

## THE DREAM OF CITIZENSHIP. MIXED MARRIAGES IN JORDAN: CHALLENGES, OBSTACLES AND STRUGGLES

BEATA KOWALSKA<sup>1</sup>

Jagiellonian University

The Jordanian law states that only a Jordanian male may pass on his citizenship to his children. Jordanian women cannot pass on their nationality to their husband or to their children. The Nationality Law reflects the conception that nationality based on blood ties is established only through the father and is not tied to the land or nation. There are currently a number of different initiatives that promote changes in the citizenship law. The concept of citizenship is at the center of the debate not only on women's rights in Jordan, but also national identity and relations with state<sup>2</sup>.

**Keywords:** gendered citizenship, politicized motherhood, grassroots movement, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, marriages with foreigners, relational rights

---

<sup>1</sup> Contact: [kowalska@uj.edu.pl](mailto:kowalska@uj.edu.pl)

<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on research that I conducted during three field research trips in 2008, 2011, 2013 thanks to a scholarship provided by the American Centre of Oriental Research in Amman. I worked with Jordanian organizations and women's groups fighting for equality in citizenship law. I would like to thank all of my interviewees for their warm welcome and all the help they provided.

## THE LOGIC OF GLOBAL POPULATION FLOWS FROM A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

In recent discussions on migration, the inflow of migrants and refugees from poor countries to rich countries is most often analyzed. Immigration conceived in this way is the response of labor markets in the pursuit of economic and demographic balance. This thesis, although true, does not explain the global geography of migration. In fact, as the French political scientist Hellen Thollet points out, the most important flow is between developing countries: 38% of immigrants from poor countries live in other poor countries, while 34% live in developed countries (Thollet 2017: 12–13). The difference in levels of wealth and the complementarity between the country of origin and the host country are important factors in explaining international migration, but not the only ones. Other factors, and no less important, include the geographic distance between countries and cultural similarity. The decision to leave home is easier when the language one hears in the new place is like ours; then, we will be able to understand the lifestyle and habits of the locals.

The economic logic of the flow of humans does not fully explain modern mass movements of the population. Consistently, the key reasons why people choose to leave their homes are: war, military conflict and violence. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says 86% (Thollet 2017: 14) of those displaced by violence live in poor countries near their country of origin. Refugees fleeing violence, persecution and war do not want to leave their homes, but are forced to do so. As a rule, they prefer to stay close to where they are coming from, in order to be able to return as soon as political, social and economic circumstances permit it. Another reason for staying close to home is the global refugee policy, which seeks to keep people running away from violence in their region of origin, which in essence limits their freedom<sup>3</sup>.

All above-described processes affect the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a small country in the Middle East that for nearly one century has survived at the center of the crises and wars taking place in the region. Thousands of Palestinian, Iraqi, and recently Syrian families fleeing the war found shelter here. Jordan is also a place where many Egyptians, the Filipinos, the Yemenis, seek work. It is not surprising therefore that in this country where indigenous people are a minority, mixed marriages are embedded in the social landscape. State law which reflects the patriarchal traditions of the region, in a different

---

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, looking at the world's main refugee groups worldwide, we see that most Palestinians have been living in Jordan, Lebanon and the Arab world since the 1950s. Also from 2012 most Syrians have been living in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

way treats the mixed marriages of women and men. Strategic importance for the sense of belonging to the national community<sup>4</sup> is rooted in the paternal lineage. Jordanian law states that only a Jordanian male may pass on his citizenship to his children. A foreign wife can obtain citizenship after three years of marriage if she is an Arab and after five years if of another nationality. Jordanian women cannot pass on their nationality to their husband or children. The Nationality Law reflects the idea that nationality based on blood ties is established only through the father and is not tied to the land or nation. It carries crucial repercussions in the daily life of thousands mixed marriages in Jordan. Official statistics state that there were 88,983 Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians and that these families have 355,932 registered children.

### LIFE WITHOUT CITIZENSHIP IN MIXED MARRIAGES

Citizenship is a guarantee of a whole range of rights. From political rights, tenure in public office, participation in political life, like voting or standing for elections, to rights that decide about the quality of everyday life, access to education, health care, social services, or employment in the public sector. A female citizen of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan not only cannot guarantee citizenship for her offspring, but even the right of residence.

In order to prove citizen status one must possess the relevant documents. A female resident of the Kingdom may, in accordance with international conventions, travel freely. The condition for the realization of this right is the possession of a valid passport. Until recently, however, in order to receive one, written permission from one's husband or father was necessary (and still the final decision depends on the good will of an officer). This is not the only example when a woman in Jordan has access to what is rightfully hers only through a male mediator. Another document used widely for all administrative procedures in the Kingdom of Jordan is a family booklet, necessary to receive a ballot and to run for office, sign up children for school or young people for university, and to have access to social assistance or to work in public service. Not possessing this document precludes the possibility to use multiple rights and benefits of a full citizen. A family booklet is issued to the head of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Religious affiliation is also inherited along this line. This affects the life and choices of women much more than men. A woman loses her religious identity when she chooses to enter into a mixed marriage. Most states in the region sanction this situation legally, forbidding women to marry outside of the Muslim faith. For men, the possibility of marrying a woman of another faith is an open possibility.

household, only a man: father, brother, or husband, and in it his dependents are listed: women and children.

Nima was the leader of an informal group of women fighting for citizenship for their children, a widow with six children. The two younger daughters only have birth certificates and entries in the passport of their deceased father. Children are not allowed to appear in the passport of the Jordanian mother, which do not take into account the children whose father is a different nationality. To get passports for the girls and to extend the documents of the younger son, documents from Morocco are needed.

*Six years ago, my daughter became ill. Surgery was needed. I went for an interview. He told me that I should turn to my husband's family in Morocco; this was not his business (R33).*

The journey is costly. They do not know anyone there (the paternal grandfather has already emigrated to Jerusalem). They do not speak French. The oldest daughters have citizenship because they married Jordanians. The eldest son who works in Dubai supports the whole family. The younger one does not have access to legal work (the permit is expensive and would need to be renewed). Whenever he asks his employer for something, he hears that if he does not like something, he can quit.

*This is a good, well-educated boy. He was arrested because he does not have an ID [crying]. Like a criminal! They held him until I came to the police station (R33).*

Jordanian law completely ignores the cases of women whose husbands died. A widow, like a woman divorced or abandoned, may receive a family booklet, which is absolutely necessary in order to study, work, etc., but only in her maiden name. Children from a relationship with a foreigner, who are minors and remain under her care, cannot however be written into the booklet.

I spent many hours talking with a young computer specialist and his newly wedded wife:

*My mother is Jordanian and my wife as well. I do not have Jordanian citizenship. I waited for four months to get permission to get married. I'm afraid of what will happen when my wife becomes pregnant. It would be so embarrassing. You can see for yourself, we will be ashamed to tell the children why we did it. But that's no reason to be ashamed (R34).*

One of the leaders summarizes the most important forms of discrimination based on sex in access to citizenship:

*Civil rights are conditional. They must pay more for residency and license, education and health insurance. They do not have the right to stay permanently in the country. The government can deport them for no reason. They cannot work. If they do find work it's on the same basis as foreigners. Generally this is not good work. On the same conditions as the Egyptians or Filipinos who are allowed to come to the country and work. They have to pay for a work license also, which is very costly. Some do not have documents, because the father left them behind and their mother cannot provide them with an identity card or passport. They live without documents; a portion of them does. It is really very problematic for Jordanian women. It is unfair because Jordanian men can pass on citizenship immediately (R1).*

Another adds:

*These families are not only deprived of citizenship, but what is more disturbing, the right of permanent residence. Because of this they are treated like other foreign guests, families need to reapply each year for permanent residence under the same conditions as foreigners, which need not be given if you do not show a proven source of income (R27).*

My many discussions with groups of women fighting for citizenship for their children not only confirmed this information, but also brought out a lot of new testimonies about the negative impact of discriminatory laws in their daily lives. One of my interviewees, a thirty-five year old widow, mother of three children, sold her husband's house in Egypt to buy a small, basement apartment on the outskirts of Amman. She works as an instructor in a driving school (only a woman can teach another woman how to drive a car).

*As I think about it, I keep crying; I cannot sleep. And when they deported them to Egypt... See, I don't even have them in my passport. Do you think I should go to Egypt? But we do not know anyone there. Here is our country. My eldest will soon be recruited to the army there. They will treat a Jordanian poorly. If he was in the Jordanian army, I would be proud. Look, I'm teaching a Filipino woman how to drive. Her husband is Jordanian. Old, sick. She says that when he dies, she'll sell everything and return to the Philippines. She does not love Jordan, we love it and our children do not have citizenship. Every day I pray for citizenship for them (R35).*

No less moving is the story of the mother of 10-year-old Sarah. Her husband, a pilot in the Oman Army, abandoned them a few years ago. Sarah only has a birth certificate because her father did not have the time to register her at the embassy. The embassy refused to issue a passport at the request of her mother. The girl, in order to pass entrance exams to high school, must have a document, and no institution wants to take on such a unique case. The UNHCR refused to help, because the girl lives “in good conditions.” Sarah dreams of travel. They live with the help of their family.

*You know, I'm so scared, because she has only me. They did not even want to insure Sarah, and the lawyer told me that if she died, we could not bury her because we do not have documents (R36).*

One of the organizations which I worked with invited children aged 14 to 18 to take part in the study. They did an exercise, “mind maps”, about their identity and sense of belonging. They wrote a poem together. Below are their statements:

*I look like a Jordanian, think like a Jordanian and talk like a Jordanian, but am not considered a Jordanian;  
I am Jordanian, but in reality I'm nobody, just a skeleton that wanders the street;  
I am Jordanian, but I'm treated as half a citizen;  
I am Jordanian, but I don't have rights;  
I am Jordanian, but not on paper;  
They call me the son of the Egyptian here [in Jordan] and when I go to Egypt, they start calling me the son of the Jordanian... they should make up their minds and decide who I am<sup>5</sup>.*

The 13-year-old boy mentioned that he “hated” school five years ago, when his teacher asked him to return textbooks that she gave to him by “mistake”. He was not entitled to them, she said, because he was Egyptian. His family, to send him to university, have to spend 10,000 dinars (\$14,000), three times the tuition for a Jordanian citizen. The annual work permit for his older brother costs the family 400 dinars (\$565), but he is still unable to work, as priority is given to Jordanians.

The complicated legal situation caused a high sense of deprivation, in the opinions of people in the study, mainly due to the limited capacity to meet basic needs, such as food and clothing, as well as limited access to education,

<sup>5</sup> Materials provided by the Information Research Center King Hussein Foundation.

employment, health care and decent housing, ill-treatment in public hospitals, the lack of opportunities to travel and deprived access to services other Jordanians have. Feelings of rejection by society, the lack of stability, a sense of inferiority seriously affected majority of researched families. These feelings are also connected with the daily fear of the deportation of the women's husband or father. One of the interviewees, a young married woman, mother of a one-year-old daughter, states:

*I am continuously in fear of severing relations between my country, Jordan, and my husband's country, and me having to leave the country with my husband, something that I find very hard to bear (What About My Children? 2010: 30).*

While most mixed marriages were not aware of the consequences before the marriage that the decision to start a family will bring, at this time almost all experience feelings of guilt and fear about the future of the children. In one of the organizations, my attention was drawn to the complicated situation regarding ownership:

*All my son's and daughter's property is registered in my name, as I am Jordanian and have the right to own property. I fear in case of my illness or death that my children rights will be lost. I also fear the severance of diplomatic relations between my country and my children's country, and the possible consequences or limits on their freedom (R3).*

In one of the organizations with which I worked, I learned the story of a widow, the mother of eight children, whose husband came from Yemen. All children were born and raised in Jordan and had never even visited their father's country. The oldest son is now 49 years and he is the father of children aged 9 to 21 years. There are signs that soon the consequences of inequality in the law will be felt by the third generation in the family.

## A POLITICAL PROBLEM

This is a violation of several international conventions, among others, the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW), which emphasizes equal rights for women and men with respect to the nationality of their children. Jordan has imposed limits to full gender citizenship based on Quran sura 33 ("Call them by the names of their fathers").

This is not a solid basis. Contradictions between CEDAW and *sharia* would not exist if the mother passed her citizenship onto her child who holds the father's surname. So if the argumentation based on *sharia* is so fragile, what is the underlying reason for this discriminatory law?

The government's official response to a report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women states that: „Jordan's reservation to article 9 Paragraph 2 of CEDAW was not based on any discriminatory practice against women. It is purely political recriminations closely related to the situation in the Middle East” (What About My Children 2010: 9).

The government of Jordan does not plan to repeal the said limitations until a comprehensive solution to this issue will be undertaken. The often repeated arguments in favor of the discriminatory law include the problem of “national security”, and, as cited in less formal discussions, the idea that national identity is in danger. In the last decade, this small country attracted masses of Iraqi refugees seeking safety and Syrians with their families, as well as many poor Egyptians, Sudanese and Yemenis seeking employment. But a primary problem is with the Palestinians. It should be remembered that more than half of the inhabitants of Jordan are Palestinians. Citizen status would have to be granted to those who do not have it, and they live in mixed marriages. Jordan firmly rejects the idea that as a result of a peace agreement it could be the alternative homeland for the Palestinians, thereby complying with the Arab League's decision, under which the Arab countries do not give citizenship to persons of Palestinian origin in order to protect the Palestinian identity.

On the other hand, the situation in the Occupied Territories has been dramatic for several years, and the chances for its improvement in the near future are scant. According to many Jordanian politicians, wider access to Jordanian citizenship could increase migration. It is claimed that this could be destructive for the limited budget of this small kingdom. However, “this business is protected” partially, because these provisions affect only women and their families. Jordanian men can marry even more than one woman from the Palestinian territories.

In this context, the authors of the *Jordan Shadow NGO Report* clearly point out:

*This justification, which was presented to NGOs as a political decision, does not explain how a Jordanian man's right to confer the nationality to a Palestinian woman upon marriage would not threaten the Palestinian identity, whereas a Jordanian woman is not entitled to pass the nationality on to her Palestinian husband because that would threaten the Palestinian identity. This political justification is*

*the product of a patriarchal principle that opposes women and women's rights. Politics is used here as a tool to maintain discriminatory practices. If this is the case with Palestinians, then what about Syrians, Iraqis and Egyptians, or any other nationalities? (Jordan Shadow NGO Report 2012: 24)*

This is an illustration of the interdependence of patriarchal structures and the institutions of the state. I was under the impression, after analysis of interviews and documents and legal reports, that the marriage of a Jordanian woman to a foreign man is treated as disloyalty to the nation and built on the basis of blood ties only on the part of the father. To understand the social background of such approach, the critical differences between family-based categories of citizenship and individual-based notions of citizenship have to be examined.

## RELATIONAL CONCEPT OF RIGHTS

The idea of citizenship was created in a Western cultural context. The question about its usefulness in the analyses of postcolonial states has to be raised. Although the idea of citizenship is nearly universal today, but what it means and how it is experienced is not. In the Middle Eastern context we should bear in mind some important characteristics. In Arab states, goods, services and rights are dispensed through a family system. Family is at the center of the national project, and the state institutions often relies on clan-tribe structures. Hence, in most regional constitutions, family is the primary point of reference and “is the main social institution through which individuals and groups inherit religious, class, and cultural affiliations. It also gives a sense of security and support in times of personal and social unrest” (Barakat 1993: 98).

The hierarchical nature of the Arab family structures favors male and older family members. They are responsible for the well-being and security of all members of the family. The basis of their authority is lodged in their social privileges and access to land, inheritance, management of time and the work of relatives. They not only distribute resources, but they also make strategic decisions about the future by supporting relatives in their search for jobs, setting up a business, or lending money. Although a mother's family can play an important social, emotional or even economic role, the relatives on the father's side that play a key role in building the social status of the individual through the transmission of religious identity or political affiliation that opens the way to various resources. Children belong to the father's family. In the case of divorce, the mother most often loses the right to care for the offspring. In the

event of a father's death, the close relatives of his family have a decisive view on the future of the children.

Clearly defined cultural boundaries affect the position of men and women in the political or economic dimension of social life. Men take action in the public sphere. Reproductive roles justify a significant reduction of women's role to the home. Childcare, in the absence of care facilities, prevents them from doing activities outside the house. They can work professionally, it is their right, but not at the cost of home life. Even when they reach important professional or political positions, their social rank is still built on the effective fulfillment of their duties as a mother, wife or daughter. A man as a family breadwinner is entitled to social security benefits. Women, due to their limited participation in the official labor market, and sometimes due to discriminatory regulations, cannot benefit from their rights without the mediation of the head of their family. Working in the informal sector of the economy or a home-based company run by a male relative does not give the right to receive benefits and social security or other forms of state aid. In the situation of economic or social instability, family support networks remain the only safeguard, which solidifies patriarchal relationships and control over women.

Controlling the behavior of women relatives is not only a social imperative, but sometimes also a requirement of law when the consent of a male guardian is required for education, employment or marriage, a passport application or travel. If there is a conflict, the position of the whole family, guarded by men, rests upon the restoration of balance. Family is the source of social identity, a "safe heaven", but also a totalitarian, all-encompassing institution. Relational specificity, based on the family, not individual, of citizenship-building still requires further study. Women in this relationship appear primarily as mothers and wives. Suad Joseph describes it as the "relational concept of rights":

*In the liberal construct of citizenship dominant in most Western countries, the unit of society is the individualized citizen, not the family or any other collectivity. Individuals, not collectivities, are the bearers of rights and responsibilities vis-a-vis the state. The citizen as an individual is assumed to have at least ideally no identities and loyalties to other collectivities that compare with those to the nation-state.<sup>10</sup> Individual citizens are seen as having equal access and rights to a neutral state, which does not differentiate among its members on the basis of race, gender, class, ethnicity or religion. Most Middle Eastern constitutions articulate notions of the individualized citizen, but also include constructs of citizens as members of subnational communities. Middle Eastern states, thus, tend not to construct citizenship exclusively or primarily as individualized. Citizens, in various ways, are formally recognized as members of family units, religious*

*sects, ethnic, tribal or other subnational groups. It is often in relation to women that Middle Eastern con? situations and laws evoke the importance of subnational collectivities that are constructed by and around male-headed families. Women are brought into the nation/state as appendages of husbands and fathers. That children come to have citizenship through their fathers and not their mothers in many Middle Eastern societies further reinforces the connection between fathers and national citizenship (Joseph 1996a: 6–7).*

The patriarchal system, rooted in the kinship structures penetrates all spheres of life. Therefore, the boundaries between state, family, market or civil society are fluid. In the case that the relationship between a female citizen or a male citizen and the state is mediated, the patron-client system is strengthened. They use their rights through their connections (usually from their network of relatives) or someone who can meet their needs or refer them to someone who can help. Implementing rights is not based on equality before the law and the neutrality of the state irrespective of gender, class, origin, ethnicity, religion, etc., but is perceived as a kind of charity or gift. Sunk in an interpersonal network of hierarchical exchanges. State institutions are penetrated by relations based on kinship structures. Access to public resources depends on them. The theoretical framework of citizenship-building helps us to understand the complexity of the Jordanian struggle for equality in nationality law.

## LONG STRUGGLE

Although the demand for equal access to citizenship in Hashemite kingdom of Jordan was raised by women's organizations already in the 50s, at the beginning of my research in 2008 hardly anyone wanted to talk about it. Attempts to raise the subject usually ended with the sentence: "This is a political issue." It was only recently that the problem began to breakthrough into broad public debate, which is due to the determination of the leaders of women's movements. The problem of discrimination against female citizens of Jordan was raised repeatedly on the international arena, both by international organizations such as Amnesty International and Freedom House, and the coalition of Jordanian women's organizations which prepared alternative reports periodically related to the implementation of CEDAW<sup>6</sup>. Much hope has been tied with the amendment

---

<sup>6</sup> The overwhelming criticism of the government on this issue, which has been reflected in the text of the report presented in February 2012 at a session of the United Nations in Geneva, met with unfavorable reactions in the country ("The Jordan Times" 03.06.2012).

of the Constitution in 2011 and the change in the wording of Article 6, which speaks of “equality before the law regardless of race, language or religion.” Despite many efforts, entering a fragment on “equality regardless of gender” into record has failed. It would have set the basis for changing the discriminatory law on citizenship. Taking advantage of the new wave of liberalization, which was brought on by the Arab Spring, new initiatives to change the status quo appeared in this regard, which was unlike anything Jordan experienced before.

On March 25, 2011, on a cold and rainy day, a powerful demonstration was attended also by Nima Habashna with her daughters Rima and Rula, standing slightly to the side. They held the banner: “My mom is Jordanian and I have a right to her nationality.” In the male-dominated crowd, the women with their own banner caught the attention of Western televisions and the sympathy of the demonstrators. In this way, the news of the battle for a decent life that the widow with six children had to fight broke out. For six years, she tried to get domestic and foreign institutions interested about the fate of Jordanian women whose loved ones do not have any rights. During our first meeting, she said:

*I believe, I believe in this fight and myself. That one day this struggle will end for us all (R33).*

Nima set up a Facebook page. She was looking for people in a similar situation; she published articles and reports on the subject; she asked for contact, and sent information to the media. On June 1<sup>st</sup> the first demonstration in front of the Prime Minister’s Office took place. The banners bore the slogans: “We are full citizens and to not accept anything less than this”; the demonstrators carried banners that read: “My mother is Jordanian and her citizenship is my right,” and “We are not attacking anyone, we are just demanding our constitutional rights.” Overcoming fear and the belief that nothing can be done was a slow process. Subsequent protests gathered more people. A database of the women who joined was created. Those who dared to protest stressed that the fight is on behalf of all women in the same situation. In informal conversations there is a reoccurring fear that a strong presence in defense of their rights may harm the children and perhaps lead to deportation to the country of their father’s origin. “Friendly” advice from the security officers concerning responsibility for the content appearing on the website or contact with the media (especially Al Jazeera) also raised the level of fear.

All of the people I talked to were opposed to politicizing their struggles. They want, as I’ve often heard, to live with their children in peace in their own country. Motherhood was an inspiration for political activity that challenges

authoritarian government and exclusion politics. It allows women to enter public areas otherwise reserved for men. My respondents present themselves as protectors of their families, the main source of their identification. Responsibility for the fate of the family became the source of mobilization. Such an appeal to maternal responsibility and a sense of responsibility connected with the sympathy of the public, but also connected people of different financial status and origin. Community experience here was more important than the differences that divide them. Unsuccessfully, attempts were made to set up an association. Every time the proposal was rejected, which was a powerful blow to the people involved. In this case, the Arab Women's Organization strongly supported the effort. Less than a year after joining the demonstration for reforms, Nima Habashna delivered a speech during a UN session in Geneva about the situation of Jordanian women's families with foreigner fathers. She was one of the authors of a new shadow report about the implementation of CEDAW.

When I visited Jordan in September 2013, under the surface of Syrian war and Egyptian chaos the old patterns were restored. In spite of protests and social mobilization the structure of the main political powers in Jordan wasn't transformed. The authoritarian state still defined and control the scope of civic engagement. Demonstrations were still organized but they gathered less and less people. Members of the mother's group were intimidated by the interventions of security service. One of my Jordanian friends summarized the situation in a very metaphorical way: "The flowers of our spring were fallen, but the harvest will come". Step by step we become witness to it. For more than 60 years nobody has wanted to deal with the sensitive problem of equal access to nationality in mixed marriages. But the Arab Spring opened the box of unrealistic dreams. Unequal access to nationality has become a part of the national debate. In 2013 a coalition was called together called "My nationality is My Family's Right", which was composed of 11 organizations and 18 individual members, including lawyers, journalists, researchers, and women's rights activists. My interviewees stressed that resigning from the struggle for equal access to citizenship (and thus political rights) would avoid entanglement in the debate on national security, "the Palestinian issue", and the danger to the Jordanian identity as a result of changes in the demographic structure, which would be brought on by giving full political rights to all families of Jordanian women.

*We're asking not for nationality because there is a political issue, as you know. So we're asking for permanent residency and to have all the rights for the kids and husband. We're not asking for nationality, if this is the main problem for the government (R26: 2011).*

It was a fundamental concession to the previous claims, as interpreted by the initiators as an instrumental necessity, which could provide a basic sense of stability for this group and an important step on the path to citizenship. Many people are concerned, however, that it may close the road to citizenship for many years. All were well aware of the importance of international solidarity, which could give them a sense of autonomy:

*We need support. Europe's, America's. We want support, pressure on the government. Slight pressure on them. They receive funds for women's rights. Really. You should ask why these women don't have guaranteed rights (R33).*

In November 2014, Jordanian women married to foreigners achieved a limited victory, when the Prime Minister announced an easing of restrictions faced by children of mixed-nationality marriages. The government announced granting the children certain “privileges”<sup>7</sup>, provided that their mothers had been living in Jordan for a minimum of five years, and at least 180 days per year. Jordan, however, did not ease its strict citizenship rules and did not allow female citizens to pass their nationality on to their children or partners. Hundreds of thousands of children of Jordanian mothers and foreign fathers, including many who have lived in the Kingdom their whole lives, hoped to enjoy basic civil rights: free education in government schools until the secondary level, free healthcare in state hospitals, and the right to work in jobs previously restricted to Jordanian citizens. They hoped to be able to invest in the Kingdom and own property, obtain a private driver’s license, and be granted a special national ID card. One of MPs who has led the campaign for civil rights of children in Parliament, stated: “This was a landmark decision and is an important step towards equality between men and women in Jordan.”<sup>8</sup> During the first three weeks, over 9,000 children of Jordanian women married to foreigners applied for IDs, over 6 months almost 37,000 received the desired documents. Unfortunately, this victory was met with an unpleasant surprise, because many public institutions did not acknowledge their ID.

The campaign “My mother is Jordanian” was an example of mother’s movements, only recently the subject of political and sociological analysis. Motherhood became an incentive to enter into the political sphere. Responsibility for the fate of the family became the source of mobilization beyond social divisions, as well as wider public sympathy and some extend political efficiency.

<sup>7</sup> After a long battle, the Parliament agreed to grant only for some social rights, but not citizenship. Children received an ID, but without a national number.

<sup>8</sup> Al. Jazira December 20, 2014.

Mothers fighting for a dignified life for their families “did not locate themselves in opposition to their husbands and sons, but rather they reattributed key roles for themselves in the family, which is for them a fundamental source of identity and an entity that must be protected and defended” (Werbner 2007: 140).

## ON THE ROAD TO CITIZENSHIP – LAST NEWS

On March 22, 2017 over 150 men, women and children staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the Jordanian Parliament, calling on the government to grant full citizenship rights to children of Jordanian women married to foreigners. They carried banners:

*It is my right to live in this country with my mother's citizenship  
We want our rights that are granted to us by the Constitution  
Stop fooling us... citizenship is our right  
Jordan's name is in my heart. How can they say I am a foreigner when Jordanian  
blood runs through my veins<sup>9</sup>.*

The demonstrators have staged 75 sit-ins in various parts of the country since the late Nima Habashneh started the campaign “My mother is Jordanian”. Protesters complained that government agencies don't recognize the official identification documents that were issued to children of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians. They were “useless” and “not acknowledged in many government institutions,” Samira, the mother of four children who is married to a Palestinian said. All “privileges that the government announced are ink on paper”.

Few hours with protestors allows one to understand the conditions of their daily struggles. The majority of them complained about their difficulty to obtain work permits, work in many professions, or driving licenses and to own property. Others mentioned their inability to donate blood to their loved ones or to enroll in public universities, which forces them to enroll in expensive private universities, and they highlighted the hurdles and restrictions they face when travelling abroad and reentering the country. Some experience psychological trauma because their children are unable to perform their regular duties as ordinary citizens and end up taking it out on their relatives as well as strangers. Many women were met

---

<sup>9</sup> Materials provided by the Arab Women Organization.

with hurtful remarks constantly heard when visiting government institutions, such as “why did you chose to marry a foreigner?”

Aisha, married to a Syrian for 32 years, bitterly recollected that she became sick and needed a blood transfusion, but the blood bank refused to allow her son to donate. “Is our blood polluted or bad?” she sadly asked. “My son is a Jordanian, yet the blood bank refuses to accept his blood, because he does not carry a national number. This is neither fair nor right”. Zamam, who is married to a Syrian as well, mentioned with tears in her eyes that her son was denied entry into Jordan when they were returning from Turkey two months ago. “My 20-year-old son was forced to return to Idlib in Syria awaiting approval to enter Jordan, but he died in a rocket attack before anything could happen. My son was killed because his father is not Jordanian”. Protestors were desperate. If no changes would be made by the government agencies, they would like to demonstrate in front of the Office of the Prime Minister and, if nothing happens, then sit in front of the Royal Court. They do not want to accept the status of second-class citizens any longer.

Five days later, during a joint parliamentary session, the majority of lawmakers voted in favour of giving the Minister of Interior the authority to issue residency for children of Jordanian women married to foreigners. Activists welcome this decision, because it would also ease obstacles in other areas, such as working and obtaining various forms of official documentation. The next step on the difficult road to full citizenship was made. But still there is a long road ahead. **Hundreds of thousands of families are still waiting to live life with dignity and in safety, and they need our solidarity.**

## REFERENCES

- Barakat H. (1993), *The Arab World. Society, Culture and State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 98.
- Jordan Shadow NGO Report* (2012), Geneva: CEDAW Alliance.
- Joseph S. (1996a), *Gender and Citizenship in Middle Eastern States*, in: „Middle East Report”, No 198, January–March, *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*.
- Joseph S. (1996b), *Patriarchy and Development in the Arab World*, „Gender and Development”, Vol. 4, Nr 2, June.
- Joseph S. (2000), *Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East*, in: Joseph S. (ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Joseph S. (2002), *Gender and Citizenship in the Arab World*, Mediterranean Development Forum, Amman: UNDP.

- Kabber N. (2005), *The Search for Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions in an Inter-connected World*, in: Kabber N. (ed.), *Inclusive Citizenship: Meanings and Expressions. Claiming Citizenship*, New York and London: Zed Books.
- Thollet H. (red.) (2017), *Migranci, migracje. O czym warto wiedzieć, by wyrobić sobie własne zdanie*, Kraków: Karakter.
- Werbner P. (2007), *Upolitycznione macierzyństwo i feminizacja obywatelstwa: ruchy kobiece i transformacja sfery publicznej*, transl. Stańczak-Wiślicz Katarzyna, in: Hryciuk R. E., Kościańska A., *Gender perspektywa antropologiczna*, vol. I, *Organizacja społeczna*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- What About My Children? Economic, Social, Political and Psychological Implications on Jordanian Women Married to Non-Jordanians and Their Families* (2010), Jordan: Arab Women Organization of Jordan.