

Predicament of Lebanese Women Married to Non-Lebanese:

Field Analytical Study

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Introduction

The Lebanese Women’s Rights and the Nationality Law project is a joint project between civil society and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It is implemented by the National Committee for the Follow up on Women’s Issues (CFUWI) and funded by UNDP. It aims at achieving equality between men and women in the field of citizenship. The project is not the first of its kind in Lebanon with respect to gender equality and citizenship, but it does present a new methodology to deal with this issue.

This methodology has three pillars: the first pillar is a socio-legal study of the situation lived by the families of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men. This is done on two main levels. The first is quantitative, to show the magnitude of the problem and how widespread it is in a country known for its cultural and human diversity and openness. The second is qualitative, and involves analyzing the repercussions of the current citizenship law on families, i.e. the problems pertaining to residency, employment, and access to State aid.

The second pillar entails reinforcing the capabilities of women’s organizations as well as civil society organizations by providing them with the necessary knowledge (study results) and skills - through organizing networking and advocacy training programs in all Lebanese regions - in order to amend the current citizenship law. For this purpose, a training manual containing basic information on advocacy and lobbying was prepared. This manual has become a reference for both male and female activists working in the field of human rights and women’s rights. It starts off by addressing

general issues related to women's rights and moves to specifics concerning their civil rights; this means enjoying the same civil status as men in terms of acquiring, keeping, or changing one's nationality as well as concerning granting children their citizenship. The manual also focuses on providing activists and trainees working in civil society organizations in general, and human rights and women's rights organizations in specific, with the necessary tools and means that enable them to work on a variety of issues such as networking, defending these rights, pressuring and negotiating with the local authorities and the legislative and executive powers in order to modify the current citizenship law.

The third pillar is the media campaign. A public awareness campaign promoting the idea of amending the current citizenship law will be prepared and launched to raise public awareness vis-à-vis this discriminatory law and disseminate the information that the study reached through articles, publications, the press, and meetings with the media. The campaign will also concretely depict the negative impacts the current nationality law has on the households of women married to non-Lebanese men. The aim is to build public opinion favoring the amendment of this law by showcasing the negative impact and the tragic consequences of the current law.

These three pillars are tools necessary for the amendment of the current law and the promulgation of a new law that treats male and female citizens equally.

The Study: Objectives, Methodology, Sources, and Findings

Studies are, in general, the correct way to produce knowledge in the social sciences. This study, in particular, has even more value being the first study of its kind as emphasized by the participants of the regional workshop entitled "Towards the Modification of the Lebanese Citizenship Law" which was held in Beirut on March 10, 2009.

As we have seen, great effort was put into trying to eliminate discrimination against women in Lebanon. These efforts were fruitful in many fields, although some laws, including the citizenship law, remained resistant to change. In addition, the women's movement did not have the quantitative and qualitative data that would lead to the resolution of the citizenship law problem.

We believe it is about time to refute the claims of those opposed to gender equality in citizenship law. The current citizenship law is by general consensus the clearest example of discrimination against women in Lebanon. In addition to going against the basic principles of the Lebanese Constitution, particularly the principles of freedom and equality, this law has no religious (theological) basis. Unlike personal status laws where attempts aimed at amending those laws are violently attacked by religious authorities, opposition to amending citizenship law is nothing but a political manipulation tool through a discourse that links laws to religious and sectarian balance on the one hand and to regional and national issues (naturalizing Palestinians) on the other hand.

The Objective of the Study is therefore:

- To produce quantitative and qualitative data that reflect the magnitude of the problem in a country that is both diverse and cosmopolitan, and the negative impact of the current citizenship law on the rights of children and families in general.
- To put this knowledge and data at the disposal of government officials as well as the concerned civil society sectors involved in the elimination of discrimination in laws and advocacy for overall equality.

The Methodology of the Study

Researchers in the field of social sciences agree that quantitative data is the basis for identifying and diagnosing most problems. Statistical data is the first step towards scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, obtaining statistical data in Lebanon is a very difficult task given that it is scarce; this is not to mention the technical difficulties that make it very difficult to obtain such data if it is available in the first place. It is important to note that there are several obstacles other than the difficulty in obtaining data that are related to the political and sectarian system. Accessing the files at the personal status registries is a grueling and complicated process. Moreover, accessing the court archives is a very strenuous and time-consuming process that starts with obtaining the authorization to access the records and ends with having to manually write down all the information needed which still remains the commonly used method (considering that the records are not automated).

Despite the efforts that have been put into overcoming all the above-mentioned obstacles, there is still a dearth of information relating to some religious courts (such as the Shiite court in Nabatieh for example). Also, the records of the Druze court were not taken into account due to the fact that Druze marriages to non-Druze are not recognized by the Druze religious courts. Though obtaining figures is necessary to know the magnitude and spread of the problem, it is not enough to grasp the effects that the problem has on the families of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men.

The aim was to put together a study that is comprehensive and not reduced to mere statistical data on the number of women married to non-Lebanese. Through the interviews, the study attempts to showcase the personal aspects of this problem by exposing the living conditions of these women and their families. Resorting to interviews was an objective necessity, but it remained limited. Therefore, it was essential to give the opportunity for women to speak out about their suffering and distress due to an unfair citizenship law. The objective of this study required procedural intervention in order to know the diverse and common/different effects the current citizenship law has had, especially on women married to non-Lebanese men who do not belong to a unique religious background or to one Lebanese region. This is why a specific sample of people with the following four criteria has been selected:

The geographical criterion: from different Lebanese regions in order to observe the impact of geography on the selection of the spouse and to what extent local communities impact the status of households.

The confessional criterion: (Muslim and Christian women) in order to better identify the nationalities recurrent with every religion.

The social criterion: 500,000 Lebanese pounds was set as a standard to determine the different social categories in terms of minimum wage. This criterion is crucial to examine the deprivation families suffer from, be it on a financial level (low social class) or on the moral/psychological level (middle and upper classes).

The spouse's nationality criterion (Arab or non-Arab): This criterion is very significant to understand the different trends resulting from religious and cultural influences on these options.

Sources of the Study

The study relies on many sources that can be summarized as such:

- The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and its directorates: General Directorate for Political Affairs and Refugees, General Directorate of General Security, and the General Directorate of Personal Status;
- Islamic Religious Courts: Sunni, Shiite, and Druze;
- Archbishops and Christian Churches;
- The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Great efforts have been put into obtaining data, most importantly in trying to get special permission to access court records, especially in coordinating the investigators' schedules with the courts' schedules knowing that the Islamic and Christian courts operate independently.

The following questions were considered: How are marriages to non-Lebanese men distributed among the different religious sects? Do these statistics truly reflect the percentages of the different nationalities? And are these statistics sufficient to deny Lebanese women their full citizenship rights?

Analysis of the Lebanese Women's Situation under the Current Citizenship Law

Quantitative Research Sample

The sample included 31 institutions from different religious sects and regions. The survey studied a 14-year period, from 1995 till 2008. This time period was chosen since it followed the issuing of the naturalization decree, considering that many similar problems were resolved by this decree.

The survey produced considerable amounts of raw data (679 pages) which included information concerning: spouse's age group, spouse's sect, brief on spouse's sect, spouse's religion, spouse's country of origin, spouse's continent, spouse's affiliation, wife's birth-related information, wife's age group, wife's sect, wife's religion, date of marriage contract and number.

Mechanisms used in the Quantitative Survey

The usual mechanisms were used in the quantitative survey. They are the following:

- Using the statistics provided by the institutions concerned with marriage certificates and the selection of samples;
- Addressing a letter to authorities to ask for information;

- Sorting out the forms, evaluating and analyzing them;
- Consulting statistics related to registered marriages at the Directorate of Personal Status between 1995 and 2008;
- Analyzing the results of the various research and estimating the size of the sample, analyzing it, and projecting it on a real scale;

Results of the Study's Field Survey

Around 18,000 marriages were contracted between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men during the 14-year period (1995-2008) studied. The data is based on the marriage contracts which were surveyed at religious authorities and personal status directorates. 8.2 percent of Muslim women married non-Lebanese men and 2 percent of Christian women married non-Lebanese men. Around 87.5 percent of the marriage contracts between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men were registered by Muslim women and 12.5 percent were registered by Christian women.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Marriages Between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men According to Religion

Religion	Number	Number of Registered Marriages to Non-Lebanese Men	Percentage According to Religion	Percentage According to Marriages
Muslim women	191,483	15,635	8.2	87.5
Christian women	108,932	2,225	2.0	12.5
Total	300,415	17,860	5.9	100

Estimating the Number of People Suffering from the Current Citizenship Law

The number of people negatively affected by the current nationality law, which robs the woman of her right to give her nationality to her children and husband, was estimated at 77,400 throughout the 14-year period (18,000 families). The number was calculated based on the fertility rate in Lebanon which is 2.3 percent. Hence, the number of people negatively affected by this law, between 1995 and 2008, is:

Parents: $18,000 \times 2 = 36,000$

Children: $18,000 \times 2.3\% = 41,400$

Total: 77,400 (affected - father, mother, children)

This shows the gravity of the problem brought about by the current citizenship law. The problem as estimated by statisticians affects 77,400 individuals. This number is significant given that the population in Lebanon does not exceed 4 million people.

Estimates of Marriages between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men according to Religious Sect

If we look at the sect variable, we would be dealing with additional unexpected information. Statistics proved that: The largest percentage of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men is among the Sunnis, constituting 11.1 percent of the total Sunni population. This is followed by the Shiites with 6.9 percent. More than half of the marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men are registered within the Sunni sect at 51.5 percent, followed by the Shiites at 33.6 percent, and the Orthodox at 5.6 percent.

Table 2: Estimated Number of Marriages Between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men

Sect	Number of Marriages Registered in Personal Status Directorates	Estimated Number of Marriages Between Lebanese Women & Non-Lebanese Men	Percentage According to Sects	Percentage According to Marriages
Sunni	82,647	9,200	11.1	51.5
Shiite	87,276	6,000	6.9	33.6
Druze	19,857	400	2.0	2.2
Alawite	1,703	35	2.1	0.2
Orthodox	19,964	1,000	5.0	5.6
Maronite	67,993	700	1.0	3.9
Catholic	12,334	250	2.0	1.4
Armenian	5,091	150	2.9	0.8
Christian Minorities	3,550	125	3.5	0.7
Total	300,415	17,860	5.9	100.0

Mechanism of Computing the Statistics and Applying the Sample at the National Level

When examining the marriage contracts, the overall number of contracts as well as the contracts between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men were counted. These contracts were considered a sample and the same percentage was projected on the total marriage contracts for each sect at the relevant vital records.

Example: 63,060 marriage contracts have been examined for Sunnis of which 7,018 were between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men, constituting 11.1 percent, which means that the approximate number of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men among the Sunnis on the national level was computed by considering the same percentage out of the total marriages for the same period of time, i.e. $82,647 \times 11.2/100$. The same method was applied for all other sects.

There are 77,400 individuals who are members of families who suffer from the discrimination of the current citizenship law. 41,400 of these individuals are born to a Lebanese mother. A Lebanese woman is a Lebanese citizen whose duties are clearly defined by the Constitution, in times of war and peace. She has the right to choose her representatives and to vote for them. She is, according to the Constitution, eligible to defend her country when duty calls. She proved her competence in this field. She also pays her taxes just like other citizens. Nevertheless, she lives in her own country as a foreigner. She is forced to wait in long queues to obtain residence permits for her children. She is also forced to resort to the "powers that be" in order to obtain work permits for her husband to make sure he remains by her side and that of their children.

Distribution of Spouses' Nationalities According to the Area and to the Religion of Marriage Contract Authorities

In another approach where the region of origin of foreign husbands is taken into account, it is noted that: 78.1 percent of Muslim women and 50.3 percent of Christian women have married Arab citizens; 25.7 percent of Christian women and 9.3 percent of Muslim women have married Europeans; and 16.2 percent of Christian women and 6.3 percent of Muslim women have married Americans.

Table 3: Distribution of Spouses' Nationalities According to the Area and to the Religion of Marriage Contract Authorities

Spouse's Nationality	Muslims	Christians	Total
Arab	78.1	50.3	74.7
Europe	9.3	25.7	11.4
America	6.3	16.2	7.5
Oceania	3.0	5.0	3.2
Asia (non-Arabs)	2.9	0.6	2.6
Africa (non-Arabs)	0.3	1.0	0.4
Undefined	0.0	1.2	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The importance of these tables and quantitative statistics lies in the fact that they help dismiss the argument of the political opposition of government authorities and society in general as well as facilitate the amendment of the current citizenship law. Table 3 shows figures that help dispel many illusions. While the percentage of Muslim women married to men of other Arab nationalities is 78.1, the percentage of Christian women married to men of other Arab nationalities is almost 50.3. These contrasting percentages are balanced out by the marriages of Christian women to European men whose percentage is 25.7 while that of Muslim women married to European men stands at 9.3. The same goes for marrying American men with a percentage of 16.2 percent for Christian women and only 6.3 for Muslim women.

If the disparities are clear in the percentage of marriages to non-Lebanese between Lebanese Muslim women and Lebanese Christian women, almost the same percentage is shown when counting the marriages registered in religious governmental institutions, international ones, and UNRWA, during the same period.

Husband Nationality Distribution According to Marriage Contract Issuing Parties

Of those who married foreign men, 23.8 percent of Muslim women and 6.9 percent of Christian women married Palestinians. Moreover, 30.5 percent of Christian women and

The citizenship law which discriminates against women was adopted in January 19, 1925. However, the Palestinian refugees came to Lebanon in 1948. This proves that the law is discriminatory in its origin and has nothing to do with the concerns about and fears of Palestinian settlement in Lebanon.

20.8 percent of Muslim women married Syrians, while 8.2 percent of Muslim women and 6.8 percent of Christian women are married to Egyptians.

Distribution of Spouses According to the Confession of the Wife

Sunni: 38.8 percent of women married to non-Lebanese men are married to Palestinians, 19.2 percent are married to Syrians and 8 percent are married to Egyptians.

Christian: 30.5 percent of women married to non-Lebanese men are married to Syrians, 10.9 percent are married to Americans, 9.9 percent are married to French, 7.8 percent are married to Egyptians, and 6.9 percent are married to Palestinians.

Shiite: 22.7 percent of women married to non-Lebanese men are married to Syrians, 21.6 percent are married to Iraqis, and 9 percent are married to Egyptians.

Table 4: Distribution of Spouses' Nationalities According to the Confession of the Wife

Husband's country	Wife's Confession				Total
	Sunni	Christian	Shiite	Druze	
Palestine	38.8	6.9	2.1	4.3	21.7
Syria	19.2	30.5	22.7	30.4	22.0
Egypt	8.0	7.8	9.0	0.0	8.0
Jordan	4.4	4.4	1.9	0.0	3.5
USA	2.7	10.9	4.9	34.8	5.2
KSA	4.2	0.0	2.4	0.0	3.0
Australia	3.1	4.9	1.8	17.4	3.2
Germany	3.1	1.7	3.9	0.0	3.1
Kuwait	3.2	0.1	5.3	0.0	3.4
Iraq	0.8	0.8	21.6	0.0	7.8
France	0.8	9.9	2.1	0.0	2.4
Canada	1.5	4.7	0.6	4.3	1.6
UK	0.7	3.3	1.0	0.0	1.1
UAE	1.1	0.1	1.3	0.0	1.1
Sweden	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.9
Denmark	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.7
Iran	0.1	0.2	5.8	0.0	2.0
Bahrain	0.3	0.0	4.4	0.0	1.6
Other	6.0	12.6	8.1	8.8	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Overall Statistics of Marriages Registered in Recent Years

The survey included governmental, religious, and international institutions such as the UNRWA, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, and the Directorate of Personal Status.

NB: Some Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese can go without registering their marriages. Also, Lebanese women who have acquired the nationality of their husbands can register their marriages in other countries without having to do so in Lebanon. The sect in which the marriage was registered was adopted i.e. the sect of the husband. There were some exceptions in which the husband converted to the wife's religion. The number of marriages registered in the vital records in the mentioned years was estimated at 300,415. The sects were distributed as in the following table (Bureau of Statistics and Documentation).

Table 5: Distribution of Marriages According to Religion (the religion of males was adopted as per the mechanism of registration in personal status directorates)

Religion	Number	Percentage
Muslims	191,483	63.7
Christians	108,932	36.3
Total	300,415	100.0

Table 5, which was provided by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, illustrates that, of the 300,415 marriages contracted during the (1995-2008) period and distributed according to confessions, 63.7 percent involved Muslim confessions (Sunni, Shiite, Druze and Alawite) and 36.3 percent involved Christian confessions (Maronite, Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian and minorities).

Table 6: Distribution of Marriages Between Lebanese Women and Palestinians According to Confession

Confession of the Spouse	Number	Percentage
Sunni	3576	91.6
Christian	183	4.7
Shiite	129	3.3
Druze	18	0.4
Total	3906	100.0

Table 6 shows that the number of marriages between Sunni Lebanese women and Palestinian men has reached 3,576 which corresponds to 91.6 percent of the total number of marriages between Lebanese women and Palestinian men occurring between 1995 and 2008. As for the number of marriages between Christian women and Palestinians it was 183, which corresponds to 4.7 percent of total marriages. As we have seen in the table above, it is 3.3 percent for the Shiites and 0.4 percent for the Druzes. This table is important because it shows the general statistics of Lebanese women's marriages during that period of time.

Looking at these statistics further re-instigates the debate over rights. The right to freely choose a spouse is a sacred right with both religious and civil institutions. It is a right consecrated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by CEDAW. Lebanon has signed both the Declaration and the additional protocol without reservations and the Lebanese Constitution considers women to be equal to men before the law.

Islamic Courts

The detailed information shown in the previous tables, regarding the different courts concerned with the affairs of the different sects, helps us understand what is happening. It forces us to focus further on the injustice women suffer from, regardless of the sect they belong to. It also reasserts that the alleged sectarian balance is not a sufficient reason to block the amendment of the current citizenship law.

Sunni Courts

The Bureau of Statistics and Documentation has obtained a permit to examine courts in 4 regions: Beirut, Sidon, Tripoli, and Zahle. Upon entering the courts, we noticed as we have previously noted, that information was not computerized. It took a team of five statisticians working for a full month to sort the records out at the courts' headquarters.

The information available on marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men included the following elements: birth date of the husband; sect of the husband; nationality of the husband; birth date of the wife, sect of the wife, year of marriage contract.

The statisticians examined 63,060 marriage contracts that they were able to go through in the records of the Sunni courts in the following areas (Zahle, Beirut, Sidon, and Tripoli). Of these, 11.1 percent of Sunni marriages were between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men since 7,018 out of 63,060 marriage contracts involved non-Lebanese men. 82.2 percent of the marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men in Sunni courts are to men of other Arab nationalities, and 17.16 percent are married to non-Arab foreigners.

Table 7. Distribution of Marriages Between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men in Sunni Religious Courts According to the National Affiliation of the Husband

National Affiliation of the Husband	Number of Marriages	Percentage
Arabs	5809	82.8
Non-Arabs	1204	17.16
Undefined	5	0.07
Total	7018	100.0

Shiite Courts

Just as the case was for Sunni courts, the Bureau of Statistics and Documentation had to obtain a permit to examine the court records of the Shiite courts in both Beirut and Baabda. The Bureau also surveyed the number of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men in the vital records of both Nabatieh and Baalbek. Here as well, the data was not computerized and the records did not include the husband's nationality

Removing the issue of the citizenship law from political deliberation would restore its legal character as well as its social/humane dimension. The people affected by this law do not belong to one specific sect. Their families are from all sects. How can we, under any circumstances, deprive these women of their rights to fully enjoy all the rights that their citizenship entails?

which forced the statisticians to go back to the marriage contract records individually i.e. to look for the husband's identity in personal records. The Beirut statistics were completed whereas the Nabatieh statistics were hindered by the intermittent activities of the court despite the team going to Nabatieh several times. The statisticians examined around 15,000 marriage contracts, of which 890 were between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men according to the records they were able to go through at the Shiite courts in Beirut and Baabda as well as in Nabatieh and Baalbek (see Table 8).

Table 8. Marriages Registered in Shiite Jaafari Courts and Personal Status Directorates Between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men

Area of Shiite Religious Courts	Years	Number of marriages
Nabatieh	from 2000 - 2008	472
Baabda	from 1996 - 2008	198
Baalbek	from 1978 - 2008	183
Beirut	from 1996 - 2008	37
Total		890

Table 9. Distribution of Marriages Between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men in Jaafari Courts and Civil Status Directorates According to the National Affiliation of the Husband

National Affiliation of the Husband	Number of Marriages	Percentage
Arabs	658	73.9
Non-Arabs	232	26.1
Total	890	100.0

73.9 percent of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men in the Shiite courts were with citizens of other Arab countries while 26.1 percent were to non-Arab men (see Table 9). The details showed that Shiite women have married quite a lot into other nationalities, mostly other Arab nationalities.

Druze Courts

The Bureau of Statistics and Documentation obtained a permit to examine the court in Beirut. Nevertheless, there was great difficulty in retrieving information from the courts in Beirut as well as the ones in the governorates (muhafazats). Twenty-three cases of marriages to non-Lebanese were accounted for.

Archbishopries and Christian Churches

Upon reading Table 10 closely, one can note that: 48.5 percent of marriages between

Reading those figures would help us reconsider our prejudices; Palestinians and Syrians do not belong to one sect just like Lebanese women do not belong to one sect. It is unacceptable to make the demographic balance of sects and groups a political priority without taking into account individuals and the social and psychological problems this unjust law entails.

Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men in Christian churches are to non-Arabs. 50.3 percent of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men are to Arabs.

Table 10. Distribution of Marriages between Lebanese Women and Non-Lebanese Men in Christian Churches According to the National Affiliation of the Husband

National Affiliation of the Husband	Number of Marriages	Percentage
Non-Arabs	557	48.5
Arabs	578	50.3
Undefined	14	1.2
Total	1149	100

According to the data collected, the Arab region is the most recurring region in marriages between Christian Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men with a percentage of 50.3 percent in comparison with Europe (25.7 percent), America (16.2 percent), Oceania (5 percent), and non-Arab African countries (1 percent).

The Effect of the Current Citizenship Law on Children and Families: Words, Tears, and Anger!

Analysis of the Interviews

Thirty-four women were selected according to the 4 criteria that had been pre-determined: i.e. the confessional criterion, the geographical criterion, the social criterion, and the spouse's nationality criterion. The choices made were dictated by the ability to find examples that reflected the survey's results. Nevertheless, these examples do not represent the survey, especially its quantitative aspect.

Hence, 34 women were selected, distributed as follows: 13 Sunnis, 9 Shiites, 4 Druzes, and 8 Christians. This selection reflects the number of marriages presented by the survey; Sunni women represent the biggest group married to non-Lebanese men, followed by Christians, Shiites, and Druzes respectively.

The women who were interviewed did not try to hide the fact that they were surprised that there was actual interest in their situation. While some of them had heard of the efforts of the women's movement or other social movements, most expressed their sorrow that the women's movement did not consider the citizenship law a top priority on their agenda. Nevertheless, their need to openly express the hardships they suffered as a result of this law was a great motivator for them to speak up ... The women spoke. We can say that most of them started with words and ended with tears...

To begin with, they stated their right to choose their partner. These women had chosen their husbands without paying attention to the nationality they belong to. Most of them were unaware that they would not be able to pass on their nationality to their children and husbands; legal illiteracy is more severe and more acute than regular illiteracy. One woman married to an Englishman said she was shocked when she arrived in Lebanon with her child and [the General Security] asked her for a visa for her child: "I went to the General Security headquarters to meet with a High Officer there and ask him why I was not able to pass my nationality on to my children, to which he replied sarcastically: you can only do that if you register him as a foundling. This means his

father is anonymous". One can imagine how tragic the situation is, especially when the same woman relates how the effects of this situation impact her children, alter their course of studies, their educational inclinations and their future as well as the future of their families. "This is a vagrancy sentence", says a second. "This is an exile sentence", says a third. "This is a sentence to migrate to another country", adds a fourth.

What are the Problems that Lebanese Women Married to Non-Lebanese Men Encounter? And How Have these Women Expressed Them?

The interviews provided us with prolific information on the hardships and problems that Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men endure. We have concluded that we can categorize these problems under several dimensions which are organically intertwined. Nevertheless, these four dimensions are different and varied depending on each family; they are the following: residency problems for children and husband, employment problems, healthcare and education problems, inheritance problems, and psychological problems.

Residency:

Residency problems resemble a never-ending drama series. One woman married to an Egyptian says she lived in a state of continuous anxiety. Her husband could be deported at any moment because his temporary job puts him at the mercy of his boss (employer). As for her children, they reside in Lebanon thanks to a courtesy residence permit. She adds: "Had I known I will endure all this, I wouldn't have married a foreigner. And if I could speak to a politician right now, I would cry".

Tears streamed down her face while she told us about her fear that her husband would become so desperate as to leave the country. He would not leave alone. In light of the current Personal Status Law that deprives women of custody and guardianship, the father would take the children with him since the mother is not permitted to keep them with her.

As for Ms. G, she was surprised to learn that she would have to renew the residency permit which she considers very costly. She added that her son, who is a university student, does not have a residency permit because his Greek passport has not been renewed. She lives in constant fear that the university he attends might ask for his residency permit which he has not yet obtained.

Crying is a common pattern in these interviews. The women speak of their financial problems and of their psychological state. One respondent explained: "It is a disaster if I forget to pay for the residency permit because I would be fined and would have to pay double the amount. I can barely pay for it once".

Ms. O's Egyptian husband has been living in Lebanon since 1992 with a work permit. But since they got married in 1996, the husband's sponsor filed a theft and fraud lawsuit against him. This left him without a residency permit till 2002. During that period, Ms. O did not encounter any residency problems. She said: "After 2002, we had to start procedures for residency so we could register the children in official registries. I immediately went to the General Security to proceed with residency paperwork under my own name but they refused my application. I asked to see the General Director of the General Security and I was told he was abroad. The Colonel in charge refused

to see me, although I know her personally, she was unable to give me a clear answer on the issue. After the Minister of Justice interfered, we were able to carry out the residency procedures and paid 8 million Lebanese pounds”.

Since then, Ms. O says the residency permit is renewed on a yearly-basis. However, the last time they tried to renew it, the request was rejected on the grounds that the husband works for an international company. “This is not true because if my husband is working there should be no problem. They refused to grant him residency and his case was being studied for deportation. After the Minister of Interior intervened, my husband and I issued a deposition/statement that he is unemployed and each deposition cost 350,000 Lebanese pounds. The residency was renewed for several months”.

Ms. O said that her lawyer is currently working on processing the birth certificates to register the children in the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. When these documents are done, she will have to pay a sum between 2,000 and 3,000 USD.



Poster prepared for the launch of the study “Predicament of Lebanese Women Married to Non-Lebanese”. It reads: “He takes after his mother in everything: the color of her eyes, her smile, her kindness, ...but not her nationality. He is destined not to be Lebanese because his father is not Lebanese”.

The issue of residency is a nightmare not only for those with low income. Even women from the middle classes complain about the time spent on this issue. They worry every time the renewal date approaches. Ms. F recounts how she once forgot to renew the residency permit while she was outside the country. This resulted in a problem with the General Security that lasted for a very long time. She added, while trying to hide her tears: “the General Security could decide not to renew my children’s residency permit when they are 18 years of age”.

Even upper-class women suffer from the grueling and complicated procedures in obtaining residency permits. According to one respondent: “I have to come in person and stand in line. It is as if I am not a Lebanese citizen. The hardest part is when my husband’s residency permit expires while we are abroad, because then my husband cannot return to Lebanon without securing a visa”. She also adds: “When my children are 18 years of age, the General Security could choose not to renew their residency permits. It depends on their mood”.

What has been noticed is that women married to Syrian men do not face residency issues and financial burdens due to geography and the current policy, given that they can live in Lebanon as long as they have their entry and exit papers.

Employment:

All the women interviewed worried about the future of their children. One of them related: “I have already started thinking about how to secure a job for my son at an international multinational company in order to secure his professional future”. Ms. F says: “My husband was rejected from many positions he applied to because of his nationality, although he is Syrian and has the right to work in Lebanon”. She also expressed her fear concerning her children’s professional careers since they will not be able to work in the public sector and will be considered foreigners in the private sector. “Our income is limited and my husband cannot grow professionally because he is not able to get bank loans or guarantees. We remain stuck in reverse”.

Just as Ms. F’s case was a typical one, so was Ms. G’s. Her children obtained their university degrees and, naturally, travelled abroad. They married foreigners and obtained their wives’ nationalities. She adds with grief: “But I was not able to give them my nationality”. She related how her son who married a French woman “works as a French expert in Lebanon”. As for her daughter who graduated as a medical doctor from the Lebanese University, she could not practise in Lebanon and had to emigrate.

Worry is a given when thinking about the future of their children. Ms. E. said that her husband works in Syria and she was aware that if he were living in Lebanon, work would have been a difficult issue for him since he is not Lebanese. Ms. E. tried to be honest with her children and constantly reminded them that they cannot work in Lebanon because of their nationality. She added: “I am constantly worrying about my children’s future and their career”.

The cases may be different but the complications remain the same. Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men are subject to all sorts of exploitation. Ms. O. explains that her husband is exploited by his boss. He has to accept the terms and conditions set

by his boss given that he is unable to obtain a work permit that would ensure a decent contract.

Health Care and Education:

If the problems of families of good social class are limited to residency and work, the suffering of the remaining households that have financial problems exceeds that. These families do not have access to either health care or education. Lebanese women who are married to non-Lebanese cannot enroll their children in public schools because they are treated as foreigners. In addition, they cannot benefit from public health care.

Inheritance:

All women expressed their concern vis-à-vis the inheritance issue. As per Lebanese law, foreigners can own a certain percentage of land or property and this presents a problem to Lebanese women married to foreigners. The case is more complicated for those women married to Palestinians who are denied the right to own any property in Lebanon, thus they cannot inherit any property or land from their mothers.

Psychological Problems:

On the psychological level, most of these households do not have many problems due to the cultural and historical openness in Lebanon. Moreover, children do not feel any inferiority on this level. They feel they belong to Lebanon more than their country of citizenship. However, the feeling of being estranged, social isolation, and the incapacity of mingling because of the language i.e. suffering resulting from problems of social integration - accompanies some nationalities where fate is determined by external factors.

“I feel that my husband is torn, he has an identity crisis. He has no national affiliation, neither to Lebanon nor to Palestine. He has lost hope of getting the Lebanese nationality. ... I fear and worry about my children, and the social and psychological problems they will suffer from in the future. We are trying to emigrate in order to secure a nationality”.

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