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ABSTRACT: In recent years there is a growing concern amongst Israeli Jewish-religious sectors in relation to Jewish-Arab couples whose number is supposedly on the rise. In this article, I will analyze three key representations of such Jewish-Arab couples, all written, published, or performed within Jewish religious sectors. These representations portray the relations of such couples as following an almost identical trajectory, from an optimistic beginning to a tragic and violent end. They expose a Jewish religious explanatory model for these relations and their assumed inevitable failure, which is disguised by non-religious, behavioral, social, and cultural terminology, to convince wider audiences, including secular ones, to avoid them. This model exploits as well as feeds into a wider contemporary representations of Muslim men and culture as violent. At the same time, the model exposes religious assumptions that are prominent also among many secular Israeli Jews, making this discourse appealing to wide sections of Jewish Israeli society.

Key words: Israeli, Jewish, Arab, Muslim-Jewish marriages, Orientalism, miscegenation

In the last two decades, conservative Israeli Jewish circles have expressed growing concerns about the number of Jewish women who are in relationships with Arab men. In two recent articles (Hakak 2015a, 2015b) I explored some of the discourses and approaches to the topic presented by Israeli media and Knesset discussions. These articles positioned the Israeli effort to prevent such relations in the wider context of anti-miscegenation efforts in other countries. According to the literature, mixed-faith couples represent one of the best indicators of social distance and separation between groups (Kalmijn 1998). Constructing negative representations of such couples is one of the key means to minimize their occurrence (Breger 1998; Hoewe and Zeldes 2012; Lombardo 1987; Pascoe 1996; Sohoni 2007).

Since actions directly aimed at preventing such relations by creating new laws or educating against them through the state schools system have so far rejected by the Israeli legal system, Israeli Jewish conservative organizations and individuals have explored other avenues. In addition to several dedicated websites, there are many feature and documentary films available online dealing with the subject; most of these were made by committed amateur religious film-makers. Here is just a small sample of their telling titles translated from Hebrew: *The Silenced Dove*,¹ *Women in Palestinian Captivity*,² *A Jewish Girl in an Arab Village*,³ *Gaza’s Beauty Queen*,⁴ *Hell in Marriage*,⁵ *Daughters of Israel—End Assimilation*,⁶ *Daily Life of Jewish Women Living with Arabs*.⁷ In addition to the films, there are also two relatively recent theater productions⁸ and two books, all trying to carry the message to wider audiences. The similarities between all these representations are striking. While preparing this article I reviewed and analyzed these representations, I decided to focus my analysis here only on two books and one of

the theater productions. While echoing many of the claims made in the other representations, all three are much more detailed in the way they portray their characters, and are therefore a much richer source for analysis. Together they reflect common shared perceptions and ways of thinking about this topic. The first of these books, *Between Two Mountains*, by Adi Paz, was published in 1995; the second, *Captives*, by Ora Hetzroni, was published in 2013; the theater production, *Meoravot: On Two Sides of the Border* (*Meoravot* from here on) was written by Dvir Shreiber and performed for the first time by the Aspaklaria theater group in 2014. Both the theater production and the recent book claim to be based on real cases. All three representations include many separate stories but they follow a similar narrative. Many of the stories are told from the point of view of women. Almost all the sub-characters, as well as the minor characters, express negative views about Jewish-Arab couples and their prospects. Often these views are either clearly religious or racist, but these are not the views of the main characters—the Jewish women—who are much more positive, at least initially. These stories portray the journey the Jewish female protagonists go through. Starting from a liberal, secular, and pluralist worldview, through the bitter realization of the “inherent” violent nature of their male Arab partners, their Arab families and culture, and to the final recognition of their own “true” Jewish religious self.

*ORIENTALISM, REPRESENTATIONS OF JEWISH-ARAB COUPLES,
AND MORAL PANIC*

The recent decade has seen a substantial increase in media and public attention directed towards a relatively very small number of Jewish-Arab couples. Fogiel-Bijaoui (2018) reviewed the Israeli media’s response to one such high-profile couple who got married in August 2014. She found three main discourses in relation to this event: the “human rights” discourse, the “romeo and juliet” discourse, and the “assimilation” discourse (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2018). The “assimilation” discourse, central to this article, is strongly promoted and encouraged by the relentless activities of several religious newspapers who are linked with organizations committed to preventing Jewish assimilation and mixed marriage. The main organizations are Yad Le’achim, Lev Le’achim, and Lehava, all specializing in “rescue operations,” during which they extract Jewish women from Arab population centers. These organizations which are committed to preventing Jewish assimilation collect “data” that are often reported unquestioningly by mainstream media, thus enhancing the fear of an imminent assimilation catastrophe. One such piece of “data” from 2011 argued that about 500 Jewish women are “kidnapped” every year and held in captivity in Arab villages. This assertion was the reason for the Israeli Knesset’s Parliamentary Committee on Immigration, Absorption and Jewish Diaspora to hold an emergency meeting on December 8, 2011. Since more than a few Israeli members of parliament collude with these religious organizations and so do more than a few journalists, the impact of such “data” is enhanced and contributes to a continuous moral panic. As described by Cohen (1972) what characterizes a moral panic is the massive exaggeration of prevalence and negativity of a social phenomenon, resulting in an inappropriate reaction to it. There are several potential explanations for this moral panic, starting with how successful it proves to be in increasing the flow of donations and the number of new members asking to join organizations such as Yad Le’achim. But such moral panics often serve the needs of much wider parts of society, including by displacing attention from a real problem into the “folk devil” at the center of the moral panic. In this case, there is good reason to think that the related real problem for Israeli religious Jews is the inability of Jewish Orthodoxy to find an appropriate solution to 300,000 people who immigrated to Israel following the collapse of the USSR under the “Law of Return.”

These people were seen as “Jewish enough” by the state, but not by the orthodox rabbis who control Jewish religious courts. These 300,000 people therefore suffer multiple marginalization in contemporary Israel, as immigrants and as not Jewish according to Jewish orthodoxy. This last point prevents them from getting married as Jews in Israel and further marginalizes them (Sheleg 2004). Many of the women in mixed relations are from this group.

Another potential explanation for this moral panic is its ability to help in raising the walls segregating Jews and Arabs at a time in which limited geographical space shared by both becomes more crowded. Both populations have high growth rates and increasing numbers of both Israeli Arabs and Jews are going through higher education and are moving to the big cities in search for work, where they interact with each other more often.

While there is relative lack of academic research about real Jewish-Arab couples in Israel, the topic seems to fascinate secular filmmakers and authors. Such couples have been featured in a series of films (Loshitzky 2001; Morag 2010; Stein 2010; Yosef 2002) and novels (Loshitzky 1994; Oppenheimer 1999) and these have been analyzed by several scholars.

Loshitzky (1994, 2001) analyzed the representations of such couples in Israeli literature and observed that, “the more violent the Israeli/Palestinian conflict became, the more frequently the taboo on inter-racial relationship was transgressed” (Loshitzky 1994, 109). Several studies (Loshitzky 2001; Morag 2010; Stein 2010; Yosef 2002) analyzed the representations of Jewish-Arabs relations in films, and included a substantial focus on gay relations. Yosef (2002) mentions a series of Israeli films featuring heterosexual mixed relations made during the 1980s by members of the Ashkenazi secular cultural elite who objected to the Likud’s government policies “in an attempt to critique and subvert anti-miscegenation discourses” (Yosef 2002, 554). Yosef explains in the introduction to his article that:

In the Israeli social psyche, miscegenation gives rise to fears of racial, sexual, moral, physiological and national decay and degeneracy, because it poses a threat to Jewish “purity” and dominance and so fuels the desire to maintain the binary oppositions between colonizer and colonized, “civilized” and “savage”, Israeli and Palestinian . . . The Israeli female body is perceived in this context as national property beckoning to the enemy within. Like the “primitive” male Other, the woman is seen as a threat to the very existence of the Jewish nation. (Yosef, 2002, 553)

As a minority religion, Judaism has always been very concerned about assimilation. Preventing such assimilation requires maintaining the separation between Jews and members of other religions. Such separation is maintained in Israel through the different educational systems for Jews and Arabs, as well as through separated cities, towns, and villages. Even mixed towns like Haifa or Jerusalem have largely separated areas which are known as “Jewish” or “Arab,” and the population in each area rarely comes to know closely inhabitants in other areas. Whereas most young Jewish Israelis are recruited to the army at the age of 18, the vast majority of Israeli Arabs are not. They are seen as a potential security threat.⁹ Such separation continues later on in the labor market. Another issue that distinguishes the texts analyzed here is that they do not relate to sexuality. While each of the relations described in the two books and theater production ends in ruins, the problems in such relations and the reasons for their failure have very specific features. I would like to argue that these representations also expose a religious deterministic view, shared also by many secular Israelis, according to which predetermined and essential roles are forced on both Jews and Arabs with no escape. These representations tell us a lot about the way in which religious Jewish authors would like their readers/viewers to view Arabs and Islam, and how they construct their own identities in relation to these.

Such representations echo perceptions that have existed for many years in the academic literature on mixed couples and which mainly emphasized the difficulties and challenges such couples face and their negative consequences (Byrd and Garwick 2004; Wilczek-Watson 2017). Such couples were often presented as experiencing a “cultural clash” and as representing “stereotyped, essentialised cultures, traditions, languages and thus identities, which are fixedly different and perpetually clash” (Wilczek-Watson 2017, 4).

To understand the particular ways in which such couples were presented, we also need to take into account recent research about the way Western and Israeli media have been representing Islam (Moore, Mason, and Lewish 2008; Poole 2002; Ramji 2007). These studies have helped uncover the stereotypes that are often found in such representations, and the overall tendency to present Islam and Muslims with limited and negative connotations. Such images portray Muslims as a homogeneous group which is mentally backward, irrational, unchanging, fundamentalist, misogynist, and manipulative in the use of religion and faith towards gathering political power. Within the framework of this cultural essentialism, the reason for the range of negative features is not biology, but the specific culture, which is portrayed as permanent and unchanging (Barker 2001; Donald and Rattansi 1992; Grillo 2003).

METHODOLOGY

In preparing this article I reviewed and analyzed a wide range of representations but decided to present the findings using two key books and a theater production. These representations provide a much higher level of detail in their descriptions, allowing us to clearly understand how the authors see each stage in such relationships and each one of the spouses in it. That level of detail is missing from other representations which still share the same overall message. In the case of all three representations, the affinity that the authors have with the organizations combatting such mixed relations is clear. Members of these organizations feature as heroes of many of these stories. Paz’s book was published in 1995 by the Haredi organization Lev-Le’achim which is committed to preventing Jewish assimilation; Hetzroni, the author of the more recent book (2013), is married to Harel Hetzroni who served as the Operations Officer of Yad Le’achim organizations and participated in many “rescue operations” of such women. Hetzroni’s book reflects some of the changes that occurred in Israeli Jewish society since Paz’s book was published in 1995. Two of the main stories in Hetzroni’s book revolve around women who initially hold very liberal views, which were not as common back in 1995. But, in line with the essentialist perceptions of both authors, the deeper characteristics of both Jewish and Arab societies and individuals remain the same in both books.

The theater production *Meoravot: On Two Sides of the Border* by Dvir Shreiber and the Aspaklaria Theater (2014) is supposedly based on evidence collected by the same organization. Aspaklaria Theatre presents itself as the first Jewish theater in Israel aiming at introducing Jewish content to secular, religious, and ultra-orthodox audiences. It is difficult to assess the level of exposure that any of these representations have had. The theater production, *Meoravot*, was reviewed by Arutz 7, an online news and content provider popular among religious and conservative Jews. The review describes the show as “complex and powerful,” but no questions are raised in relation to any of its content and claims (Finkler 2014). Out of these three representations, the book by Hetzroni from 2013 received wider publicity and very positive reviews by mainstream media outlets serving many secular Israeli Jews. For example, Mako conducted an interview with Hetzroni and her husband quoting her diagnosis of the current predicament of Israeli society in the title of the piece: “if we are not connected with our roots, we have a problem” (Cohen 2014). Both Hetzroni and her husband are

hailed in this article and others as humble heroes providing an extremely important service. Not even a hint of criticism can be found.¹⁰

The fact that such media coverage was never critical in any way and only congratulated the author for her achievement implies that the perceptions presented in the book are shared more widely by many non-religious Israelis. Such perceptions connected to the “threat of assimilation” and the need to “safeguard vulnerable girls” from Arab predators were one of the three main themes identified by Fogiel-Bijaoui as dominating Israeli media discourse on these issues (2018).

Both books were purchased. The script for the play was sent to me by Aspaklaria Theater. I have read each of these texts several times and used thematic analysis to identify key themes. The themes are in fact, key stages through which these relations develop across these representations and many others: from an optimistic beginning to a bitter end. In that respect, the themes just follow the narrative line. Specific sections were then chosen for discourse analysis to explore use of language and argumentation.

FINDINGS

Meeting an Arab

Jewish women in such relations, according to the books analyzed, usually live in a city, whereas the men in most cases come from a village.¹¹ The women are socially marginalized and in a time of personal and emotional crises. Michelle is a new immigrant from France; Yasmin is an only child raised by her mother, and Revital has just returned from a long journey abroad to her working-class parents’ home and finds that her childhood friend is missing. They are all experiencing deep loneliness and sadness, if not depression, at the time they get involved with the Arab man. They are also portrayed as acting out their anger and frustration and being driven by an illogical and destructive youth rebellion and “false consciousness” shaped by contemporary popular and materialistic secular culture.¹² These women are also younger, at times much younger, than their partners. All of these details are meant to bring the readers to perceive these young women as emotionally unstable and to question their ability to make an informed and reasoned decision when they choose to link their future with these Arab partners. In addition to their marginalized background and emotional instability, their difficulties are portrayed as exacerbated by the generational gap between them and their conservative parents whose views they see as outdated:

“You are racists!” I shouted at my parents. “You don’t have even a drop of tolerance. There will never be peace if we continue to isolate ourselves. What’s wrong with knowing a different people, living with it? Tayseer’s family is warm and loving, like ours. They also work, study, shop, build. They aren’t aliens. Contrary to you, they welcomed me as a guest of honor . . .” (Hetzroni 2013, 29–30)

Such arguments between the girls or women and their parents are more common in the second and more recent book (Hetzroni 2013) and echo the equality discourse young Israelis are exposed to. On many occasions the girls and women accuse their parents, teachers, or other adults warning them against such relationships, of being “racists,” “backward thinking,” or “primitive.” Such claims are important. They signify what is considered acceptable and unacceptable discourse among contemporary young secular Jewish Israelis. The authors have to comply with such limitations if they want their message not to be rejected outright. In

addition to the need to avoid telling stories that will portray Arab men and culture in a racist light, the authors must also tell stories that will appeal to secular readers, as this is the background of most of the young women in such relationships.

The “Annoying” Distinctions of Nationality and Religion

A significant number of the cases in both books are young secular Jewish women. They challenge the importance ascribed to religious and national distinctions by other adults, both Jews and non-Jews. Rikki, who is almost 16, is very ambivalent regarding the marriage offer she has just received from Tayseer. To her friends she pretends to be delighted, but inside she is “trembling out of fear . . . My heart was wailing . . . Mommy, save me!”

She is frightened that:

I am going to be erased, disappear, say goodbye to the Jew in me and to anything Jewish that I knew. . . and what am I going to be now? I didn’t know. I convinced myself that it isn’t that bad and nothing will happen: what separates me from my peers from Taibe¹³ which we met during a recent (school) activity day? I really connected with one of the girls. She had a thick long braid, a nice scarf on her shoulders. We spoke endlessly. I discovered a world, similar to mine . . . Why can’t I just be Rikki and she, Nora, and that’s it, without the disturbing nationality, the annoying definitions and distinctions? (Hetzroni 2013, 27–8)

Here the author leads us to differentiate between Rikki’s real fears of losing her “true” self and the arguments she used to “convince[] myself that it isn’t that bad.” These liberal humanist arguments are not challenged head on, but already presented as questionable. In another attempt to settle her doubts Rikki goes to meet the principal of her school who is concerned about her deteriorating achievements and attendance records. She tells him she is getting married to an Arab Muslim and he is shocked. The principal raises a series of objections including the cultural difference and the fact that “some Arabs hate us.” These are rejected as insignificant by Rikki. She then says (Hetzroni 2013, 31–2): “You taught us in citizenship classes that we should aspire to be a ‘State for all its Citizens’, without distinctions of nationality or race. Why is it so hard for you when I personally choose to create the bridge between our two nations?”

The principal doesn’t have a good enough secular reply and he only says that “maybe if you were over 25 years old I would have seen it differently. . . but if my daughter would do that, even if she would have been 100 years old, I would have tied her up and removed her by force, away from this trouble.” To explain why, despite what he taught her, he finds such relations so problematic, he adds:

Because we are Jews. . . We are a different people, a people who lives on its own, separated. We were not able and we will not be able to mix in with the world. Generations have tried and it ended with the Inquisition and in concentration camps. Someone wants us very much to remain what we are, that we don’t assimilate and disappear from the map of the world. (Hetzroni 2013, 32)

The principal’s response accurately exposes the apprehension most Israelis feel about such relations, as well as the deeply rooted pessimism towards the possibility of a peaceful coexistence with non-Jews. When asked to explain his views, the principal who is described

as secular¹⁴ ends up using deterministic and religious arguments. According to the principal, such marriages are against the will of a higher entity—which we can only assume is God—and will end up badly. But Rikki still isn't convinced and goes ahead with the marriage.

Michelle finds herself arguing with her mother about the same topic (Hetzroni 2013, 58–60). The mother decides to share with Michelle for the first time that both she and Michelle's father have survived the Holocaust, and starts describing her experiences during it. But Michelle rejects her mother's confession and says: "why would you bring up this topic now? It causes you pain and it doesn't add much to me. I got used to that we are people without a past and that it isn't needed. . . ." This rejection of the past and of the distinctions based on religion and nationality, as part of it, are portrayed as a secular liberal tendency. Here these arguments are being put forward by a young Jewish woman from a European background. But as each of these stories develops, these women dramatically change their relationship towards their Jewish identity and Jewish history and their new reality is presented as perceived by them as a repetition of the Jewish fate of being persecuted.

Warm, Generous, and Attractive Men

The men in the stories are described, at least in the initial stages, as sensitive to their needs, generous, and protective (Paz 1995, 8–14). In addition, these men are very often described also as charismatic, confident, and good-looking:

Long mane of hair in a pony-tail, wide shoulders, tanned skin, sculpted face. Free flowing cash. He chose me, a fifteen year old! . . . over all the girls in the best club in town . . . My friends told me that evening that I'm the luckiest girl in the world . . . and the fact that he's an Arab—leave this nonsense to primitive religious people . . . (Hetzroni 2013, 20)

Such portrayals of Arab men as sensuous are in line with the Orientalist and Hebrew literature (Oppenheimer 2008, 9–17). These relationships develop quickly, as in Michelle and Mika's story. Michelle recently immigrated to Israel from France in order to serve in the army. She finds it difficult to adjust and is lonely. Every Friday she goes to the lively Carmel Market as she has no family to visit. One of the merchants, Yoseph, spots her and one day arrives at the gate of her army base with a big generous basket of fruit. He tells her about his cousin, Mika, who works in a bank, studies French, and is looking to hire a tutor. She agrees to tutor Mika. Here is what follows:

Mika's head worked well. The guy invested all his energy and time and practised the material . . . and the language settled nicely in his brain. Fridays became good days . . . Little sweet gifts came out of his bag with his notebooks, and flowers decorated their table at the coffee shop. Michelle noticed that many people knew Mika . . . and they often greeted him with "ahlan and sahan, mister Mika". "These are my customers from the bank", he explained humbly. "I do my best to give a good service. . . People wait especially to see me even when other clerks are free". Mika had charm and Michelle was swept away by it. Mika was swept away by Michelle just as much. An expensive mobile phone as a thank you for the lessons—and so that they can be "in close contact, as I have to hear your voice"—proved that a beautiful love is developing between these two young people. (Hetzroni 2013, 53)

In the texts analyzed here, the charismatic, sensuous, and generous character of Arab men is only a disguise for a much more sinister character that is only gradually manifested. The fast pace at which these relationships develop in the stories, usually without approval from the young women's/girls' family and friends, is depicted as part of an intent to disconnect the young women from their Jewish surroundings in order to control them. The narrator's tone is constantly suspicious and hints at the manipulative character of Mika and the gifts he gives which are only meant to help him lure Michelle and control her actions.

Mika is in Fact, Mahmud

One expression of the more sinister and disguised character of Arab men in the stories is their dishonesty commonly expressed in their attempts to pass as Jews by using non-Arab names. After Roger proposed to Yasmin, he then tells her that his real name is in fact Saeed, and that he is an Arab (Paz 1995, 6); In the play *Meoravot*, Sarit discovers that Asi's real name is in fact, Ishmael. This is how this issue is presented by Hetzroni (2013) through the relations between Michelle and Mika: the couple fall in love and Mika asks her to marry him. Michelle agrees. Mika then tells her that there is one thing he didn't tell her yet: he is an Arab. His real name is Mahmud. Initially she is deeply insulted and angry, wondering if all the rest was also a lie. This is Mika/Mahmud's response:

“No, Michelle, no”, tears were pouring from Mika/Mahmud's eyes. “I was afraid to tell you; afraid that you will leave me. . . This was an ugly lie. If you don't forgive me, I will understand, just know that Mika and Mahmud is the same human being”.

“This is true”, Michelle thinks. “I like Mika as a person, not because of his nationality. Has anything changed really?” she wonders. (Hetzroni 2013, 54–5)

Mahmud also explains that he would like to convert to Judaism and had begun to inquire about the process. Eventually Michelle calms down and decides to marry Mahmud. He goes to classes in Judaism and puts a lot of effort into his conversion plan though this is a long process. Mahmud's family “didn't put pressure on the couple to move, as is the custom, into the parents' house,” and during the first three years, Mahmud and Michelle enjoyed autonomy raising their children Amir and Lian without intervention.

Gradually, Mahmud's plan to convert into Judaism becomes sidelined by the demands of family life and work at the bank, but “for Michelle this is no longer important. She grew to know his kind heart and his accepting and liberal way of thinking. His respect for her erased any doubts” (Hetzroni 2013, 57).

These sequences will become important later on in the story. They help stress that even several years of harmonious relationship are no guarantee against the bitter end that is surely to follow.

On the Other Side of Marriage

In all the stories, the men's behavior and attitude towards their Jewish women change drastically around the time of marriage, and especially once the couple moves in with the husband's family. Here is how events unfolded for Michelle and Mahmud: after three idyllic years Mahmud's family demands that the couple moves to live next to them. The family is wealthy so they build a new apartment for the couple. The couple moves in and Michelle struggles to adapt to the new culture. Growing up as an only child to middle-class parents in France, she doesn't know how to cook; she's slow in doing chores and is described as lazy and spoiled by

her Arab family. From now on, Mahmud takes the same critical line towards Michelle as his family and demands Michelle quickly change: “you have to show everyone that you are quick, clever, submissive, happy and patient. If you will be clever, they will love you, if you continue as you are, I don’t envy you”.

Michelle is shocked by this dramatic change (Hetzroni 2013, 62–3), just like Jasmin (Paz 1995, 65) who reflects: “Is he the same person she met in Tiberia? What happened to that gentle and understanding person?” For Michelle, things go downhill very quickly from here and shortly after the couple moves into their new apartment, Michelle is summoned for a family gathering where she is falsely accused by Mahmud’s father of damaging the parents’ living room carpet that she was asked to clean the day before. As a punishment she is flogged by Mahmud’s father in front of all of Mahmud’s brothers. In order to teach her submission, Mahmud’s older brother orders her to serve him a drink, but Michelle tells him to ask his own wife instead. In response to her “audacity,” she is then beaten by Mahmud and all of his brothers. Bleeding she is carried away to her room and the family doctor treating her is told she slipped down the stairs.

Things only get worse and Michelle’s mental and physical well-being continues to deteriorate until she finds herself separated from her husband and children. She is held captive in a remote apartment used by Mahmud’s family members working in construction in a southern city, and is in charge of making food for them and washing their clothes. Effectively she is being held as a slave. This is part of her re-education as a submissive woman. If she will comply, she is promised, she will be allowed to see her children again. Driven into madness by her conditions, in a frenzy she manages to run away and finds shelter. Madness as the outcome of inter-racial relations is a common theme both in secular Israeli representations as well as in European colonial representations (Loshitzky 1994, 101–2). In these cases, Westerners “lose their mind” due to the destructive power of sexual passion, the Id that overcomes the Ego. In the Jewish religious representations, where sexuality and passions are not discussed, extreme physical and psychological violence is the cause.

Violence as an Inevitable Part of Arab Culture

Throughout the two books, theater production, and other representations, Arab men and culture are portrayed as inherently violent and as obeying only the law of honor. While it is clear that the authors see the “backward” village mentality as part of the reason for this, the violent tendencies are so deeply rooted that even Arabs living in towns and cities aren’t healed from it. Here is Revital’s description of her abusive partner, after she managed to flee from him: “I thought that the reason he decided to live in the city is that he is more cultured. . .” (Paz 1995, 259). The violent tendencies are connected to the culture that is perceived as backward. It seems that even moving into the city can’t change these “deeply imbedded cultural tendencies.” In *Meoravot* (Dvir 2014), after he has physically attacked his wife, Sarit, Ismail’s mother reassures Sarit: “sure he loves you, it’s just to teach you. . .”

In one of the other stories in Paz’s book (1995, 253–5), Yasser and his Jewish wife, Inna, get along extremely well and Inna is the only wife who isn’t physically abused in any way. But then one day, out of nowhere, her husband murders his uncle, as if these deep violent urges must express themselves one way or another.

Having a Choice

Before moving back in with his family, Mahmud’s life choices indicated that he was not a conformist: despite being the youngest brother he left his parents’ home, leaving his older brothers there (Hetzroni 2013, 62). Marrying a Jew despite some disapproval from his father

and his plans to convert to Judaism were additional indications of that. But, after moving back in with his family, Mahmud loses any ability to resist his family and wider society's demands concerning his wife. From now on, he conforms. When Mahmud comes to see Michelle after the incident described earlier, he says: "My sweetheart, forgive me, I didn't know that my father is angry with you. What could I have done? If I had protected you, my honor would have been trampled." The readers are led to understand that Mahmud is also a prisoner of his society's rules and codes of behavior. Women are seen as property and expected to be submissive to their husbands. Therefore, once a Jewish woman joins in and doesn't conform, there is a tension. This will require "educating" her, which in all the stories involves violence. Physical violence as part of living with Arab men and within Arab society is presented in all the stories as inevitable. Violence seems to be a predetermined destiny that will eventually erupt. Often the physical violence is enacted by the husband in the name of his family and wider society. On other occasions it is enacted by family members with the husband's support or at least lack of resistance. In any case, the husbands are never portrayed as protecting their wives or taking their side, and violence always ensues. Such descriptions regularly refer to cultural differences as the cause. This allows the portrayal of Arab men not as murderous monsters driven by desire to inflict pain, but as "victims" of the violent tendencies of their own culture. Such portrayals provide a more "nuanced" and "reliable" explanation of why such relationships must be avoided.

In contradiction to the way Arab men are described, Jewish women are portrayed throughout as able to choose. Indeed, according to the stories, many of them make bad and destructive choices to start with. In the name of liberal humanistic values, they distance themselves from Jewish tradition. But their plan doesn't work out. Higher powers force them back to acknowledge and connect with their "real" identity. Often these realizations occur during the worst part of "captivity" in the Arab "jail," after disconnecting themselves from their Jewish family and society. When they are lonely and abused, they realize that they can't escape their Jewish fate. Naomi, for example, is described as "a lonely Jewish soul yearning for her people," living in Gaza, and celebrating Passover with her son, in secrecy and for the first time (Paz 1995, 111–112).¹⁵

Such realizations are in these stories a source of empowerment and clarify for many of these women what they need to do. Through realizing how Arab society and their own husbands see them, many of the women in the stories then connect to their Jewish identity. This is what Mahmud says about Michelle before he sends her to be "retrained" as a submissive Arab woman:

"You are a Jew in your essence. Talk like a Jew, cook like a Jew, think like a Jew".

In reply Michelle says: "I don't even know what it is to be a Jew. What are you talking about? If anything—a French woman is more like it". This felt ridiculous. She saw herself as a global citizen, without nationality and a specific affiliation. What do they see? What exists in her without her being aware of it? Mahmud explains: "The way you talk, your thinking, and most of all—your eyes—this stubborn look that doesn't give up or accept" (Hetzroni 2013, 177–8)

By his words Mahmud confirms that, even if Michelle sees herself as a French woman, her Jewishness is flowing out of her through her look, her way of speaking, moving, thinking, and her actions. It seems like Michelle and other such women are destined to be different in the Arab society they are trying to blend into. Such realizations increase the feeling of isolation and loneliness, but under these difficult conditions, Jewish religion and tradition turn out to be a

source of empowerment and resilience. When Rikki's first daughter is born she decides to call her Rachel. She remembers a story that was told to her by her grandfather when she was a little girl and terrified during a wind storm. He introduced her to Rachel, the biblical hero so she can "meet a heroine who wasn't afraid fighting evil." Her grandfather explained that Rachel's source of courage was that she simply trusted God. This childhood memory and the heroism of Rachel, one of the four Jewish mothers, empower Rikki in her moments of fear and despair and is the beginning of a process of coming closer to her Jewish identity and of understanding that her mistake was disregarding her Jewish origin and tradition.

Their ability to choose to return to Judaism and change the wrong path they have taken, in Rikki's case as well as in others, is highlighted as an indication of their unique strength. This is where their autonomy and agency is celebrated by the authors. Hetzroni's opening to her book (2013, 8) is written as a letter to Rikki, one of the women in the book: "I did everything to disguise your identity, but I kept the essence. I kept my appreciation of you, for that despite everything you went through, you continued to choose and didn't run away". Further appropriate choices of many of these women is coming back into the faith and remarrying to Haredi¹⁶ Torah scholars. Marrying an Arab man was only a step.

Your Children Will Become Terrorists

As if the threat of being the victim of marital violence isn't sufficient, many of the stories portray a uniquely grim life for the children of such couples, expecting them to turn into terrorists, criminals, or if they are lucky, returnees into the Jewish faith. Such reality is depicted in Paz's book. Naomi the Jewish mother had her first son grow up as a Muslim in Gaza but he then returns to Judaism; the other son turns out to be a violent terrorist wanting to kill all Jews (Paz 1995, 105). A similar destiny is at the center of the theater production *Meoravot*, depicting the meeting between a Jewish mother and her daughter from her abusive Arab partner. She escaped her husband but was forced to leave one of her daughters behind. This daughter grows up with her Arab dad and during her late teens joins a terrorist organization. She is then captured by the Israeli General Security Service who invites her Jewish mother to meet with her. The daughter who grew up on the Jewish side explains her sister's actions and says: "all my life I had to prove that I'm not an Arab, that I'm a good Jew and that I hate Arabs. This is why you joined Hamas, right? To prove that you are a good Arab, correct?" As daughters to a Jewish mother and a Muslim father both sisters are Jewish according to Judaism and Muslim according to Islam. This point shapes the way in which even the most religiously fundamentalist and extreme decisions—such as the daughter's decision to join Hamas and become a terrorist—are explained. In this case as well as in other similar cases, the explanations, such as the one offered above by the sister, are very psychologically logical and human, and describe a set of circumstances which forced the person into making the decision, distinguishing it from a portrayal of inhuman evil which would have been rejected by the target audience.

An unintended novelty of these representations is the way that they challenge the readers' perceptions of the categories "Jew" and "Arab" and what separates them. This is especially evident when these children who occupy a gray zone between the two categories need to choose their identity. They can either be a Jew and join the Jewish people or a Muslim and join the Muslim world. Importantly, focusing on the ability to choose as what makes the difference—not certain innate biological or cultural predetermined components—questions the essential nature of these distinctions and shakes up such categories.

CONCLUSIONS

The representations of Jewish-Arab couples by Israeli religious Jewish authors is directed towards wider audiences beyond the Jewish religious minority. For this reason, these representations use more neutral terminology and argumentation which include references to psychological, sociological, and cultural factors. Brought together, these factors create a model which is meant to explain the “inevitable” dynamics that lead all such mixed relationships towards a dreadful violent end. This model explains the motivations of both partners to start the relations, how these relations develop, and the complicated dynamics that lead to their violent later stages.

I have shown how both Arab men and Jewish women are presented as being trapped in a predetermined essentialist script that repeats itself in an almost identical way. The women are presented as vulnerable, superficial, and easily led by the charisma of Arab men and the superficial attraction they have towards them. While the authors show us the imminent signs that things aren't right, the women are too naive to notice this until much later. Starting from a secular liberal point of view, the women gradually realize that, even if they are totally disconnected from their Jewish roots and identity, Arab society around them still treats them differently and as Jewish. They are discriminated against, abused, and imprisoned. During their captivity they also realize that their Jewish identity is their main source of empowerment and resilience, which leads them to embrace their Jewish identity and reconnect with their “true Jewish self.” This is their first step towards returning to the Jewish people and faith.

Just like the women, Arab men are also trapped in a predetermined script. Their motivations include the desire to hurt the Jewish people through marrying its daughters and converting them and their children to Islam. But this motivation is relatively marginal. Much more important in this context is their inability to avoid violence. What is central for these relations as presented in the texts is the cultural tension between Jewish women and their new Arab family and wider community who perceive them as lazy and spoiled. According to these texts, this inevitable tension requires “re-educating” or “training,” which always involves violence. Whereas Jewish women are portrayed as having an agency that eventually allows them to choose and embrace their Jewish identity after realizing they cannot ignore it any longer, Arab men are lacking it. Even those who initially were portrayed as free thinkers and uncommitted to their Arab culture and community, never protect their wives from their own families' demands to “straighten” their straying Jewish wives, including through harsh physical chastisement. The bottom line here is the assumption that a relationship with an Arab man, especially marriage, is bound to end up in severe physical and mental abuse and with children who are at high risk of becoming terrorists or drug addicts. While these representations were created by religious authors, many of their assumptions are shared more widely by many other Israelis who see themselves as secular, but are deeply suspicious of non-Jews and the possibility of coexistence with them. In an age where “religious fundamentalism” and acts of religious violence are often equated in Israeli as well as Western eyes with Islam, Jewish religious sectors can easily mobilize and further enhance such sentiments. By distancing themselves from fundamentalist Islam and emphasizing its portrayal as violent, the authors of the texts analyzed can enhance their communities' image as “civilized” and more developed, and thus help to prevent inter-faith relations and maintain social boundaries.

ENDNOTES

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1tTqD1R7EM>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BsIz41enbc>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-wNwoCyCqg>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJZWhz4s958>

⁵ <https://www.sodot.tv/video.php?id=1397>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtFHcq4quoQ>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqBqpl6Mzmg>

⁸ *Until the End of the World* by Lehisia Theater and *Meoravot: On Two Sides of the Border*, written by Dvir Shrieber and performed by Aspaklaria Theater. Both theaters are popular within the religious-nationalist and the Haredi minorities. These two productions are open only to women. Both productions claim to be based on thorough research and real cases collected by the Yad Le'achim organization.

⁹ Indeed there are Druze and Bedouin as well as some Israeli Arabs who are recruited, but they are still a small minority.

¹⁰ http://www.mako.co.il/spirituality-popular_culture/Article-7c1e963c07b9341006.htm

^{See} also the interview published in *Ynet* (Farkash 2013) which lacks any critical questioning or challenging: <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4401957,00.html> as well as the article in the online religious news-site Eretz Binyamin: <https://binyamin.org.il/newspaper/?parent=6125>

¹¹ Such portrayals were typical to early Hebrew Yeshuv literature and include the heavy associations of cities with “advanced” culture and the village with its opposite (Oppenheimer 2008, 12).

¹² Tayseer offers to marry Rikki and shocks her as she’s only 16 and very ambivalent. Then he invites her to come with him to buy her a dress at Castro: “I straightened up. When you hear ‘Castro’ you don’t think twice, even if it’s an unexpected marriage offer” (Hetzroni 2013, 22). In another section she says about herself: “I grew up on movies and dreamt about great love and sweeping romantics, and here I am part of the film and my dream is about to come true” (Hetzroni 2013, 21).

¹³ Taibe is an Arab city in central Israel.

¹⁴ The principal is described as “someone who never wore the yarmulke before apart from during his mother’s funeral.” In Israel, wearing a yarmulke is a requirement for entering most cemeteries.

¹⁵ See also Hetzroni (2013, 70).

¹⁶ Jewish Ultra Orthodox.

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