

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG BEIRUT

**“People like me, they have to bypass” –
Lebanese young adults without Lebanese citizenship**
By Benita Kawalla



1

Lebanon will continue to drown in the whirlpool of sectarianism as long as the Lebanese woman must study demography before marrying a non-Lebanese. She must ponder the possibility that her fetus might destabilize the unique Lebanese formula, and calculate whether this addition befits the demographic vision of the Deputy.

(Jamal 2016, p. 92)

¹ The photography shows people on a demonstration organized by the Arab Women's Right to Nationality Campaign. The slogan on the banner means: My nationality is my right and my children's right. Image Rights: Collective for Research & Training on Development – Action (CRTD-A), <https://al-rawiya.com/human-rights/womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-lebanon-denying-the-basic-right-of-nationality/>

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the practices and acts of citizenship of Lebanese young adults in binational families not holding the Lebanese citizenship. Having a Lebanese mother and a non-Lebanese father, the interviewed young adults do not have the possibility to get the Lebanese citizenship because of the patrilineal citizenship law.

Using the concept of performative and affective citizenship, my claim is that these young adults perform their Lebanese citizenship by political and social activism for a more inclusive citizenship law, by finding coping strategies to exercise basic human rights and by feeling Lebanese and stating their right to be legally Lebanese.

Introduction

“However it may have originated, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern citizenship became an institution deployed for colonial and imperial campaigns to create governable (rather than merely subject) peoples. Many postcolonial nations and states inherited and then effectively instituted citizenship for governing – dividing, classifying, disciplining, regulating – peoples” (Isin 2015, p. 263).

The citizenship law of Lebanon is an outstanding example for the colonial legacies addressed in the above quote. There are different ways how regulation and classification of people by the Lebanese citizenship norms law work: By not offering regular ways of naturalisation, meaning the admittance to citizenship, for non-Lebanese residing in Lebanon (Jaulin 2006), by irregularly offering re-naturalisation for (mostly Christian) Lebanese descendants residing elsewhere (Jaulin 2015) or by not granting Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men the right to transmit their nationality to their children (Chebbo 2022).

Besides the colonial legacies, these ways of population regulation by ancestry-based citizenship law also show the patriarchal influences. The law cements “the linkage between religious identity, political identity, patrilineality, and patriarchy - that is, between religion, nation, state, and kinship” (Joseph 2000b, p. 18). By identifying the family as the core unit of society, the Lebanese citizenship law is depicting men as the primary citizens due to their function as the head of patriarchal families (Joseph 2000b, pp. 16–17). This preference of male ancestry in the Lebanese citizenship law manifests in the legal norm that Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men do not have the right to transmit their nationality to their husband or children whereas Lebanese men do have this right.

This way of legal regulation is at the centre of this paper. The discrimination against Lebanese women in transmitting their citizenship is codified in Article 1 of the Decree No. 15 regulating the Lebanese citizenship norms (General Saray 1/19/1925). This patriarchal legal norm has an important impact on the daily practices of these binational families: Not having the Lebanese citizenship, the children and the foreign spouse of Lebanese women do not have access to a long-term residence permit or to the social security system, they face difficulties accessing the formal public education system and are denied access to certain jobs or syndicates (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 22). Additionally, this study argues that these restrictions lead to reactions by the disadvantaged: They are the starting point for political activism and campaigning work to change this law, the reason why support structures beside the state are established, and the driving force for people to decide to leave the country.

These different practices concerning the positioning of individuals depending on the citizenship status are conceptualized by political scientist Engin Fahri Isin with the notion of *performative citizenship*. The *performative citizenship* approach follows a broader definition of citizenship, not only focusing on the “legal and political membership in a nation-state but also [...] [on] the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights” (Isin and Wood 1999, p. 4). This broader notion of citizenship allows researchers to shed light on the various experiences of citizens and non-citizens concerning their citizenship status, on the restrictions they face as well as on the respective coping strategies.

To investigate the situation and practices of children of binational families in Lebanon in which the Lebanese mother cannot transmit her nationality to her children, this paper aims to answer the following guiding question:

Following Isin’s notion of a *performative citizenship*, which practices and strategies do children of binational families in Lebanon use to cope with the restrictions imposed by the law and to perform their own form of citizenship?

In this paper, I argue that the performative citizenship of the children in these families is not only expressed through their political and social activism for a more inclusive citizenship law. Rather, by finding coping strategies to exercise basic human rights and by having an *affective citizenship* meaning they feel Lebanese and therefore state their right to be Lebanese on paper, they are performing Lebanese citizenship.

Additionally, despite the same legal frame for all interviewed families, the perceived restrictions and the developed coping strategies differ based on the socio-economic situation of the family and the nationality of the children.

The question will be answered by following a qualitative approach using the method of problem-centred interviews conducted by the researcher throughout Lebanon. In this paper, after outlining the applied methodology, I will then shortly characterize the Lebanese citizenship law and its consequences for the families of Lebanese mothers having married non-Lebanese spouses. I will continue recapitulating the concept of a *performative citizenship* following Isin and finally connect the existing theory with the findings of this case study.

Methodology

The existing research regarding the situation of binational families in Lebanon is limited when it comes to a sociological investigation on the day-to-day restrictions and undertaken actions of these families. Therefore, this research chooses to follow an explorative qualitative research approach using the method of problem-centred interviews (Witzel 2000). Problem-centred interviews focus on a specific social problem which can be conceptualized in the theoretical manner while the interview process remains open to the personal stories and preferences the individuals want to focus on (Witzel 2000). Ten semi-structured, problem-centred interviews were conducted with people directly affected by the legal restrictions, thereof seven mature children (age 18-27, four men, three women) and three mothers. The contact to these families was mainly established with the dedicated help of Karima Chebbo, responsible of the Nationality Campaign of CRTD-A, and via word of mouth of the interview partners. It is important to note that due to this way of contact, the group of interviewees is not representing the totality of affected families. For this reason and following the principles of a qualitative research approach, a generalisation of the analysis of this paper to the totality of affected interviews is not possible.

Because of the sensitivity of the collected data, the interviewees stay anonymous. The interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes and were conducted face-to-face or via WhatsApp or Zoom between April and June 2022.

The Lebanese citizenship Law and its patriarchal restrictions to Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men

The Decree No. 15

The Lebanese citizenship law dates back to the Ottoman Empire. It was codified in 1925 in the Decree No. 15. Its influences from the Ottoman and the French colonial law are still present until today (Jaulin 2015). One of these judicial “fossils” can already be found in the first paragraph of the law: “Is considered Lebanese: Every person born of a Lebanese father” (General Saray 1/19/1925). As the Lebanese nationality is transmitted patrilineal, Lebanese women can neither transmit their nationality to their foreign husband nor to their children (Sharafeddine 2017, p. 15). A gendered conception of citizenship is not unusual in the history of citizenship laws throughout the world. But in the Middle East, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria are the only countries still maintaining this specific discriminatory law whereas countries like Egypt or Morocco recently changed the law due to civil society protests² (Al Tabshi 2021, p. 14).

The reasons for this law and its durability since nearly one hundred years are multiple. As mentioned in the introduction, this law reveals the complex relationship between religious, kin-based, and patriarchal influences (Joseph 2000b, p. 18). Soad Joseph describes this relationship as the hidden hegemonic civic myth of extended kinship telling

“a Story of a nation composed of multiple, large (as opposed to small, nuclear), ‘natural’ groupings based on biological (blood) relatedness, descended through male genealogies. One is ‘born’ into kin groups in Lebanon” (Joseph 2000a, p. 109).

This hegemonic patriarchal civic myth is translated into a larger framework of legal violence against women in Lebanon: Beside the citizenship law, the different religious personal status laws discriminate against women by i.e., limiting their pecuniary rights and putting them under “ the risk of losing their children if they remarry or when the so-called maternal custody period (determined by the child’s age) ends” (Geagea et al. 2015, p. 1).

Another reason for the durability of the law is, as concerning the majority of political and social questions in Lebanon, the power balance between the different sects (Jaulin 2006). The argument of keeping the fragile sectarian balance and therefore not naturalizing (mostly Sunni, i.e. Palestinian and Syrian) non-Lebanese³ husbands of Lebanese women (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 13) is still wide-spread, even though reliable data on the numbers and sects of affected families and their potential impact on the power balance is not available (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 17).

² Even though the French colonial rule is responsible for this patriarchal norm in Lebanese law, France does not longer have this legislation in place since 1960.

³ The argumentative recourse on the sectarian balance in Lebanon is widespread and its foundation lies in the National Pact of 1943, dividing political power among the existing sects after the Lebanese independence (Nahas 1980). In the aftermath of this pact and the following Ta’ef agreement, i.e., the president, having extending power including the power of naturalizing people by decree, must be Christian by law (Jaulin 2006).

Consequences

Taking a closer look on the day-to-day consequences for women and their families shows the extent to which this one paragraph of Lebanese citizenship law is influencing people’s lives. The restrictions start from the very beginning since “the Lebanese authorities refuse to grant [non-Lebanese] children born on their lands official birth certificates” (Al Tabshi 2021, p. 23). The refusal of giving a birth certificate are followed by the need to renew the residence permit for the non-Lebanese spouse and the children every three years, including all the costs for processing the paperwork. In addition to these bureaucratic obstacles, foreigners, as such family members of Lebanese women are considered to be, do not have access to the social security system or government-subsidized medical care (Human Rights Watch 2018). Non-Lebanese children also face difficulties joining a public school or university (Yahya 2009, p. 47) and later on, they are barely able to “attain higher-skilled and better-paying jobs” (Yasmine and Sukkar 2019, p. 29). These difficulties in attaining higher-skilled jobs are mostly affected by the fact that joining certain professional unions and associations requires the Lebanese nationality (Human Rights Watch 2018; Mouawad 2021, p. 9). Restrictions are also in place concerning the ability to own or inherit more than a certain amount of property with special constraints for Palestinians who are not able to own or inherit any amount of property (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 23).

(No) numbers of affected families

The number of women and families affected by this law can only be estimated, since there has not been any kind of census in Lebanon since 1932 (Jaulin 2006). An estimation based on a study conducted by Dr. Fahima Shrafeddine in 2009 suggests a total number of 77.400 individuals affected by the law from 1995 to 2008 (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 17). The actual number of affected people nowadays after the arrival of around 1.5 million Syrian refugees from 2011 on (Funk and Parked 2016) will most likely exceed this estimation of 2009. Another estimation from 2012 considers 35% of Lebanese women being married to a non-Lebanese man (Griira 2017).

The study of Fahima Shrafeddine has also showed that the

“largest percentage of marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese men is among the Sunnis, constituting 11.1% of the total Sunnis. [...] More than half of the marriages between Lebanese women and non-Lebanese women are registered within the Sunni sect” (Sharafeddine 2009, p. 17).

Aggravated situation due to Covid-19 and the economic crisis

Crises hit the most vulnerable the harshest. This observation remains true for the current situation in Lebanon: While nearly the whole population is affected by the intertwined crises (food insecurity, inflation, Beirut blast etc.) together with the global pandemic, stateless and non-Lebanese families are affected even more. The problems are multidimensional: Non-Lebanese being employed in low-income jobs were the first ones out of work in times of crises (Scala 2022, p. 16). Additionally, non-Lebanese people were not able to access the few existing state aid programs at the beginning of Covid-19 nor were they able to return to Lebanon in times of national lock-downs since the airport was only open for Lebanese citizens (Shibaty 2021).

Activism and proposed amendments

The Decree No. 15 and its patriarchal implications on the marriages of Lebanese women to non-Lebanese men are certainly not uncontested in Lebanon, neither from the civil society nor from some political actors. The most prominent campaign was launched in 1999 by the CRTD-A (Collective for Research & Training on Development – Action) (CRTD-A 2022). Under the slogan “My nationality is a right for me and my family” (Arabic: *جنسيتي حق لي ولأسرتي*), the campaign consists until today of different activities: an ongoing petition, different lobbying activities and legal suggestions concerning amendments as well as the organization of support structures and trainings for affected women and families (Chebbo 2022).

Following the campaign work of the CRTD-A and other civil society actors, several legislative initiatives were proposed by different political parties: “Regarding the bills that grant the children of Lebanese women the right to acquire Lebanese nationality, there are two trends, one granting them Lebanese nationality unconditionally pursuant to the principle of gender equality and the other restricting this right with a series of controls and exclusions” (Saghieh and El-Hajjar 2020). These proposed exclusions concern i.e. the age of the children as in the amendment of the National Commission for Lebanese Women, which plans to grant only children under 18 years the Lebanese citizenship (Yasmine and Sukkar 2019, p. 29), or the nationality of the father (with exceptions for Palestinian or Syrian husbands)⁴. Until today, none of the proposed amendments passed the vote in the parliament.

Performing citizenship

Citizenship as a complex phenomenon

The example of the Decree No. 15 in Lebanon shows the complexity of citizenship in a very tangible way: The relationship between a citizen and a state goes far beyond the juridical conception of citizenship as a “a set of legal obligations and entitlements which individuals possess by virtue of their membership in a state” (Isin and Wood 1999, p. 4). These legal obligations and rights influence the political, social, and civic positioning of people within a society, discriminating between citizens and non-citizens. This legal differentiation is also influencing the scope of action for the affected individuals: Sergio Tamayo describes citizenship therefore as a *shifting process*, “producing unequal social practices” (Tamayo 2019, p. 130).

The above-mentioned restrictions Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men face are one example for these produced unequal social practices for citizens and non-citizens. Additionally, the unequal treatment of Lebanese men and women when it comes to marriage of a foreigner shows that “the exercise of rights and access to social entitlements is very different for women and men, and often hampered by social practices, traditions, dominant cultures, and institutionalized discrimination against women” (Abou-Habib 2011, p. 443).

Performing citizenship as a non-citizen

The concept of *performative citizenship* is considering these unequal opportunities for social practices of citizens and non-citizens, but it is going beyond this dichotomy.

⁴ All of these amendments were rejected by NGOs like CRTD-A fighting for a non-discriminatory citizenship law (Chebbo 2022).

“Since citizenship is brought into being by performing it, non-citizens can also perform citizenship” (Isin 2019, S. 50).

The concept of *performative citizenship* focuses on the social practices of individuals concerning their civic, political, and social rights (Isin and Wood 1999, p. 4). As the quote states, both citizens and non-citizens are the subjects of social practices affirming or challenging the legal norms set by the nation-state with regard to the concept of nationality. The aim of the concept is not to ignore the restrictions and difficulties faced by non-citizens concerning their scope of public action, but to consider the agency of people despite their legal status and to acknowledge the fact that “[c]itizenship rights are also often the outcome of struggles around specific issues” (Yahya 2009, p. 17).

Applying this broader concept of citizenship to the Lebanese context and especially to the specific context of binational families in Lebanon seems very plausible for different reasons. On the one hand, as described in the previous section, there is many activisms for a less discriminatory citizenship law, which makes it important to include and highlight these struggles when elaborating on the situation of binational families in Lebanon. On the other hand, the notion of *performative citizenship* is opening the view on the private, informal, and/or clandestine strategies people are using to survive despite the restrictions they face. These strategies can also be described as *acts of citizenship* referring “to those instances when individual actors constitute themselves as citizens” (Fortier 2016, p. 1040). Especially in the current economic situation where the vast majority of people suffers, it is important to highlight the harsh living conditions while focussing on the agency of individuals despite all.

Research results

The qualitative small-scale study conducted for this paper contains ten different cases, all affected by the restrictions the citizenship law puts on Lebanese women married to foreign men. The following figure shows the composition of the group of interview partners with their names anonymized. Additionally, nationality, gender, age, and current working status are depicted because these characteristics reoccur during the analysis as important factors.




















 Malika		two children, age 21 and 15, stateless	 Amal	 stateless	25 years, Accountant
 Dalia		two children, age 19 and 14	 Ali		27 years, Artist
 Batoul		one child, age 6	 Nabil		25 years, Student
 Yasmin		21 years, Student	 Rayan		21 years, student and Playground manager
 Nour		18 years, Student	 Yassir	stateless	25 years, student and freelancer

Figure 1: Composition of the group of interview partners (BK)

The analysis of the interviews guided by the research question concerning the performative citizenship of the interviewees focussed on three different topics⁵: The first covers the developed coping strategies in reaction to the restrictions the families are facing. Whereas the second is focussing on the affirmative component of their performed Lebanese citizenship having an influence on their practices and future plans as the interviews have shown. The third category directly tackles the acts of citizenship they are performing to fight for a more inclusive Lebanese citizenship law. The aim of these three topics is to take a comprehensive look at the varying practises, assessments, and strategies people develop when being confronted with a legal frame that does not allow them to get the Lebanese citizenship.

The aim of a qualitative study is not to deliver representative data. The practices and experiences of the ten interviewees do not represent the totality of experiences of binational families in Lebanon, but they can offer an exemplary and rich insight in their *acts of citizenship*.

Equally unequal before the law, but impacted differently – an intersectional approach

The information derived from the interviews clearly shows how “the material experience of citizenship differs according to internal hierarchies and stratifications” (Hepworth 2017, p. 2). Therefore, an intersectional approach for the analysis needs to consider the different personal characteristics and life circumstances of the interviewed individuals while finding common patterns and practices. The different social positioning of the individuals reflected in the interviews mainly contains the nationality of the father and the children⁶, the socio-economic background of the families, their employment relationship, and the gender of the children. In every case, these categories are in a way or another intertwined and the individual “material experience of citizenship” (Hepworth 2017, p. 2) results out of this unique positioning. Consequently, special attention is placed on these social positionings in the following presentation of the research results.

Privatized healthcare, mother’s accompaniment, and the use of English words - Developed coping strategies to face experienced restriction

The existing literature on the situation of binational families in Lebanon points out a lot of legal restrictions and difficulties these families are facing. In focussing on the actual experience of the restrictions and more specifically on the coping strategies the families are using, my aim is to shed light on the day-to-day consequences of the legal restrictions. By applying this approach, it is possible to centre the agency of individuals and not viewing them as passive actors following the law-given path.

⁵ Following Braun/Clarke I am convinced that themes do not emerge out of the collected data, but that the researcher is playing an active role “in identifying patterns/themes” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 7).

⁶ Especially Syrian and Palestinian refugees and stateless people in Lebanon live under specific legal restrictions, i.e., not having the right to work legally or to own property (Saleh 2019).

Below the coping strategies the children were using to mitigate the negative consequences of not having the Lebanese citizenship are classified into six different categories: change of one’s own social behaviour, change of personal plans, use of the other nationality, advantage of the mother’s Lebanese nationality, paying money/privatization of services, and support of NGOs/organizations. Needless to say, not all of these strategies are and could be used by every family, but people were able to find different strategies to cope with them. Additionally, a lot of restrictions like travel bans, restricted access to syndicates or the prohibition to possess a certain amount of property cannot be mitigated by the individuals themselves. An exemplary overview of the coping strategies follows.



Figure 2: Overview on the coping strategies (BK)

The **change of one’s own social behaviour** concerns situations in which the interviewees faced discrimination in asserting the rights they legally have. This change of behaviour was reported in different situations, i.e., when getting a health record for your new-born in the hospital (ITV Malika, paragraph (p.) 31) or when seeking help from the police (ITV Nabil, p. 33). The used strategies range from “We should speak polite and use some English words and French words” (ITV Nabil, p. 33; ITV Nour, p. 43) to become angry and be persistent (ITV Malika, p. 31). Every interviewee reported these discriminatory situations in public or private encounters, thus one of the consequences the individuals drew is to leave the concerned person and situation (ITV Nour, p. 41) and to not seek official help anymore (ITV Nabil, p. 124).

The **change of plans** concerns major decisions such as the university major or career choice (ITV Nabil, p. 122) as well as plans to go abroad (ITV Malika, p. 3) or stay in Lebanon (ITV Nour, p. 134) based on the estimated job and life prospects of the interviewees. Amal, a young stateless woman, who inherited the refugee status from her grandfather via her father, wanted to study engineering, but due to the work regulations for Palestinians she changed her university major “from engineering to nutritionist to business” (ITV Amal, p. 70). Now she is working illegally without any contract as an accountant.

For some individuals it is possible to **use the other nationality** they hold to mitigate obstacles in Lebanon, i.e., to get medical treatment in the father’s country (ITV Nabil, p. 107) or to not get into trouble with the police when they see the foreign, in this case Turkish, citizenship (ITV Ali, p. 71).

The **support of someone else’s Lebanese citizenship** plays a major role in the mitigation of legal restrictions and social discrimination. This support takes very different forms, it ranges from using the Lebanese ID from a Lebanese friend to get free medical treatment in the hospital (ITV Nabil, p. 105) to taking out a loan for an air conditioner on the name of someone else (ITV Rayan, p. 84). Every interviewed family reported also that the children use the support of the mother’s Lebanese nationality when dealing with issues like buying an apartment on her name (ITV Yassir, o. 69) or being accompanied by her to public authorities to facilitate the procedures (ITV Nour, p. 107).

The common practise of **paying individually for services** the state is not providing in Lebanon is also used by binational families to assert rights and to access social entitlements. The occasions range from paying a private insurance and education (ITV Ali, p. 76; ITV Malika, p. 33), to paying to get official papers to pass military checkpoints in the country (ITV Nour, p. 93) or using a sponsor to enable the children to attend a public school (ITV Nabil, p. 163). It is important to note, that privatized services like private insurance or education require a significant amount of money in dollars (Rayan pays 900\$ for his private health insurance a year (ITV Rayan, p. 51)), which only few families can provide. Concerning the health care, the other families are relying on prevention measures as wearing masks during Covid-19 (ITV Amal, p. 127), illegal medication coming from countries like Turkey (ITV Nabil, p. 107) or they have to pay in cash if they are going to the doctor which most of them avoid if possible (ITV Yasmin, p. 24).

Some interviewed families reported the **support of NGOs and organisations** to mitigate their daily difficulties. Whereas the Mahmoud-Abbas-Foundation offers direct support for Palestinian families in paying the university fees for Palestinian students (ITV Amal, p. 64), the families connected with the campaign of Karima Chebbo mainly took advantage of the connection and knowledge sharing during the held community meetings (ITV Nour, p. 59). This campaign also directly influenced the life of the families, i.e., since the campaign is mainly responsible for the fact that since 2009, children of Lebanese mothers are prioritized as Lebanese children in access to public schools (ITV Yasmin, p. 45).

In addition to the six mentioned categories of copings strategies, the analysis of the ten family cases also shows the intersectional consequences the social positioning has on the use of certain strategies. Three examples illustrate these intersectional consequences:

Double discrimination: Non-Lebanese and Non-male

Nabil tells the story of the reaction of the police after his sister got harassed in the streets (ITV Nabil, p. 124): Trying to make a report, the police officers did not believe the story of his sister and told the accompanying father: “The problem is your daughter” (ITV Nabil, p. 124). Nabil describes this situation as the result of intersectional discrimination: “So, [in case of] contact with police, even though with Lebanese people, especially Lebanese women, [there are] a lot of problems. For us binational[s], also. It's difficult especially [for] women with Lebanese mother[s] and foreign fathers” (ITV Nabil, p. 124).

Being able to leave: Having money and the right passport

As for the majority of Lebanese young people currently, the topic of emigration also plays a major role in the future plans of the interview partners. Whereas everyone reports that he or she is thinking about and hoping for emigration, the probability and ability of going abroad (to study, to live, to get medical treatment) highly differs according to the socio-economic status and the citizenship the people are holding. The cases of two mothers, who emigrated show these differences: For Batoul, an actress married to a Croatian man who has a six-years-old daughter holding the Croatian citizenship, it was relatively easy to move with her family to Croatia to flee the restrictions her daughter would face in Lebanon (ITV Batoul, p. 30). Whereas for the family of Malika, whose sons are stateless, the emigration process via relocation to Canada lasted about seven years (ITV Malika, p. 6). Both families were able to afford private education and health care in Lebanon and can be considered middle class families, but their emigration process highly differed according to the nationality of the children.

Holding a foreign passport: Positive and Negative discrimination

The case of Ali, holding the Turkish nationality, illustrates the multiple ways in which a foreign passport situates an individual in the Lebanese society: On the one hand, Ali talks about situations in which he was confronted with negative stereotypes and harassment about Turkish people, and people denied him his ability to engage in Lebanese politics because of being Turkish and belonging to another country (ITV Ali, p. 65). On the other hand, he talks about his Turkish citizenship as a privilege, for not getting into trouble with the police (ITV Ali, p. 71) or concerning online dating: “This is funny because nowadays people on Tinder ask, like they put in the bio if you have a foreign passport, it’s a plus. [laughs] So this is funny. So, you can flex with your passport” (ITV Ali, p. 101).

The above-depicted practices are the family’s means to access basic human rights like education, health care, or employment, because the Lebanese state is denying them this access on “legal” grounds due to its restrictive citizenship law. Therefore, these coping strategies are an essential part of the *performative citizenship* of the children constituting themselves as citizens with needs and rights despite the state’s denial.

Between “I am 200% Lebanese!” and “Lebanon didn't give me like one good moment” - Affective acts of citizenship

The emotional relationship of the interviewees towards the Lebanese citizenship played a central role in each interview. This relationship can best be described as ambivalent. Despite the ambivalences, every interviewed family is convinced that it is the right for Lebanese women to give their children the nationality and that it is their children's right to be legally Lebanese (ITV Nour, p. 67). Being and feeling Lebanese was associated with being born and raised in Lebanon (ITV Ali, p. 130), speaking Lebanese (ITV Nabil, p. 11), having your home, friends, and families there (ITV Malika, p. 11) and knowing “the circumstances, the country is facing since I was a child” (ITV Nour, p. 33).

Following Anne-Marie Fortier, these acts of labelling oneself and feeling Lebanese despite not having the legal citizenship assert *affective citizenship* (Fortier 2016) shedding light on the importance of a feeling of belonging as a practice “that seek to redefine, decentre or even refuse citizenship” (Fortier 2016, p. 1039).

Even though every interviewee stated a certain feeling of belonging to Lebanon, the emotional ambivalence of the interview partners concerning Lebanon is important to be highlighted. Fortier puts this in the following words: “How the feelings that attach to citizenship are unevenly distributed across gendered, racialised, sexualised, classed bodies” (Fortier 2016, pp. 1041–1042). Concerning binational families, the interviews showed that this complex entanglement concerns additionally experiences of discrimination based on not having the Lebanese citizenship and experiences of discrimination based on the foreign nationality of the children.

The discrimination based on not having the Lebanese citizenship means that the feeling of being “technically Lebanese”, as one 18-years-old interviewee put it (ITV Nour, p. 9) goes along with emotions of deprivation, fear, and anger towards the Lebanese society and the ruling elite due to their insecure future prospects and the discriminatory experiences in this “toxic society” (ITV Ali, p. 113). Malika, a Lebanese mother of two children, cites her 20-year-old son:

“He told me: ‘I love Lebanon, I relate to this country more than I relate to Palestine, and still, they don't want to grant me the nationality. [...] How come, the country of my mother, where I was born and I have lived most of my life, they don't consider me, consider me their citizen”

And she continues:

“I see their anger is against the current rulers and not the country, as a country and the people. It's mainly towards those, who are ruling and those who are in, who lead the design of the laws” (ITV Malika, p. 44).

Concerning the discrimination based on the foreign nationality of the children, every interviewed person, independently of the foreign nationality the children hold, talked about social encounters in which they felt reduced to their foreign nationality, often combined with prejudices. Examples of this are comments like, “You are Egyptian, you have to work in a gas station” (ITV Nabil, p. 11), or with the denial of them being able to engage in Lebanese politics (ITV Ali, p. 65).

The case of Ali, a young man holding the Turkish citizenship, illustrates another influence the non-Lebanese citizenship can have on the emotional relationship to Lebanon: Having the Turkish

passport allowing him to travel and move outside Lebanon relatively easily, his emotional attachment to Lebanon is primarily marked by the absence of his rights (ITV Ali, p. 113).

Referring to the intersectional perspective of Fortier on the gendered feeling of belonging to a certain citizenship, the situation of the mothers is important to highlight too: The interviewed women referred to themselves as Lebanese women, never applying only the term Lebanese to themselves (ITV Malika, p. 3). This can be an indicator showing that the differentiation the citizenship law is making between male and female citizens is also shaping the identity of women as “second-class” citizens. This awareness about the gendered conception of the Lebanese citizenship law is also depicted in interviews with daughters: Being asked if she seeks to get the nationality by marrying a Lebanese man, Yasmin answers:

“No, I don't think about it this way at all. [laughs] A marriage is not a goal to get citizenship at all. Marriage should be for the reason it is. Not for nationality, Lebanese nationality. Also, I am a medical student, I am going to be a doctor, I am going to be an independent woman so. I don't think of, I will find solutions for this (ITV Yasmin, p. 64).”

This statement of being an independent woman and having the right to have the nationality from her mother shows that Yasmin is not only feeling Lebanese (despite not having the citizenship) but is well aware of her legal status as a woman under this patriarchal law and the gendered consequences of this law.

To conclude, one can say that affective acts of citizenship play a central role in the performative citizenship of the interviewed families. Whereas the emotional relationship to Lebanon is ambivalent, primarily due to the multiple discriminatory experiences, the affective conviction of having the right to be Lebanese was demonstrated in every interview.

“And if it's like the last thing I do before I die” - Performative citizenship as a struggle for a more liberal citizenship law

The concept of *performative citizenship* focusses originally “not only [on, B.K.] the actual social and political struggles that mobilize it, but also [on, B.K.] practical, material, artistic, expressive, and articulate ways in which people enact citizenship on a stage that may or may not be of their choosing” (Isin 2019, p. 52). The following analysis points out these different ways of social and political activism of binational families.

It is important to note that the way I got in contact with my interview partners, was via contacts with NGOs meaning that every interviewed person has in one way or another an affiliation with social or political organizations. I assume that their contact with NGOs, especially with the campaign of Karima Chebbo concerning the Lebanese citizenship law, correlates with their social and political activism in a reinforcing way. Therefore, special attention needs to be drawn on not generalizing the here depicted forms of *performative citizenship* to all binational families.

The various forms of political and social engagement by which the interviewees perform citizenship can be summarized in four different categories of engagement.

The first category contains **dedicated engagement for a more liberal citizenship law**, meaning for eight of ten interview partners any attachment with the campaign “My nationality is a right for me and my family” (Arabic: جنسيتي_حق_لي_ولأسرتي) led by the CRTD-A and Karima Chebbo. Their engagement with the campaign contains different forms of awareness raising activities, from participation in demonstrations (ITV Nour, p. 65) to the writing of newspaper or website

articles (ITV Dalia, p. 78; ITV Amal, p. 234) and public speeches (ITV Malika, p. 19). The following statement of the 18-years-old Nour summarizes the motivation for this engagement as a lot of interviewees described it. To the question, why she takes part in such demonstrations, she answers:

“In order to just make sure light is getting there, light is being shed of course. Sitting not doing anything and just expecting the citizenship to fall from the sky, it's really not logical” (ITV Nour, p. 67).

Political party engagement is the second form of engagement. It is exercised by three interviewed young men (ITV Ali; ITV Nabil; ITV Rayan). Two of them (ITV Ali; ITV Nabil) are engaged with the new emerging political party “Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla” (English: citizens in a state) and Rayan volunteers for the Lebanese Forces. Ali and Nabil highlight the singularity of *citizens in a state* in their openness to the participation of non-Lebanese people: “All of the political parties, they say that: ‘You are Lebanese citizen although you don't have identity [card]’” (ITV Nabil, p. 46). Ali, the 27-years-old Turkish man, adds: “It's something very weird and uncommon to have a political life in Lebanon with people who are not Lebanese at all” (ITV Ali, p. 124), highlighting the unfamiliarity of his political engagement for a party he cannot vote for. Rayan describes his engagement with ambivalence: He talks about feeling sad of not being able to vote, but that with his party engagement, he tries “to feel like I am Lebanese more. I am trying to live like my environment.” (ITV Rayan, p. 70).

A third form of engagement can be summarized with the notion of **local civic engagement**. It includes the participation in the mass protests of October 2019 (ITV Yassir, p. 55) or in the reconstruction of Beirut after the port blast in 2020, i.e., performed by Ali in distributing food or cleaning the city after the blast (ITV Ali, p. 116). This civic engagement beyond the cause of a more inclusive citizenship is described by the interview partners with the same ambivalence as the party engagement. Concerning his queer political engagement, Yassir states:

“And even political engagement, the only entry point for my political engagement is not queer, even though for me it has to be primary. It's "oh my mother has to have the right to give me a nationality". I cannot talk about anything else because I know that they will not give me the entitlement to talk about anything else” (ITV Yassir, p. 56)

Widening the view on the concept of political engagement, the interviews revealed a fourth form of engagement in the close environment: the (daily) **engagement in explaining one's situation** to known and unknown people. The interviewees described that either in private encounters with friends, classmates, or professors at university, or in official contacts with authorities i.e., the General Security, they must explain their situation because “not everyone is aware of it. Like they are not aware that we exist” (ITV Ali, p. 122). I designate these, both time consuming and emotionally tiring (ITV Nour, p. 43) practices as political engagement, because it can be considered as a not voluntarily chosen awareness raising activity by which the individuals perform as political actors shedding light on legal norms and spreading their demands on how to change these.

These different forms of engagement show the various forms of how non-Lebanese people coming from binational families perform their political citizenship by engaging in various political and social struggles. By engaging as a political subject, and not only concerning the question of

the Lebanese citizenship law, they contest the state-drawn dividing line between legal citizens and non-citizens.

“It is as 'active citizens' that individual women and men are empowered to claim their basic rights and entitlements: not only the right to vote or engage in political decision-making, but the right to work and to earn a decent livelihood, the right to affordable health care and education for themselves and their families, and the right to social welfare benefits” (Abou-Habib 2011, p. 443).

Conclusion

This qualitative paper’s aim is to shed light on the consequences the patriarchal Lebanese citizenship law has on the families of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men. By applying the notion of Engin F. Isin’s concept of *performative citizenship*, it answers the guiding question of what practices and strategies the families have adopted to overcome or mitigate the legal restrictions they face.

The ten interviews conducted for this study give an exemplified insight in the multiple ways that people cope. Children act and react to the restraint of not having the Lebanese citizenship on paper. Following Isin and Anne-Marie Fortier, I call these actions and reactions acts of *performative* and *affective citizenship* arguing that even without legal citizenship, children of binational families perform Lebanese citizenship in three different ways. Firstly, they perform citizenship by finding and asserting coping strategies to overcome or mitigate the legal restrictions and hereby actively take responsibility to claim and work for their basic rights. Secondly, they perform citizenship by affectively being attached to Lebanon and by openly and publicly stating this emotional relationship to the country and their conviction to have the right to have the Lebanese citizenship. And finally, acts of performative citizenship can be observed in children politically fighting together with their parents for a more inclusive citizenship law or engaging in other ways (political parties, civic engagement) in Lebanese politics.

This paper also strengthens the hypothesis that despite the same legal framework, the group of binational families is highly heterogenous. The intersectional analysis shows that the possibilities to overcome or mitigate restrictions depends on the socio-economic background of the family, the nationality, and the gender of the children. In light of the current multiple crises Lebanon is facing, basic human rights like health care, education, or work are significantly easier for families with higher income and for children with non-Arab nationalities.

Based on the insights this paper provides, some suggestions derive concerning the advocacy work for a more inclusive citizenship law in Lebanon: It may be advisable in this work to specifically target the access to education, health care, and the labour market to reach significant improvement of the living conditions for the affected families. This advocacy approach does not mean to neglect the aim of changing the patriarchal citizenship law in itself but may represent a step-by-step path based on the immediate daily needs of the families.

I hope that this paper contributes to a better understanding of the day-to-day restrictions, the coping mechanisms, and the heterogeneity of the situation of binational families. But if anything can change the patriarchal legal norm causing these restrictions, these are the daily struggles, fights, and strategies the families are performing. I am grateful that they have shared their personal stories with me! شكرا جزيل

Publication bibliography

Abou-Habib, Lina (2011): The 'right to have rights': active citizenship and gendered social entitlements in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. In *Gender and Development* 11 (3), pp. 441–454.

Al Tabshi, Rasha (2021): *Humans Without Rights*. Research into the issue of denying women their right to grant citizenship and the problem of statelessness in Syria. Edited by Warsheh Team.

Braun, Virginia; Clarke, Victoria (2006): Using thematic analysis in psychology. In *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2), pp. 77–101.

Chebbo, Karima (2022): Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in Lebanon: Denying the Basic Right of Nationality. Al Rawiya. Available online at <https://al-rawiya.com/human-rights/womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-lebanon-denying-the-basic-right-of-nationality/>, checked on 6/15/2022.

CRTD-A (2022): Annual Report 2021. Edited by CRTD-A.

Fortier, Anne-Marie (2016): Afterword: acts of affective citizenship? Possibilities and limitations. In *Citizenship Studies* 20 (8), pp. 1038–1044. DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2016.1229190.

Funk, Marco; Parked, Roderick (2016): Syrian refugee flows - and ebbs. Edited by European Union Institute for Security Studies. Available online at https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_5_Refugee_flows.pdf.

Geagea, Nayla; Fakih, Lama; Makhlof, Youmna (2015): Unequal and unprotected. Women's rights under Lebanese personal status law. Edited by Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch (Organization). New York NY (Human Rights Watch (Organization)).

General Saray (1/19/1925): Decree No15 on Lebanese Nationality.

Gira, Sarra (2017): Coup de gueule des Libanaises : "La naturalisation est un droit pour nos conjoints et nos enfants !". In *France24*, 4/6/2017. Available online at <https://observers.france24.com/fr/20170406-coup-gueule-libanaises-naturalisation-est-droit-nos-conjoints-nos-enfants>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Hepworth, Kate (2017): *At the Edges of Citizenship. Security and the Constitution of Non-citizen Subjects*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Human Rights Watch (2018): Lebanon: Discriminatory Nationality Law. Grant Lebanese Women’s Children, Spouses Citizenship Rights. Human Rights Watch. Available online at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/03/lebanon-discriminatory-nationality-law>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Isin, Engin (2015): Citizenship's Empire. In Engin Isin (Ed.): *Citizenship after Orientalism. Transforming Political Theory*. London: palgrave macmillan, pp. 263–281.

Isin, Engin (2019): Doing Rights with Things: The Art of Becoming Citizens. In Paula Hildebrandt, Kerstin Evert, Peters, Sibylle, Schaub, Mirjam, Wildner, Kathirn, Ziemer, Gesa (Eds.): *Performing Citizenship. Bodies, Agencies, Limitations*. Cham: palgrave macmillan, pp. 45–56.

Isin, Engin F.; Wood, Patricia K. (1999): *Citizenship & Identity*. London: SAGE Publications.

Jamal, Mutayyam (2016): The Lebanese Woman Is Half Citizen until Further Notice. In *ALRJ* (129-130), pp. 91–93. DOI: 10.32380/alrj.v0i0.61.

Jaulin, Thibaut (2006): La restitution de la nationalité libanaise : enjeux juridiques et politiques. In Françoise de Bel-Air (Ed.): *Migration et politique au Moyen-Orient*. Beirut: Presses de l’Ifpo, pp. 163–183. Available online at <https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/4786>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Jaulin, Thibaut (2015): « C’est bien la loi d’un pays à forte émigration » Principes de la nationalité et représentations de la nation au Liban. In *remmm (Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée) en ligne* (137). Available online at <https://journals.openedition.org/remmm/9077>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Joseph, Suad (2000a): Civic Myths, Citizenship, and Gender in Lebanon. In Suad Joseph (Ed.): *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 107-136.

Joseph, Suad (2000b): Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East. In Suad Joseph (Ed.): *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 3–31.

Mouawad, Jamil (2021): *Lebanese Trade Unions and Independent Professional Associations: A Review in Light of the Popular Movement*. Arab Reform Initiative.

Nahas, Charbel (1980): *Le confessionalisme au Liban. Du fonctionnement discursif et idéologique vers une position du problème*. Thèse. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Beirut.

Saghieh, Nizar; El-Hajjar, Shehrazade Yara (2020): Denying Lebanese Women the Ability to Pass On Nationality. Edited by The Legal Agenda. Available online at <https://english.legal-agenda.com/denying-lebanese-women-the-ability-to-pass-on-nationality/>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Saleh, Mohsen (2019): The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the right to work. In *Middle East Monitor*, 7/31/2019. Available online at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190731-the-palestinian-refugees-in-lebanon-and-the-right-to-work/>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Scala, Michel (2022): *An Intersectional Perspective on Social (In)security. Making the case for universal social protection in Lebanon*. Edited by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, The Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action.

Sharafeddine, Fahima (2009): *Predicament of Lebanese Women Married to Non-Lebanese. Field Analytical Study*. Available online at <http://www.databank.com.lb/docs/Predicament%20of%20Lebanese%20Women%20Married%20to%20Non%20Lebanese%202009%20Fahima%20Charafdeen.pdf>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Shibaty, Omar (2021): The woes of Lebanese women married to foreigners during COVID-19, 3/1/2021. Available online at <https://beirut-today.com/2021/03/01/the-woes-of-lebanese-women-married-to-foreigners-during-covid-19/>, checked on 6/15/2022.

Tamayo, Sergio (2019): Spaces of Citizenship. In Paula Hildebrandt, Kerstin Evert, Peters, Sibylle, Schaub, Mirjam, Wildner, Kathirn, Ziemer, Gesa (Eds.): *Performing Citizenship. Bodies, Agencies, Limitations*. Cham: palgrave macmillan, pp. 127–146.

Witzel, Andreas (2000): Das problemzentrierte Interview. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung* 1 (1).

Yahya, Maha (2009): *Lebanon National Human Development Report. toward a citizen's state*. Edited by UNDP.

Yasmine, Rola; Sukkar, Batoul (2019): Restrained motherhood: the Lebanese state in times of changing demographics and moral values. In *Sexual and reproductive health matters* 27 (2), pp. 27–38. DOI: 10.1080/26410397.2019.1643192.

Interview partners

Ali: 27 years old, Turkish nationality (27.04.2022).

Amal: 25 years old, stateless/ Palestinian refugee status (01.06.2022).

Batoul: mother of one child (6y) having the Croatian nationality (22.04.2022).

Dalia: mother of two children (19, 14y) having the Syrian nationality (21.05.2022).

Malika: mother of two children (21y, 15y) first having no nationality, after emigration to Canada having the Canadian nationality (29.04.2022).

Nabil: 25 years old, Egyptian nationality (11.05.2022).

Nour: 18 years old, Egyptian nationality (29.04.2022).

Rayan: 21 years old, Egyptian nationality (02.06.2022).

Yasmin: 21 years old, Pakistani nationality (02.06.2022).

Yassir: 25 years old, stateless (09.06.2022).