violence escalated, nonetheless.

The change in legal status with becoming a married woman was at times characterized as a signal event in the onset of the abuse. This narrator, for example, alluded to how the domestic order and her husband's conduct were licensed by a patriarchal legal and religious order, and not from her husband's will alone:

> Once we got married and the Sharia court notified me that I am now Muslim, his approach to me totally changed. He effectively imprisoned me day and night and told me, 'Now you are married and cannot go out'. Later, he also beat me up every time he decided I did not know how to cook for him.

The women recounted how questioning or disagreeing with their partner, that is, 'talking back', especially in public or in front of family members, could result in horrendous violence. One woman recounted how, after growing alarmed by her husband's not having returned home from work far past his customary time, she walked next door to call him to inquire about his welfare and whereabouts. Upon his return, he beat her in front of their home, in view of neighbors, to ensure that anyone who had seen her walk outside at night knew she had drawn a penalty; he also scolded her for daring to inquire about his whereabouts, saying he was teaching her a lesson: to be patient and remain at home, ready to attend to him at a moment's notice. Going silent could also result in punishment, however: a frustrated woman who went silent, declining to speak with her husband for a while after a dispute, described how she was tied to a tree 'from morning to evening' until she 'learned how to behave', that is, defer to the asymmetrical ordering of genders.

The new reality the women reported having to adapt to pertained not only to the looming threat of violence, but also the sabotage and erasure of practices imported from an earlier life. This was most apparent with religious or spiritual observance. One woman described how her husband went beyond banning her from practicing Jewish customs—he forced her to violate deep-seated Judaic precepts. She explained,

> Before we got married, he promised that when I moved to his village, nothing would change, neither the holidays nor the time I could spend with my family—I would continue to live my life as I had before. In the first year I was a queen [...] But later, when Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement, the holiest day in Judaism] arrived and I wanted to fast, he replied that I was talking nonsense, that it was a regular day: I would have to take the children to school, cook, and eat [i.e., not fast] ... So, as I prepared the meal I wept, and my tears blended with the vapors of my cooking. He also lit up a cigarette and forced me to smoke ... My heart was pounding. I did not sleep all night. I realized that this was the first time in my life I did not fast on Yom Kippur. I begged him to find a solution, but he didn't budge, and threatened to beat me up if I refused to eat or smoke.

Forced severance from religious practice was not the only jarring symbolic violence the women described; they also referenced abusive treatment that ran counter to their expectations for how a husband should treat an expectant wife. For instance,

> After the wedding I got pregnant and his attitude towards me was totally reversed. Instead of telling me how pretty and nice I am, he said 'you're stupid, retarded, you don't know or understand anything'. His mistreatment involved verbal abuse, lots of humiliation, and then it moved to physical violence, from which I also suffered a lot. This is how it went, on and on ...

The motherhood-related sabotage could extend to the naming of the child, an act that in a mixed-marriage may forecast how a child will be raised. Thus, another woman described how, after the birth of their first son, the husband came to the hospital and gave the baby an Arab name. After he left, she added a Hebrew name; when the husband discovered his effort to erase the child's Jewish ties had been reversed, he beat her so severely that she could not walk for a month.

The sense of being symbolically demeaned was also experienced when those women who had relocated to the Palestinian territories found themselves being displaced by a second, younger wife.[19] One woman described how she was ordered by her husband and his mother to vacate the room in which she lived with the joint children, so that her husband's new bride could move in. She and her children had to relocate to the damp basement of the house, where they slept on floor mattresses, without sunlight and fresh air.

The political conflict, military hostilities, and community violence

While the women's abuse and mistreatment seemingly originated from patriarchal social order and gendered rules or expectations, most women perceived the abusers' tone, coupled with references to their Jewish origin and natal family and friend networks, as expressing hostile sentiments connected to the geopolitical conflict. The abuse became explicitly tied to the narrators' association with 'the opposite side' during flare-ups, affecting their emotional well-being and social lives. Although military conflict and terrorism impact the lives of all those living in conflict zones, including Israel (Racin, 2006; Shechory-Bitton and Cohen-Louck, 2021), the ongoing political conflict, and periods of military hostility and national strife, amplified the sense of isolation and precarity associated with the persistently vulnerable position the women found themselves in.

Recalling periods of armed clashes, the narrators described situations in which they minimized communications with their husband's family and lowered their profile in public places. Situated between two worlds at war with one another, one woman's account reveals conscious efforts to preclude confrontations or disapproval:

> I knew that my brother was in the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces], and I worried that he would be injured in battle. During periods of [military hostilities] I refrained from being seen in the Arab village with my children.

While fearing for her brother's well-being, this woman also worried she and her children would get singled out for their familial connection to a member of armed forces deemed the enemy.

Exposure to informal conversation in the family home served as a backdrop for the narrators' self-imposed social isolation and withdrawal. The women felt it difficult to join the breakfast or dinner table, as family members discussed military attacks and fatalities while dining, and they felt left out while their husband and other *hamula* members shared 'hostile solidarity' (Carvalho and Chamberlen, 2018), or exchanged thoughts about fighting 'the Jews'. Armed clashes between Israel and the Palestinians often led to family and community members resenting the women, who reported feeling uncomfortable or guilt by association. Following Arab fatalities or injuries, the women could be castigated for 'what the Jews do to us Arabs'. A woman who lived in the Gaza strip described her experience during the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) 2014 Protective Edge campaign as follows:

> I was at home in Raffah and heard all the missiles landing. I was always afraid during hostilities, even before the war, mostly afraid about my children, as there were no [bomb] shelters in which to hide. And what did my husband and his family do? They cursed the Jews day and night, even when I was present in the room, they just cursed the Jews. I was the only one who stayed silent. What else could I have done?

The narrators living in Jewish majority towns recounted similar difficulties in appearing in public during violent flare-ups. One woman from a majority Jewish city in southern Israel, described how, during the 2015 'lone terrorist knives intifada' that hit the Jerusalem metropolitan area, stabbings of Jewish civilians compelled her to employ conflict avoidance. Such protective measures included keeping children home from school, thereby freeing her from the antagonistic glares she expected to receive from her Jewish neighbors:

> When they had all these stabbings, all these different events, terrorism events, I was afraid to go down with the girls, and for several days I did not take my daughter to the kindergarten.

Although the woman lived far away from where the attacks were taking place, she feared these events had worsened the disdain and mistreatment she, as a woman married to an Arab, expected to receive from fellow Jews during 'normal times'.

The impact of terrorism on family members, particularly mothers, is well documented in Israel (e.g. Shechory-Bitton, 2013; Shechory-Bitton and Cohen-Louck, 2021), but the mothers in the study (80% of the sample) experienced it in a unique way: they found their children making remarks that questioned their heritage, authority, or loyalty, signaling degrees of alienation from their mother or distress about their ancestry. The women recounted having to respond to disturbing expressions and questions coming from their children, who could be apprehensive about their own identity or allegiance. One woman relayed how her child asked her if his Arab father was 'glad that Jewish Israelis were killed in the terrorist attack'. Another woman described how one day her son stormed home, upset and angry, and startled her with his rebuke:

> I asked him what happened, and he responded, 'your family took our land'. So, I asked him, 'who took our land', and he replied, 'you, the Jews, took the land', and when I asked 'which land?' he responded, 'Palestine, this land belongs to us'.

Some narrators mentioned silencing themselves, unable to object as they saw their children rejoicing, with peers or family members, over news of fatalities of Israeli soldiers executing military operations or Israeli citizens killed or maimed in terror attacks.

The armed flare-ups went beyond raising concerns about the narrators' physical security; they also stirred complicated and ambivalent feelings about what these events meant for them, their relations, and their identities and loyalties. The women's descriptions conveyed confronting emotional and psychological conundrums that did not offer clear or satisfactory resolution:

> During the Protective Edge campaign [Israeli military response to continuous missile attacks from Gaza], I cried for both sides. I can't explain it, I am very sensitive about these issues. Sometimes I say to myself, 'For God's sake, people are fighting here over a piece of land that, in the end, nobody is going to take with them to the grave'. Let's just say it the way it is.

Some women recounted how the deaths of fellow Jews reawakened in them primordial ties and associations, while their empathy for the deaths of Arabs/Palestinians prompted grieving for those on the other side of the conflict. Indeed, the distinction between the two groups could seem meaningless, as with the narrator in the preceding excerpt, who had moved to the territories, given birth to half-Arab children, and now saw herself as bound to both parties to the conflict.

Breaking points and separation assault: reaching exit

The women eventually left the relationship. Their narratives depict how the patriarchal violence, and the compounding effect of the political situation, strengthened their resolve to leave. The path toward that resolution was not straightforward, however, and entailed wrestling with equally dismal options centered on their welfare, their children's well-being, and ultimate custody of the children. The decision to leave and the wherewithal to follow through were not necessarily in sync. Whether the women were forthright in their declarations of intent, or acted covertly, they described various failed attempts to separate from and leave their abusive relationships.

The resolve to leave the abusive relationship was rooted in many circumstances, but the women were especially compelled by experiencing the abuse through the eyes of their children:

> One day he punched me in the face. It wasn't the most violent he'd been toward me, but the incident made me understand that I must get up and leave, that this was not the place for me. My blood was flowing and soon I noticed that I was covered with it. My four-year-old son went into the kitchen and returned with a towel and glass of cold water. He said, 'Drink but stay here, I will guard you'. At that moment the point hit me: boom! I understood that this was not where I should be, for I couldn't bear the thought that my son would see such things. I had never seen my father acting violently in our home and I never thought that a child of mine would see such things.

The implications of the violence for the children's welfare and upbringing was often at the center of these turning points, including the fear that the children could possibly become 'collateral damage' as a result of incoming missiles or acts of DV that spiral out of control, but realizations that no one would be rescuing them, that they must take the reins and leave of their own accord, were also important in crystallizing the urgency of getting out.

Regardless of how the women reached the point of 'enough is enough' and decided to separate, most realized that they could not leave without risking serious consequences or penalties. Those women who were forthright about their decision learned that merely raising the issue of divorce caused their partner to become irate and often violent. As one woman explained,

> When I told him that I wanted to divorce, he took a knife, cut my whole body, and told me, 'The day you divorce me you will be dead. A woman does not divorce her husband'.

These women described escalations in the abuse that went beyond what they had already experienced, including one who described how her husband took pliers 'and extracted three of my teeth while I was fully conscious'. Other women described beatings that left them hemorrhaging or even physically disabled after announcing their intentions.

In some cases, the mother-in-law endorsed the violence directed at forthright women, highlighting the role female members can have in preserving a system of marital social control:

> When I told him I wanted to divorce, he did not ask me why or what are you missing in our marriage. Instead, he stood up and hit me all over my face and body. He then grabbed my hair, threw me on the floor, and pulled me by my hair down two floors to his mother. She then cursed me and yelled, 'Who do you think you are, who are you to request divorce? With us, only the man can divorce, you have no right to ask for divorce'.

Women who were overt about their intentions also described receiving threats directed at their parents and siblings. One woman relayed, 'He constantly told me that if I left, he would hurt the person I love most in the world—my mother'. Indeed, in one case, an abusive partner managed it: a woman described how after leaving her partner, he caused her mother to crash her car. The injured mother was brought to the hospital, and upon arriving there to visit her mother, the estranged partner ambushed the woman, and compelled her to return home with him under threat of further escalation.

Notwithstanding the harm that the women risked by overtly announcing their intentions, or that they incurred in failed attempts at fleeing, the paramount concern they described was fearing loss of custody of, and contact with, their children. In Arab society, children commonly remain under the father's guardianship if the mother leaves or is divorced; accordingly, the male partners immediately raised the prospect of the women never seeing their joint children again should they dare to act on their intent or reattempt it. One woman explained,

> After his threat to kill me did not work, he said, 'if you don't straighten up and get in line'—meaning his line—'I'll divorce you and take away the children. You will never see them again'. That night he and his family kept me from seeing my children, so I had no choice but to go back, thinking it's my destiny to live in this hell.

In an escalated version of this scenario, one partner warned his wife that a divorce would result in her losing contact with the kids for another reason:

> He became upset when I told him I wanted a divorce and said, 'if you demand a divorce and ask for custody of the children, you'll get it but then one day you will disappear, and no one will know where you are'.

Ironically, the welfare of the children, and the long-term harm that exposure to an abusive household would cause them, inspired many women's resolve to leave; but, at the same time, the threatened permanent separation from their children effectively kept them tethered to the abusive relationship. It was commonly[20] through a series of fits and starts, including sudden opportunities that they seized upon (e.g. a prolonged absence caused by the husband's being away on business or sent to prison), that the women managed to extricate themselves from the seemingly no-win situation.

Discussion: stories of abuse and narrative victimology

Victim narratives documented how survivors 'understand their own experience and actions in relation to their identity and the wider collectives to which they belong' (Pemberton et al., 2019: 392); they illuminate the moral load of victimization, casting into stark relief how survivors 'experience wrongdoing' (Pemberton et al., 2019: 393), prefiguring their subsequent actions and intentions. Narratives both spotlight a person whose 'sense of self' has been subjected to 'an ontological assault' (Pemberton et al., 2019: 395), but who is also a survivor moving on from that victimization in ways forecast in the story they tell. The outlines of projects related to recovering one's agency, for example, or returning to the fold and resuming a life that had been abruptly interrupted or hijacked, can be heard in such stories, however haltingly. The nexus between life story and victimization is critical for grasping how the survivors located themselves in the 'historical event' of their victimization and its aftermath, incorporating societal and justice system responses to it, as the case may be; the victimization narrative foregrounds ‘issues of self, including self-understanding, self-respect and autonomy’; in it ‘the main actor is the victim’ (Pemberton et al., 2019: 393–394).

Victim narratives also spotlighted the circumstances of their telling and the opportunities they offer to connect with others—those who may offer empathy, assistance, or another kind of shared connection. The women relating their stories of abuse knew that their accounts have a powerful resonance with their present listeners, as well as imagined future audiences. These efforts to project themselves into a shared, supportive community, whether in the present or in the future, were essential to their storytelling, indicating the sense in which these narratives are ‘co-constructed’ (Riessman, 2008). Narrative victimology is also attuned to processes of co-construction in its focus on narrators drawing upon resonant themes and motifs that repair breaches between the survivor and their community, especially if the latter’s reaction to the narrator—before, during, or after the victimization—was indifferent or hostile (Pemberton et al., 2019). The audience becomes a stand-in for that societal reaction, but it is now addressed as at least receptive to empathetic listening and hence open to understanding what the survivor has endured in the past and needs now.

The narratives examined in this study reference the women’s in situ perspectives as they shift over time, from an initial involvement with their soon-to-be partner to the dissolution of their relationship. The narratives offer poignant and dramatic glimpses into a journey, an ordeal, that represents both a breach in their life stories as well as an indelible shaper of them. Theirs are stories of suffering, injustice, and survival; in them, their victimization is serial rather than singular, a process rather than an event, ramifying rather than resolved, even though all the narrators had left their abusive relationships by the time they gave their accounts. Echoing Pemberton et al. (2019), for narrative victimology, the aftermath of the victimization was not easily distinguished from the victimization itself. The women’s identities as survivors could no more be effaced than can their Jewish ancestry.

As structured, in their narratives, the women were actors; even when they seemed to be more acted upon than acting, living besieged lives. Their heightened awareness of the transformations through which they were put, bearing witness to their degradation and denial of agency, functioned as actions: these acts recalled and documented a history of objectification—initially subjects of grooming, later subjects of scapegoating—and ontological assault, and they relived that history now in the hopes that others would not live it later. Indeed, multiple agendas are reflected in these accounts, constituting a scaffolding for the women’s narratives. Their life stories cannot be easily extricated from those agendas, and yet that interweaving of agenda and story renders the women’s agency more apparent. We take our cues from narrative victimology in deciphering this underlying scaffold.

Survivors’ interrupted life stories bear common elements. First, they foreground issues pertaining to identity: the loss, re-surfacing, and recuperation of identity propels much of the narration. The women make sense of who they were, how they were injured, demeaned, and degraded, and what they had to absorb and surmount to reemerge as the narrators of their stories. The women appeared to implicitly understand that their journey was initiated as a wayward, naive, and possibly foolish venture to ‘the other side’, for which they paid dearly; and now they have returned to the flock, bruised, and battered, but willing to share harms endured and reveal wounds unhealed. Thus, the narrative act is itself painful, a kind of sacrifice, an offering to the collective to which they now return and re-anchor themselves.

Second, the narratives are saturated by moral load, that is, a sense of fundamentally unjust wrongs: throughout their sequences, the stories display an accretion of injustices that ultimately engulf the survivors' humanity, reducing them, and at times their children, to objects that can be disregarded without perpetrators experiencing a sense of remorse. Their narratives highlight what outcasts they were, objects of scorn and mockery, but otherwise without meaningful presence. They were scapegoats during wartime, personifications of the reviled enemy subjected to mob harm. So constructed, the narratives likely hold a deep affinity for the audiences encountering them: Israeli Jews, whose collective memory likewise is imbued with historical themes related to discrimination and dehumanization.

Third, the narratives are best viewed therefore as co-constructed, the product of an interaction between speaker and projected listener. These women were either rescued by the NGO's volunteers or were being assisted (along with their dependent children) in their reintegration in Israeli society, a society that previously viewed their relationships with alarm (as indicated by the caller logs detailed above) and apparently not inclined to easily forgive their 'transgression'. The women's narratives in that sense can also be seen as attempts at eliciting empathy for their plight as well as markers of solidarity with and gratitude for the assistance they had been and presumably would continue receiving. The narratives are constructed as much to tell a story of injustice as to make the narrators redeemable to a society that previously rejected them. The 'shattered connection' (Pemberton et al., 2019) to their natal community is thus the implicit recipient of the reparative work the narratives attempt.

Fourth, the narratives derive moral load from another source, namely paradoxes and contradictions that the women wrestled with or puzzled over during their ordeal. The women were alternately deviants and victims, betraying cultural codes governing the social milieus that featured in their stories, while also suffering ever-intensifying forms of abuse. The women worried about their natal family members on the Israeli side of the conflict, while also being concerned with the looming plight of their half-Arab children, producing in them a sense of horror and paralysis in the face of the violence. Their fears for what would become of their children should they stay motivated them to leave, while their fears of what would happen should they lose contact with their children motivated them to remain. Ambiguity around what to think, feel, and do, suffused their existences, and this sense of ambiguity, marred with insecurity and ambivalence, courses throughout their stories.

Summary, limitations, and conclusion

Situated in Israel, with its history of adversarial Arab–Jewish relations, this study incorporates geopolitical conflict—a context of contested territorial claims and a history of inter-ethnic tensions—into the intersectional analysis of DV that is uniquely complicated because the partners were ancestrally tied to opposing sides of the conflict. The mutual suspicion and distrust that many in both Jewish and Arab communities feel toward each other, combined with pervasive fear and anxiety stemming from hostilities between Israel and Palestine, were experienced as an additional layer that exacerbated the domestic abuse. The culturally foreign territory to which most of the women in the study relocated, together with their perceived negative social capital (Bokek-Cohen and Ben-Asher, 2018) as Israeli Jews in their new homes and communities, defined and essentialized them, shaping their experience of mistreatment. In mixed abusive intimate relationships, as this study suggests, the intersecting 'dichotomous oppositional differences' (Collins, 1986: s20) of gender, religion, and nationality, amid an ongoing political conflict, can join and shape how women in mixed couplings experience their partner's abuse, now enabled and extended by his family and community.

Marital life carries potential problems for all couples, requiring both partners to adapt and compromise to maintain their union (e.g. Racin, 2006). Intermarriages, whether interfaith or inter-ethnic, are particularly vulnerable to stress, conflict, and marital dissatisfaction (e.g. Kaplan and Herbst-Debby, 2017). The women's stories reflected how tying the knot and relocating to the partner's family and community subjected them to rejection and loss of support from their natal families and new rules and restrictions dictated by the 'classical patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) that their partner's community practiced. Their narratives reflect the hardships and the violence they endured in running afoul of their hosts' stringent expectations and standards. Their attempts to resist local gendered norms or negotiate compromises resulted in further abuse from the partner that was justified and normalized by his extended family. For the narrating women, the abuse was experienced as animosity that went beyond gender ideology and misogyny: many explicitly stated that they were degraded and mistreated because of their Israeli Jewish identity.

Isolated in their partner's family location, having lost the support of their natal family, and living in a community that constructed them as 'Others', without access to the social support networks that Israelis find vital (Malach-Pines and Zaidman, 2003), the women felt trapped. As many of them did not work outside the home, the economic violence (Postmus et al., 2018) they experienced heightened their dependency, and diminished their ability to resist and prospects of leaving. Periods of military hostilities were particularly difficult for the participants, forcing them to tiptoe around and carefully monitor exchanges among and with family/household members, including their own children. In the end, all the women left their abusive relationships. Yet, as Adelman (2000) has observed about this part of the world, 'women find it difficult to *get* and *be* divorced' (p. 1228). Attempts to separate or divorce, to extricate themselves from marital captivity (Deogratias, 2019), created their own dilemmas and hardships, particularly when children were involved: at times, some or most of the children were left behind due to practical or political barriers.

The study has some limitations: it examines a hard-to-reach population whose size is unknown, making a representative sample of this population unattainable. It employs testimonials gathered by an organization that fights assimilation, opposes intermarriages, and is dedicated to helping Jewish women in mixed relationships. This agenda may result in self-selection processes that skew the narratives in a direction that favors Jewish nationalism over integration. This study also does not report experiences of women in abusive mixed relationships who never leave their partners. Future research should examine testimonials of DV/IPV survivors who utilize the services of NGOs with ideological orientation that is neutral or favor co-existence, and abused women who remain in the relationship.

Yet, the analysis of the sample's stories through narrative victimology, given its interest in stories of abuse, suffering, and injustice, we submit can benefit intersectional feminist criminology. The specificity of social location that grounds intersectional work is strengthened by narrative victimology's close attention to the temporality of experience associated with the life stories of survivors of crime, victimization, and injustice. The emotional and experiential cast associated with particular social locations is illuminated by attending to the contours in such compelling life stories, and the agency animated by narrative acts offers students of victimology a portal through which to appreciate how survivors overcome abuse and move forward while reckoning with the pasts that remain with them.

The intersectional study of DV/IPV in mixed relationships will also be enhanced by inquiry into the role and impact of political enmity amid ongoing political conflict in diverse nations with histories of inter-ethnic conflict and civil unrest, illuminating the attributes, conditions and influences that produce unique vulnerabilities for individuals, families, and communities. Such work promises to further develop and refine an internationally focused narrative victimology in a conflicted, globalized world.

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Notes

1. Intimate partner violence (IPV) involves violence between past or present intimates or dating couples. Domestic violence includes family members beyond intimates, such as parents and children, siblings, or members of a common household.
2. We use the term Israeli Arabs in reference to Arab citizens of Israel, and refer to the Arabs in the Palestinian territories who are not Israeli citizens as Palestinians.
3. According to the Israel Census Bureau of Statistics (2020), aside from the secular plurality (49%), there are Jews who identify as ultra-Orthodox (9%), religious (13%), and traditional (29%).
4. In 2020, the Israeli Arab community consisted of 17.8% Muslims, 1.9% Christians, and 1.6% Druzes.
5. The rate of employment among Israeli Arab women was 40% in 2018, whereas the employment rate among Jewish women was 74%; see https://www.taubcenter.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/labor-market2018overviewheb.pdf
6. About a quarter of the women in the study migrated to the Palestinian territories.
7. Religious and political leaders refer to the assimilation of Diasporic Jews as ‘the silent Holocaust’ (see 13th Knesset, 22 February 1994, Protocol on ways to prevent assimilation in the Diasporas; p. 1300 of Divrey Haknesset, bulletin 10).
8. For example, in the beginning of the second *Intifada (*September 2000—8 February 2005), a Palestinian man named Ziad Al-Kilani from Siris, a village near Jenin in the West Bank, with the help of his Jewish intimate partner, Angelica Yosefov—a new immigrant from Russia—carried out a terrorist mission that killed several Israelis.
9. Sion (2014a, 2014b) discusses cases in which Jewish women in intimate partnerships with Palestinian men, knowingly or unknowingly, assisted the men in their terrorist activities, or shielded them from authorities.
10. DellaPergola (2017), based on the registered marriages in the 2008 census, estimated that there were 770 mixed couples, the overwhelming majority of which (620 couples) were Jewish women and Arab/Palestinian men.
11. Druze Arabs, who are not Muslim, are prohibited from marrying outside their religious group and suffer severe communal sanctions when they do (see Falah, 2018). Out-marriage in this community is therefore rare.
12. Marriages between Arab women and Jewish men are likely to involve highly educated urban residents who hold progressive views (Karkabi-Sabbah, 2017).

13. The non-governmental organization's (NGO) efforts to rescue abused Jewish women trapped in abusive relationships is in keeping with the Jewish commandment (*mitzvah*) of 'redemption of captives' (*pidyon shvuyim*).
14. For instance, Hakak (2015) argues that descriptions of Arab partners as both loving and attentive, and abusive and controlling, are contradictory and hence evidence of racism. Studies of IPV, however, have shown that abusive relationships deteriorate over time, beginning with a romantic phase before devolving into an abusive one, so there is no contradiction at issue. Hakak's (2016) discussion of the mostly 'at risk' women who become involved with Arab men is refuted by the narrators in the current study, who come from both comfortable homes as well as disadvantaged ones.
15. With respect to legal barriers, in Israel, parties to marriages must be of the same religion—there is no civil marriage, so one of the parties must convert to wed. Consequently, many Jewish women do not marry to avoid converting, while others convert but do not register the marriage with the state of Israel for fear of being shamed.
16. About 2% of the callers were communicating about the same woman, that is, one person calling multiple times about one person, or multiple people calling about the same person.
17. Two of the 25 women were not from intact homes. One was street-identified, and the other grew up in foster care.
18. Religious conversion is far likelier to fall upon the Jewish woman than the Arab man because converting to Judaism is demanding and even onerous. In Israel, the only recognized conversion is Orthodox Jewish, which requires intensive study of Jewish law and familiarity with Jewish holidays and customs. Candidates also must prove that conversion is sought out of genuine belief in the righteousness of Judaism and not for utilitarian reasons, such as marriage. By contrast, conversion to Islam requires that the candidate recite the Shahada (Testimony of Faith)—'La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasoolu Allah' (None has the right to be worshipped except God; Muhammad is the messenger of God).
19. Islam allows polygyny—a man can marry up to four wives. This practice can be found in the Palestinian territories and in Israel's Bedouin community, although Israel criminalizes bigamy (Knesset Center of Research and Information, 2013).
20. Several of the women were rescued by the NGO, which organized well-planned para-military operations to evacuate the women and their children from their homes in Arab villages or cities.

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