Social Change through Daily Life – An Exploratory Study on University Student Opinions on Personal Status Laws in Lebanon

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Abstract

Recent studies have shown the discriminatory and patriarchal nature of personal status laws in Lebanon (Geagea et al. 2015; Mikdashi 2018b). Stories abound of women losing custody of their children due to laws that favor paternal custody and of couples pursuing civil marriages abroad to avoid being subject to religious courts in Lebanon (Abillama 2018). Literature on the subject has focused on the discrimination of women and the resistance of sectarian leaders to implement changes. Missing from these studies, however, is a thorough discussion of how youth populations perceive the personal status law system and alternatives they desire. This study shows that one segment of the youth population, namely university students in Lebanon, regardless of sect or sex, oppose the current system of religious personal status laws, which they view as discriminatory toward women and impinging on their rights. Key to understanding their views is understanding the formal and informal patriarchal structures that maintain a "sextarian" form of citizenship on the Lebanese population (Mikdashi 2018b). Additionally, this study explores the development of a "social non-movement" (Bayat 2013) in Lebanon in which individuals separately and simultaneously challenge social norms and values that encourage intrasectarian relationships and adherence to the sectarian divisions in society, with the goal being the implementation of a civil PSL. This study uses survey and interview data collected in Beirut during November and December 2019 from students attending 14 universities. Carried out in the context of the anti-government protest movement that began in October 2019, this study shows that university students desire a civil personal status law that protects women from discrimination and treats all citizens as equal members of society, regardless of sex or sectarian affiliation.

Keywords: Lebanon – Sectarianism – Personal Status Laws – Social Non-Movement – Youth – Social Change – Women

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1 Introduction

On the morning of 5 October 2019, less than two weeks before a mass protest movement engulfed Lebanon, a young women's rights activist named Nadine Jouni who publicly fought for custody of her son, died in a traffic accident on her way to a protest in Beirut (Antar 2019). Her death sparked outrage directed toward Lebanon's system of personal status laws (hereafter referred to as PSLs) that are controlled by religious courts (Merhi 2019). Nadine, a Shia woman and a victim of the Lebanese Jafari court's highly conservative interpretation of Islam, had been denied custody of her young son after divorcing her husband and actively fought for custody until her tragic death (Antar 2019). Stories like this are not uncommon in Lebanon, nor are they unique to the experience of Shia women in the country. In recent years, multiple stories have emerged in which women from various sects lost custody of their children due to laws that favor men and had to engage in drawn out battles to reclaim their children[1] [2] [3].

1.1 The Issue of Personal Status in Lebanon

Nadine Jouni's story is a result of Lebanon's complicated and conservative system of religiously inspired PSLs (i.e. child custody, marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, guardianship, etc.), which favor patrilineal citizenship[4] and rights allocation. The Lebanese state recognizes 18 religious sects made up of 12 Christian sects, 5 Muslim sects and 1 Jewish sect. Based on recognized sectarian identity, Lebanese citizens are divided into the jurisdictions of 15 religious courts responsible for the administration of PSLs. Rights groups have systematically lambasted these religious courts for their failure to recognize marital rape, their unequal divorce and child custody laws (Geagea et al. 2015), their susceptibility to bribery and corruption (Mikdashi 2014, 280), as well as many other problems.

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[1] Lina Jaber, a Shia woman who lost custody of her children after divorce and whose daughter died in the custody of Lina's ex-husband. He barred her from attending the funeral or visiting her daughter's grave (Mneimneh 2020; Zakhour 2020).

[2] Dolly Khabbaz, a Maronite woman who went on hunger strike after losing custody of her children when her ex-husband suspiciously produced papers that deemed her mentally ill (Najib 2019).

[3] Manal Mansour, a Sunni woman whose ex-husband used the Internal Security Force to forcibly enter Manal's home and take her son from her (Mikdashi 2018a).

[4] Patrilineal citizenship refers to the practice in Lebanese civil registries of solely inheriting a father's sect and municipality to his children. Mothers are *de facto* barred from passing on citizenship to their children, as given sex and the father's sect are the definitive markers of Lebanese citizenship (Mikdashi 2018b, 2).

Rooted in strategies of empire, Ottoman and French powers relegated issues of personal status, or religious family laws, to recognized local religious institutions, which were often coopted by the imperial power (Salloukh et al. 2015, 50). This was codified in Decree No. 60 L.R., of 1936, which "guaranteed the recognized sects the right to manage their own sectarian courts and to follow separate personal status laws" (Salloukh et al. 2015, 33). To date, there is no civil alternative to these laws, and all Lebanese citizens must follow religious laws, independent of personal beliefs. Currently, the only options for individuals wishing to access rights not available to them are to either convert to another sect (Mikdashi 2014, 281) or to seek a civil marriage abroad, after which Lebanese authorities will follow the civil law of the country in which the marriage was contracted (Abillama 2018, 149).

The often-present sectarian dimension of Lebanon's 15-year civil war (1975-1990) and the subsequent Ta'if Agreement of 1989 ushered in a new era of sectarian divisions in which sectarian religious and political authorities were able to gain increased power to represent their co-religionists through a formal confessional system that marginalizes ideological difference to sectarian affiliation (El-Husseini 2012, 31). While the Ta'if agreement calls for the dismantlement of the sectarian system (Ofeish 1999, 104), actions supporting institutional desectarianization have yet to materialize. In fact, in the post-war political order, many of Lebanon's most influential politicians were and are the exact same militia leaders responsible for the country's destruction (El-Husseini 2012, 85; Geha 2019, 14). Furthermore, religious leaders enjoy a great deal of political power and hold monopolies on the practice of each religion, mainly through their state-sanctioned positions and roles as the heads of personal status courts (Henley 2016, 19). However, since the end of the civil war, several cross-sectarian and non-sectarian protests and reform movements related to the administration of PSLs have taken place[5]. All such cases have been met with staunch rejection from Lebanon's religious institutions who fear losing their monopoly over matters of personal status (Abillama 2018, 152; El-Cheikh 2000, 149). In fact, when in January 2019, then-Interior Minister Raya El-Hassan voiced an intention to discuss the implementation of a civil PSL, religious leaders were quick to cast their absolute rejection (Obeid 2019).

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[5] Such protests and reform movements include: President Elias Hrawi's 1998 civil marriage proposal (El-Cheikh 2000, 161) and Kholoud Sukkarieh and Nidal Darwish's 2012 civil marriage (Salloukh et al. 2015, 37), among others.

1.2 Introducing the Study

While the attitudes of sectarian religious and political elites are well-documented, recent studies have failed to explore how other segments of the Lebanese population perceive PSLs or their desires in this area. In particular, the generation that grew up after the civil war ended is nearly absent from discussion when it comes to PSLs, given the broader human and women's rights approach to the subject[6]. Youth are more present in discussions about protest movements against adverse economic conditions and political disenfranchisement (Kabbani 2019; Majed 2019; Paasonen and Urdal 2016), rather than about civil rights and liberties. This is evident in the ongoing protest movement that began on 17 October 2019. While the main claims of the protest movement are against the economic crisis, devaluation of the local currency, political corruption, mismanagement of public services and poor governance, other claims against the sectarian system have found a place in the protest movement (Bou Khater and Majed 2020; Cham and Salam 2019). Women and women's rights have been central to the protest movement, with women calling for equal treatment in matters related to personal status and passing on nationality to their children (Nassar 2019). Members of the LGBTQ+ community are also demanding rights in the country (Younes and Bailly 2020), a further display of the social rights protesters are demanding. Furthermore, recent studies have shown decreasing religiosity among the Lebanese population (Arab Barometer 2019) and strong sentiments against Lebanon's sectarian form of governance (Cham and Salam 2019).

Within the context of these social changes and demands in Lebanon, I seek to answer two main questions: *How do university students in Lebanon perceive of the current system of PSLs and a civil alternative to these laws? Beyond these perceptions, how are these individuals contributing to social change in the Lebanese context?*

Throughout this study, I seek to answer these questions and explore the factors that have led to the development of a social non-movement in which individuals seek equal rights and greater autonomy from formal and informal structures that perpetuate differential treatment. I rely on field work completed in the fall of 2019 using a mixed methods approach of survey data and semi-structured interviews. I apply wider ideas related to sectarianization (Hashemi and Postel 2017), desectarianization (Mabon 2019), patriarchal structures (Kandiyoti 1988; Moghadam 2013; Walby

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[6] While also urgently needed, these studies are cover broader groups and do not talk about more specific groups. Such studies include Abillama 2018; Geagea et al. 2015; Mikdashi 2014; Mikdashi 2018b; Salloukh et al. 2015.

1990), and social non-movements (Bayat 2013) to explore how university students seek meaningful social change in their daily lives when formal structures consistently resist such changes.

While this study is contextualized specifically in the Lebanese context, it fits within a wider range of topics on the Middle East and North Arica (MENA) region, divided societies and social change. First, it explores the desires of Lebanese university students, an important segment of the youth population, and a demographic often only studied in the context of employment and political marginalization in the MENA region. Instead, I explore personal opinions related to wider social issues that are also relevant in other divided societies in the MENA region. Second, through its use of the novel conceptualization of desectarianization (Mabon 2019), this study explores the topic of how divided societies, and specifically violently divided societies, can mend in the private sphere through daily life practices. Finally, this study adds to the literature on social change, as well as shifts in norms and values in the MENA region through the practice of social non-movements. It is useful for understanding how individuals, particularly university-educated youths, claim their rights and legitimize those acts deemed contrary to societal norms.

1.2.1 Limitations

There are several inevitable limitations to this study. First are limitations associated with the language barrier. Since my level of Arabic is not sufficient for doing research, I was unable to access literature written in the language. Fortunately, there is a large literature available in English related to the subject. Further, this meant that respondents had to speak in their second or third language. This means that words with social or historical significance in Arabic could not be translated in the same way in English. However, many narratives emerged in English, and answers were highly nuanced thanks to the high level of English of all of the interview participants. The interviewed students' university studies are entirely in English, meaning that they are required to speak with high proficiency.

This study is centered on the perspectives of students in urban centers of Lebanon, mainly Beirut. Therefore, it is limited to the experiences of educated young people living in areas with high rates of interaction between members of different sects. Furthermore, as a majority of participants are students at private universities, the majority come from a middle to upper-middle

class background. These factors affect the narratives and perspectives of the participants of the study.

Access to participants on various university campuses was significantly impeded by the protest movement that began in October 2019. Because classes were often cancelled and professors became very unresponsive, I could not visit courses or distribute the survey as widely as I had hoped. However, I took advantage of the large number of university students at the protests, as well as social media, in order to rectify these problems. Furthermore, because I had direct access to the American University of Beirut (AUB) campus through my internship at AUB's Issam Fares Institute, as well as many social circles within the university, there is an overrepresentation of AUB students in the survey.

1.2.2 Delimitations

This study is limited to university students in Lebanon and does not include other demographics. While many other segments of the population are involved in the debate over PSLs, I focused on university students to provide a reasonably-sized survey population that is somewhat representative of university students in the country. I further made this decision due to the relative ease of access of university students and the lack of detailed studies on university student desires pertaining to PSLs.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I explore literature relevant to the study of PSLs in Lebanon and abroad. I begin with a discussion of the relationship between religions and states and the issue of state secularism. I follow this with a discussion of the secularization of various societies. Next, I conceptualize the role of sectarianism in religiously divided societies and engage with the sectarianization thesis (Hashemi and Postel 2017). Additionally, I discuss the potential for desectarianization in post-conflict societies. Finally, I discuss the relationship between PSLs, sectarianism and differentiated citizenship more broadly, focusing on the unequal treatment of citizens based on sex and sect within the legal realm of PSLs. Here, I explore how sectarian PSLs reproduce sectarian subjecthood and patriarchal structures in Lebanon and other societies with differentiated PSLs, as well as how contesting these systems provides a framework for cross-sectarianism and potential desectarianization.

2.1 Religion and the State

I begin with a discussion of the relationship between religious practice and the state system, as well as the society at-large. This involves the state's relationship with religious institutions and religious life, leading to the state's role in identifying how and when religious laws should be implemented or reconfigured. In this section, I will explore the topic of state secularism and the complicated relationship between states and religions. This has particular implications for the development of differentiated personal status codes world-wide, as well as how the state justifies its understanding of gender roles and social norms. These understandings are constantly and consistently challenged by various social groups, who challenge formal and informal structures in order to normalize actions deemed illegitimate by these structures.

Contrary to popular belief, secular states, rather than making a clean break with religions, have changed their relationship with religious institutions and religious norms and values through cooptation and instrumentalization (Chatterjee 2010, 527). The popular understanding of secularism in the West stems from practices in post-Reformation Europe that formally separate private religious belief from the state (Asad 2003, 1-2; Brown 2009, 10). However, politicians in France such as former president Nicolas Sarkozy, have referenced France's "Christian roots" in recent arguments about veiling and maintaining French cultural traditions (Akan 2017, 125). In the United States, religious arguments have been central to many notable court proceedings, such

as *Obergefell v. Hodges* regarding same-sex marriage or *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* regarding the requirement that contraceptives be included in employer health policies (Fretwell Wilson 2018, 1-2). The notion of state secularism is routinely problematized, specifically by non-Western feminist authors while discussing women's rights vis-à-vis powerful religious institutions and the government (Abu-Lughod 2006; Mahdavi 2009; Mahmood 2013; Scott 2013). Examples abound in the MENA region, such as in Egypt (Sezgin 2011), Lebanon (Ofeish 1999), Tunisia (McCarthy 2014) and Turkey (Yildirim 2005), where politicians coopt and instrumentalize women and women's rights, secular discourses and religion, among other issues, to legitimize their power claims. In Lebanon, many activists for secular PSLs believe that secularism will bring gender equality and an end to sectarian strife where the state would view citizens as equals, regardless of gender or sectarian affiliation (Mikdashi 2014, 281). Using France as an example, Joan Scott argues that at no time and in no place has secularism led to real gender equality, as other logics were given to subordinate women (2013, 29-30).

In countries where civil PSLs exist, a process of institutional secularization took place, often mistakenly linked in the literature to ideas of modernization that reduce secularism to the endpoint of a "linear evolution of modernity" (Scott 2013, 26). Two main examples in the region are Tunisia and Turkey, who in the twentieth century undertook sweeping secularization projects. Under its post-independence leader Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia implemented the 1956 Code of Personal Status, that while maintaining Islamic inheritance laws, outlawed polygamy, abolished *sharia* courts, and gave men and women equal divorce rights, among other changes (Khedher 2017, 34). However, women and women's organizations were often coopted by the Tunisian regime, with women's rights dependent on a "state feminism" that forbade genuine dissent (El-Masri 2015, 125). State feminism, sometimes called state-sponsored feminism, here refers to the state's cooptation and monopolization of a feminist discourse in order to seek legitimacy and sideline dissident voices (El-Masri 2015, 130; Tchaïcha and Arfaoui 2012, 220). As Mervat Hatem notes, state feminism is often "a conservative top-down strategy to women's issues that [does] not solve the problems of underrepresentation, discrimination and subordination" (1992, 232). In the post-Ben Ali government, secularization was shown to be an ongoing process, as the conservative Ennahda party in 2013 proposed a more conservative personal status code that would roll back women's rights, as more secular segments meant to expand on women's rights (Alami 2013).

Turkey adopted a civil code in 1926, which was viewed as the next logical step in a century of modernization through the *Tanzimat* reforms of the late-Ottomans[7] and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secularizing project in the new republic (Scharffs and Disparte 2010, 419). However, despite aiming to separate religious family laws from the state, the Turkish civil codes of 1926 and 2002 still hold remnants of *sharia* law, such as the requirement that a woman wait a specified number of days to remarry after a divorce, annulment or the death of a husband to ensure the identity of the father of any potential child is known (Yildirim 2005, 419). Similarly, American and French judges, until the passage of laws enforcing more equal gender status in civil courts in the mid-twentieth century, used religiously inspired views of a woman's traditional domestic role when adjudicating cases related to pay and contracts (Scott 2013, 29). In practice, secularism constructs similar dichotomies that cause the state and the society to perceive women as second-class subjects, with women's bodies still used by the state as proof of being secular or modern (Scott 2013, 40). Religious and patriarchal values are then still in place under a secular guise according to the above cases, with women remaining as second-class citizens to their male counterparts.

States in Europe and North America who profess a clear separation of church and state manage their relationships with religions in various ways, creating the necessity for thinking of secularism in the plural (Asad 2003, 5-6). As Saba Mahmood argues, "the secularization of modern society has historically entailed not so much the withdrawal of the state from the religious domain, but the state's reconfiguration of substantive features of religious life" involving "the extension of state regulation over social and legal norms that are derived from religious doctrine" (2013, 47). In fact, the widely held notion that secularism and religion are opposite is flawed. While women and men have different opportunities in each system, for example greater sexual emancipation in secular societies, the differences are not as clear as many debates portray (Scott 2013, 26). Despite proposals for the secularization of Lebanese PSLs (Kafa 2019), or an alternative secular 19th sect (El Hallak 2019; Muhanna 2013), Scott warns that secularization alone will not provide real equality nor guarantee protections for women (2013, 26), meaning that a top-down approach alone cannot make true societal change in this area.

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[7] The *Tanzimat* reforms refer to the period from 1839 to 1976 in which the Ottoman bureaucracy underwent a series of reforms that recognized the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim subjects within the state (Cleveland and Bunton 2016, 77-78).

2.2 Secularizing Societies

Secularization not only affects the state and state institutions but impacts and is impacted by individuals and society. The relationship between people, religions and secularism is highly complex, influenced by practically every factor of life. Secularism has mistakenly been equated with modernization by many over the last century (Hibbard 2011, 7). The authors of the "Human Development Index" argue that high rates of religiosity in a population correlate with low sexual or individual emancipation, meaning that human development would be low (Welzel et al. 2003, 355). This notion insinuates that secular societies are inherently modern or advanced, while non-secular states are pre-modern with individuals lacking autonomy (Scott 2013, 33). This argument insinuates a linear progression of one correct modernity, which lacks nuance and is highly reminiscent of the orientalist essentialisms against which Edward Said (1979) argued. As Scott shows, these arguments were used to validate colonial practices to "civilize" and "liberate" women through the act of unveiling or spreading Christianity (2013, 33).

Abu-Lughod challenges the relationship between secularism and modernization within liberal and western feminism, arguing that debates on women's rights "tend to exclude key aspects of ordinary life in much of the world" (2006, 1621). She notes that liberal-feminist understandings fail to fully grasp that in many places "religion is hard to separate from other aspects of social life" (2006, 1624), with religion being embedded in cultures, social norms and value systems, influencing people's understandings of what constitute human rights and gender equality. Depending on the situation, men and women alike may instrumentalize religious doctrines to achieve more rights or to justify their rejection of the religious establishment. The success of Lebanese Sunni women in using Islam to reconfigure their child custody rights and raise the age of maternal custody, is a key example (Dabbous 2017, 20-22). In this case, religious authorities are unable to rollback legal changes because the changes became religiously legitimate (Dabbous 2017, 23). While this particular project did not end up leading to full gender equality in these laws, many women involved in the debate felt that it was a positive change (Dabbous 2017, 23).

Conversely, rejecting the religious establishment in order to gain more rights is often viewed as necessary. The "sexual revolution" in Iran involves individuals revolting against the state in the private sphere by engaging in pre-marital sex, consuming drugs and alcohol, and spending time with non-relatives of the opposite sex (Mahdavi 2009). In this case, young people

and specifically young women blatantly, though covertly, reject the Iranian state's use of morality and Islam in order to normalize illegitimate acts (Mahdavi 2009, 11). The normalization of these acts has led to easier access to condoms in pharmacies and the state's introduction of clean needle facilities (Mahdavi 2009).

These fights for greater personal autonomy and sexual freedom by individuals and groups that can problematize understandings of people's relationships with religious and secular values. Take as an example the "cultural revolutions" of Europe and North America during the mid-twentieth century, labelled as an era of liberation by its proponents and of depravity by its opponents (Marwick 2011). Many, particularly young people, contended with sexual liberation, gender equality, religious norms and values and political demands, blending the personal and the political into one fight for political and societal change (Clifford et al. 2013). More recently, within the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, young people called into question traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity, with protesters blurring traditional heteronormative gender roles (Amar 2011; Ghannam 2013). This often takes the form of personal decisions, often not directly related to a formal movement, as Mahdavi argues is the case for Iran's sexual revolution (2007, 448). This is highly comparable to debates on PSLs in Lebanon, as women in particular reject traditional gender roles in larger numbers and seek more equal treatment in society (Salameh 2014). However, discrimination based on sex is only one part of the equation for Lebanese PSLs, as Lebanon's entrenched sectarian system creates further divisions between Lebanese citizens.

2.3 Conceptualizing the Role of Sectarianism

The relationship between religious institutions and the state in Lebanon is mainly centered around the sectarian political system currently in place. As previously discussed, in addition to the role of sectarian affiliation in determining which religious court each Lebanese citizen follows for matters of personal status, the allocation of parliamentary seats and various political positions is also based on sectarian affiliation (Salloukh 2017, 222). Sectarianism in Lebanon, like in many other places, is both politically and socially constructed, with each reinforcing the other. In this section, I outline the academic understandings of sectarianism, after which I explore the relationship between sectarianism and laws.

Sectarianism has been broadly used to describe ethno-religious conflicts across the world, though in the post-9/11 era, sectarianism often conjures images of religious violence in the MENA region. As Fanar Haddad points out, the terms sectarian and sectarianism are often used to refer to sectarian hatred, invalidating all forms of moderate sectarian expression (2014, 146). Outside the MENA region, sectarianism has been used to refer to Catholic-Protestant conflicts in Northern Ireland (Brewer 1992), the Bosnian civil war between Muslim and Christian factions (Stefansson 2010) and the Gujarat riots mainly between Muslims and Hindu nationalists (Powers 2008), among others[8]. In the MENA region, sectarianism popularly refers to instances of the Sunni-Shia divide led by Saudi Arabia and Iran (Hashemi and Postel 2017, 2-3). Other religious groups are also implicated in sectarian divisions in the region, particularly Christians and Druze in Lebanon (Makdisi 2000), as well as Christians in Egypt (Mahmood 2012). Various viewpoints have developed on the origins of sectarianism in the region and abroad, which will be explored for the remainder of this section.

While there are many contending views on the origins of sectarianism, most can be categorized into three schools of thought: primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism. Perhaps the most popular in political and media portrayals of sectarianism, primordialists are likely the most criticized in academia for promoting a near biological understanding of sectarianism, arguing that these identities are fixed and can automatically originate violent episodes (Hashemi and Postel 2017, 2-3). Social cohesion between groups is viewed as practically impossible, leading to the field of partition theory for divided societies (Jenne 2012, 256). This understanding of sectarianism is highly problematic, relating to a discourse of ancient hatreds highly emblematic of orientalist understandings of the Middle East (Makdisi 2008; Said 1979). Similarly problematic, instrumentalists view sectarianism through an entirely top-down structure, seeing elites as the sole practitioners and manipulators of sectarian identity for their own divide-and-rule strategies, while ignoring the agency of people to internalize and contribute to sectarian structures (Hashemi 2016, 67).

Constructivists find a middle ground between these two opposing viewpoints, recognizing the potential salience of sectarian divisions and the role elites can play, while also noting that elites

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[8] In many cases, such as in Northern Ireland and Iraq, ethnic divisions are simultaneously at play with religious divisions. This is often termed "ethno-sectarianism" (Haddad 2014; Haddad 2017; Shirlow 2003) and is beyond the focus of this study, as ethnicity is not a determining factor of division in the Lebanese case.

are products of the societies in which they live, and that sectarianism requires further contextualization than the mere existence of sectarian divisions (Hashemi 2016, 68). Rather than using sectarianism as a catch-all term for any form of sectarian expression, it is necessary to recognize the broad range of times and places in which sectarian identities gain political salience (Hashemi 2016, 66; Makdisi 2008, 559). In order to ground the term in the temporal, local and geo-political contexts in which sectarian identities gain political salience, sectarianism must then be understood in the plural (Ofeish 1999, 98; Weiss 2009, 151).

Going one step further than constructivist theorists, Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (2017) brought the term "sectarianization" to prominence in their eponymous book. They argue, using several case studies mostly from the MENA region and South Asia, that sectarianism comes from processes of sectarianization that cause religious and ethnic identities to gain social significance and political salience at different times and places (2017, 4). This further explains why divided or diverse societies are not always in conflict. Scholars cite a variety of reasons that contribute to sectarianization, refusing to overlook the specific temporal, national, social and political contexts that shape this process, while also identifying some overarching themes. Yezid Sayigh cites economic disparities, the widening gap between rich and poor, as well as failures in governance for causing extremism that has added to worsening sectarianism throughout the Arab world (2017, 55-58). For instance, recent memory of sectarian violence or warfare contributes to more recent sectarian episodes in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria (Haddad 2017; Hilu Pinto 2017; Makdisi 2000; Rubaii 2019; Traboulsi 2012). Beyond this, there are many causes for sectarianization and it is through a combination of factors that sectarian conflicts develop and should be studied.

Several historical events and processes have contributed to the sectarianization of the Lebanese society and polity. Ussama Makdisi (2000) traces modern sectarianism in Lebanon to the mid-nineteenth century, highlighting the importance of Ottoman, French and British colonialism, local elite manipulations, and violent clashes for contributing to local sectarianization and polarization. In the post-independence era, Maronite political and economic supremacy under the National Pact, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) operations in Lebanon against Israel as well as individualized internalization of sectarian difference, among other factors, have all been cited as contributing forces to sectarianization and the eventual 15-year civil war (Weiss 2009). However, no single event is uniquely responsible. In the post-war era, the personal and collective memories of sectarian violence (Haugbolle 2012; Salloukh 2019), extensive patronage networks

(Cammett and Issar 2010), political corruption (Clark and Salloukh 2013; Leenders 2012), geo-political manipulations and "reciprocal demonization" of the "sectarian other" in post-war media (Salloukh 2017, 225) are cited as contributing to more recent sectarianization in the public and private spheres.

Despite intense processes of sectarianization, societies are able to recover and place less emphasis on sectarian belonging. The sectarianization thesis informs studies on how societies recover from sectarian divisions through what Simon Mabon calls a process of "desectarianization" (2019, 29). He conceptualizes desectarianization as an extension of sectarianization, arguing that because sectarianization is a process of constructing politically salient identities, this process can be undone overtime (Mabon 2019, 29). Desectarianization can take a variety of forms, with earlier studies on non-sectarian social movements and conflict resolution informing this newer field. Urban social movements tackling non-sectarian issues related to LGBT activism in Beirut (Nagle 2018) and LGBT and workers' rights in Belfast (Nagle 2013) provided platforms within civil society for cross-sectarian relationships to build, lessening the importance of sectarian affiliations.

2.4 Sectarianism and Differentiated Citizenship through Personal Status Laws

A main site for reinforcing and reproducing sectarianism in Lebanon and in other religiously divided societies is the legal framework of religious and religiously inspired PSLs. Often in these instances, the family, rather than the individual, is the basic unit of society (Joseph 1996, 16). By maintaining religious PSLs, sectarian leaders are able to reproduce segmented citizenship, forcing the reproduction of sectarian subjects who receive basic services and rights through sectarian membership (Salloukh et al. 2015, 33-36). In addition, these systems reinforce patriarchal structures that favor men's legal supremacy (Mikdashi 2014, 283), making women second-class subjects in the process.

Differentiated citizenship is not unique to religiously divided societies, as multiple identities have been shown to be at the core of processes of differentiation. This has come in the form of racial segregation and apartheid in the US and South Africa (Sides 2017), the caste system in India (Bapuji and Chrispal 2018) and racialized religious divisions in Northern Ireland (Brewer 1992), just to name a few. In all of these cases, processes of othering are intrinsic to determining the in-groups (us) and out-groups (them), creating space for unequal oppositions that seek to justify

separation, superiority and inferiority and at times, violence against the "other" (Brons 2015, 70-72). Furthermore, instrumentalist intentions on the part of states are useful for identifying historical causes for differentiated citizenship. The French Empire of the 19th and 20th centuries was notorious for inadvertently formalizing religious family law systems in its colonies through its capitalization of local patrimonial networks, thereby formalizing these networks in places like Tunisia and Algeria (Charrad and Jaster 2015, 65-66). The British had very similar practices in India and Egypt (Sezgin 2011, 1007). In Lebanon, as well as other Arab regions formerly under Ottoman control, these systems were already in place before European colonization due to the *millet* system[9], which guaranteed a degree of autonomy for religious minorities to conduct matters related to their adherents, a main area being family laws (Levush 2015, 2; Mahmood 2012, 59). In other words, it is clear that differentiation on the basis of religion formalized already existing divisions in many places over centuries. However, it is not enough to discuss the formalization of differentiated citizenship under colonial regimes, as post-independence states have continued to implement these systems, despite claiming a desire to unite under one national identity, such as in the cases of Egypt's Copts (Mahmood 2012), India's Muslims, Christians and Zoroastrians (Sezgin 2011) and Lebanon's 18 religious sects (Ofeish 1999). Rather, a common denominator for control of PSLs is the male domination of these laws in modern state systems. Women consistently have less rights, regardless of religious or secular control of PSLs, although the forms and degrees of discrimination vary across societies (Scott 2013, 29-30).

Differentiated citizenship and PSLs in Lebanon and in other countries have promoted the maintenance of closed religious communities (Salloukh et al. 2015, 33). In her study of sectarian animosity in Egypt between Muslims and Copts, Mahmood shows that differentiated PSLs have exacerbated differences between communities by formally dividing them into groups with tangibly different rights (2012, 60). In Lebanon, religious elites have a monopoly over issues related to PSLs, using their influence to promote intrasectian marriage and the sectarian *status quo*, thereby discouraging cross-sectarian or intersectarian relation(ship)s (Salloukh et al. 2015, 35). These practices have a greater effect than simply the maintenance of sectarian systems. A major effect of differentiated citizenship is the perpetuation of the "familiar stranger," a neighbor and "other"

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[9] The *millet* system was the main Ottoman strategy for governing the various non-Muslim religious minorities within the empire's domains. It granted autonomy to Christian and Jewish communities to conduct religious affairs, collect taxes and educate their populations, under the justification for the toleration of the "people of the Book" in Islamic teachings. (Cleveland and Bunton 2016, 45-46)

against whom the in-group defines itself (Post 1999, 340). In fact, as Jerrold Post develops, marriage between familiar strangers, in this case the sectarian "other," is always prohibited in order to maintain group boundaries (1999, 340). Furthermore, formal differentiated citizenship often encourages second-class forms of citizenship, primarily affecting marginalized groups including women (Mikdashi 2014), religious minorities (Mahmood 2012) and non-religious individuals (Salloukh et al. 2015), leaving men who conform to the normative system to have a preferential citizenship. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on how women and non-religious people are affected, as they make up the most statistically significant portions of my survey's respondents.

The actual forms of discrimination vary depending on the national and temporal context. Israeli PSLs, for example, are regulated by Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze religious courts (Fogiel-Bijaui 2003, 29) with a civil option only for those registered as being without a religion (Levush 2015, 7). However, as Levush argues, this is against the desires of a secular majority that desires a civil alternative guaranteeing equal citizenship regardless of sex or sect that does not give men unilateral control over divorce (2015, 3). In Lebanon, Sunni, Shia, Druze and Christian Orthodox women have fewer ways than men to initiate divorce and to gain custody of their children after the divorce (Geagea et al. 2015). Furthermore, Muslim women, and Shia women in particular, lose custody of their children at far younger ages than Christian women, though Christian men also benefit from better treatment in child custody laws than Christian women (Geagea et al. 2015). For those wishing to practice a civil PSL, no alternative currently exists other than travel abroad, which creates the added challenge of applying foreign laws in Lebanese courts, another argument used to defend the need for a unified civil PSL (Salloukh et al. 2015, 37).

Since the end of the Lebanese civil war, there have been several instances in which individuals and collective groups have protested the religious establishment's monopoly over PSLs. Many studies have only focused on the absence of a framework for civil marriage (Abillama 2018; El Cheikh 2000; Farha 2015). Studies like these cited President Hrawi's 1998 civil marriage proposal and the 2012 civil marriage between Kholoud Sukkarieh and Nidal Darwish. Missing from many of these discussions on civil marriages, however, are in depth discussions on other PSLs and their effects on various social groups, particularly given the interconnected nature of PSLs. Some studies have shown the many ways in which individuals are discriminated in all PSLs, as well as in civil and criminal codes (Geagea et al. 2015; Mikdashi 2018b; Salameh 2014; Shehadeh 2010). While these studies show general support for the implementation of a civil PSL

on the part of Lebanese citizens, they have fallen short in quantifying these desires in the general population, instead focusing on elite strategies for coopting and countering movements in favor of civil PSLs. Furthermore, studies have hardly addressed the desires of various social groups, particularly youth and student populations. While youth in the MENA region are often studied in connection to protest movements, in particular the Arab Spring protests, studies are often limited to youth frustrations regarding unemployment and disenfranchisement (Kabbani 2019; Majed 2019; Paasonen and Urdal 2016). Marriage is studied in the context of financial instability that causes youth populations to delay marriage and childrearing (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon 2008). Desires related to PSLs and social change are largely absent from English academic sources despite their importance concerning the daily lives of all people in the region. This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring how one segment of the Lebanese youth population perceives PSLs and how individuals seek to change social norms and values that encourage intrasect relationships and the perpetuation of closed sectarian communities.

3 Theory

The theoretical framework that informs this study has been categorized into three sections. First, I relate ideas of differentiated citizenship to Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality and to Maya Mikdashi's "sextarianism." Following this, I discuss theories related to patriarchal structures, notably the patriarchal bargain as well as discussions about public and private patriarchies. The final section explores Asef Bayat's "social non-movements" as an appropriate model for studying social change in the MENA region. I will further summarize these theories and their importance for understanding how Lebanese students conceive of PSLs and the changes they want to see.

3.1 Sextarianism and Differentiated Citizenship

As previously discussed, sex and sect are integral to studying the Lebanese state and the administration of PSLs. The system accords different rights based on these two identity forms that are partially negotiable, most commonly through conversion. Recently, Mikdashi introduced the term "sextarianism" to better describe the functioning of Lebanese citizenship and statecraft. She argues that "sex along with sect are articulated and operate together to form the legal infrastructure of biopolitical citizenship in Lebanon" (Mikdashi 2018b, 2). In this sense, citizenship is constructed in Lebanon simultaneously through sect and sex, never independently. This is not to say that they are not independent identity forms. Mikdashi argues that while they "are mutually constitutive modes of political difference," Lebanese sovereignty "emerges from the management of these modes of political difference" (2018b, 3). In other words, differentiated citizenship is crucial to the current system of Lebanese citizenship, as sect and sex inform the rights and privileges of each individual citizen.

Mikdashi uses Lebanon as a prime example of sextarianism due to the highly bureaucratized and therefore identifiable nature of sextarian citizenship in the Lebanese context. She points to the colonial construction of citizenship during the Ottoman era and French Mandate, the current patrilineal assignment of citizenship, as well as differences in the criminal, civil and personal status laws to show that for several decades, a sextarian form of governance has become entrenched in the Lebanese state structure and influences nearly every aspect of bureaucratic life (2018b). Furthermore, as Lamia Shehadeh shows, marriage in Lebanon is "a contract between two unequal partners: The husband, who by providing for the material needs of the family, assumes

the position of 'head of the wife and family,' and the wife, who by being obedient and providing pleasure, children, and housekeeping, becomes the *femme couverte*" (2010, 215-16). She uses the term *femme couverte*[10] to denote this unequal relationship, wherein the husband has full control over his wife's rights, as she is his property according to sextarian legal frameworks and under the legal precept that a husband and wife are considered one entity headed by the husband (Shehadeh 2010, 216). This highly differentiated citizenship defines the structure of the state and relationships between individuals.

One may even consider sextarianism to be a highly specific and formalized iteration of intersectionality. Intersectionality calls for recognizing the interconnectedness of various forms of discrimination, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to depict the relationship between racial and sex discrimination against black women (1989, 139). Rather than understanding and challenging discrimination through a single-axis framework, it is necessary to identify the multidimensional forms of discrimination and their relationships (Crenshaw 1989, 139). Jennifer Nash adds that one must address other identity forms within intersectional theories (2008, 10) and explore the intersections of privilege and oppression (2008, 12). Sextarianism provides an analytical framework for studying men's and women's varied treatments, based on sectarian affiliation. Questions of class, education and other identities may also become pertinent. Sextarianism also provides a basis for the differentiated understandings and sentiments regarding citizenship and the administration of PSLs, and how individuals negotiate and contend with varied rights and treatments.

3.2 Defining Patriarchal Structures

Reinforcing the sextarian system in Lebanon are wider patriarchal structures governing society that must constantly be challenged before sustainable changes can be produced. Patriarchy is a multi-dimensional term that cannot be accurately depicted in any one measure or indication (Benstead 2020). Rather than conceptualize of the patriarchy as a monolithic structure, I concur with Sylvia Walby's assessment that there exist patriarchies that developed in different places and at different times, allowing for various relationships between individuals primarily on the basis of gender with added components of class, ethnicity, race and multiple other identity forms (1990,

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[10] The direct translation is "covered woman."

19-21). Walby gives the following concise definition of patriarchy: "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990, 20). From this simple definition, various practices can occur based on temporal, social, cultural, political and other contexts.

It is an oversimplification to say that all men profit, and all women suffer from patriarchal structures. Rather, as Suad Joseph shows, males and elders, including some older women, sit atop patriarchal structures in the Arab world, with kinship and religious values reinforcing and justifying their dominance (1996, 15). Younger men and women then have less power in patriarchal structures than their elder relatives. Deniz Kandiyoti further develops the idea that women adopt and negotiate their position in society in what she terms the "patriarchal bargain" (1988, 275). In these cases, women work from within the structures to raise their social position, accommodating patriarchal structures where necessary and convenient until they can rise to the top of the structure in older age (1988, 275).

Key to understanding the impact of patriarchal structures on PSLs in Lebanon is the shift from private to public patriarchy identified by Walby in her 1990 book. Her description of private patriarchy involves the male head of household as the primary oppressor of women, who are excluded entirely from the public arena by other structures (1990, 178). In public patriarchy, currently in practice in Lebanon and most of the world, women have access to both public and private arenas, and are subordinated within both, though primarily by means of the public (1990, 178). As Walby argues, "sexual controls over women significantly shifted from the specific control of a husband to that of a broader public arena; women were no longer excluded from sexual relations to the same extent but subordinated within them. Women's exclusion from the state was replaced by their subordination within it" (1990, 179). The "sextarian" regime in Lebanon is a key example, where women have access to the public sphere, but are subordinated by patrilineal and patriarchal laws, as well as informal patriarchal structures, that bar them from having equal rights with their male compatriots. As Shehadeh points out within the Lebanese context, it is not enough to rely on a "benevolent husband" to treat his wife fairly and equally, as men are legally positioned higher in the hierarchal structure than their wives, and men can never truly renounce this position unless laws remove this advantage (Shehadeh 2010, 220).

Valentine Moghadam argues that Middle Eastern states have neopatriarchal features that maintain the family as the main building block of society, rather than the individual, which is

justified using religious norms and values, with the result that "the neopatriarchal state, family and family laws reflect and reinforce each other" (Moghadam 2013, 17). In fact, as Hisham Sharabi shows while defining the neopatriarchal state, rather than weakening patriarchal structures, Arab states have seen these structures strengthened under a guise of modernization (1988, 4). In this sense, the state and religion are able to impose their norms and values on the citizenry, resulting in the increased emphasis on people's, particularly women's, bodies as emblematic of the good citizen or the idealized woman (Moghadam 2013, 37). This has resulted in varying degrees and forms of social pressure, stemming from religious tradition, calling on individuals to maintain values related to sexual mores and religious practice, coming from the state, religion, society, community or family (Moghadam 2013, 109). Social change can come about through pushing back against these societal structures within the private sphere in order to create a space for more permanent and tangible changes in the public sphere.

3.3 Social Non-Movements for Social Change

Bayat argues that social movement theory is rooted in the politically more open Western societies, where disparate claims eventually conform to a common movement with identifiable leaders, becoming homogenous entities (2013, 4). This is often not the case in the MENA region, where grand revolutionary movements have momentarily united groups with disparate claims, who then faced severe challenges in unifying after regime change was achieved. Take as an example the 1979 Iranian revolution, where Islamists and secularists were united in overthrowing the Shah, but secularists were largely marginalized and persecuted after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took power (Moghadam 2018, 37-38). Indeed, better organized and often undemocratic groups, such as militaries and Islamist organizations, have been the most prepared to take power in regime changes, though calls for more democratic and secular institutions are common during protest movements.

Instead, Bayat argues that individuals bring about social change through what he calls "social non-movements" (2013). Bayat defines social non-movements as "the collective actions of non-collective actors," where actors do not partake in a "politics of protest, but of practices, of redress through direct and disparate actions" (2013, 20). Social non-movements rely on individuals rather than the group to bring about change, not through large-scale collective action such as protests, but through "practices that are merged into, indeed are part and parcel of, the ordinary

practices of everyday life" (Bayat 2013, 21). When millions of individuals act in a common way, Bayat argues, acts once unacceptable can become legitimized and normalized, creating space for social norms and values to change (2013, 21). Furthermore, as these politically rebellious acts take place within daily life, it is harder for the state apparatus to suppress these individualized acts without a massive network of surveillance structures (Bayat 2013, 21). Even when countering-forces act in response, zones of relative freedom still exist where actors are able to make inroads and continue to quietly encroach on norms and values (Bayat 2013, 27). Eventually, when acts become so normalized, a state may be required to reform itself in order to accommodate, leading to state reform (Bayat 2013, 26).

An example of this can be found in Mahdavi's studies of the sexual revolution in Iran. As more individuals consumed alcohol and drugs, had premarital sex and other acts common to youth in other places, the wider society progressively began to accept these behaviors (Mahdavi 2009). Eventually, when repression became too difficult due to the sheer number of infractions, the government was forced to loosen restrictions, allowing limited sexual health clinics, easier access to condoms and sites for clean needle exchanges (Mahdavi 2009). While women have taken a central role in large protests in Iran, such as the 2009 Green Movement (Sadeghi 2012, 128), their participation stems from several years of individually challenging traditional gender norms and roles (Mahdavi 2009, 3-4; Sadeghi 2012, 128-134). Therefore, the social non-movement created the space for a large-scale protest movement to take place and continued even after protesters left the streets. As Bayat points out, more unified and identifiable movements are able to occur within a social non-movement, as the simultaneous actions of a large number of people can be indicative of already existing social mobilizations (2013, 26). However, large-scale social mobilizations are not a prerequisite in social non-movements. While they may come about when conditions allow, they are flexible enough to recede again into individual acts when conditions prohibit contentious actions (Bayat 2013, 26).

Application of social non-movements to attitudes about the implementation of a civil PSL has gained greater relevance through using queer theory to frame heterosexual intersectarian love and marriage. Sabiha Allouche argues for queering heterosexual intersectarian love and marriage due to "its potential to destabilize normative affective attachments," in much the same way that homosexual relationships break with heteronormative affective attachments, with the norm being intrasectarian relationships instead of heterosexual relationships (2019, 547). In her view,

heterosexual intersectarian love and marriage have the potential to destabilize the Lebanese state structure, as intrasectarian relationships "reproduce Lebanon's religious/political nexus" (Allouche 2019, 554). As Shehadeh argues, "law is the vehicle through which society defines not only its regulations, but also its actual values and behavioral patterns, as well as what is considered to be natural or unnatural" (2010, 212). In other words, the sextarian PSL system, then, functions as the vehicle through which the Lebanese state reproduces the sextarian system. Through social non-movement, non-collective actors subvert intrasectarian, heteronormative claims on intersectarian love by legitimizing behaviors that are deemed illegitimate within the sextarian legal architecture of the Lebanese state.

The potential for social change in non-movements varies, but it is clear that formal and informal structures are simultaneously affected. In the Lebanese case, patriarchal and sextarian structures are being challenged by individuals who seek more autonomy, freedom and choice, particularly related to the system of PSLs currently in place. As Moghadam states, "change in family law is a significant index of social change in the Middle East, a barometer of the internal debate within Islam, and an illustration of the capacity for reform in the Muslim world" (2013, 119). These challenges fit into a larger environment of reform through the political and personal actions of individuals in their daily lives.

4 Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of how current university students in Lebanon feel about the current system of PSLs and their desire for change, I conducted an exploratory survey using a mixed methods approach. Due to its relatively small sample size, the study does not pretend to provide conclusive results, but seeks to provide the basis for a larger study, as the topic is currently under-researched. Over November and December 2019, I collected 158 valid responses that are being used to inform this study. Participants represent 14 of the 18 recognized religious sects and were students at 14 different universities in Lebanon, mostly in the greater Beirut area. Universities represented in this study can be seen in *Figure 1*. Additionally, to contextualize the survey data, I interviewed 10 of the respondents in order to gain a better understanding of their responses to each question and to hear how they believe the laws affect, or will affect, their lives. Their age, sect and religiosity distribution, as well as their assigned pseudonyms, can be seen in *Figure 2*. Six interviewees are students at AUB, two at the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) and two at Notre Dame University (NDU). These interviewees were not selected for their attendance at specific universities, but due to access, which will be elaborated below. In this section I will explain my research design, data collection and analysis methods, as well as ethical considerations and my positionality in the research.

University	Male	Female	Total
Antonine University (AU)	2	0	2
American University of Beirut (AUB)	21	50	71
American University of Science and Technology (AUST)	2	2	4
Azm University	0	2	2
Beirut Arab University (BAU)	5	0	5
Balamand University (BU)	2	4	6
CNAM	1	0	1
École Supérieure des Affaires (ESA)	0	1	1
Haigazian University (HU)	6	5	11
Lebanese American University (LAU)	0	7	7
Lebanese International University (LIU)	3	5	8
Lebanese University (LU)	11	22	33
Notre Dame University (NDU)	1	3	4
Université Saint Joseph (USJ)	1	2	3
(Total)	**55**	**103**	**158**

Figure 1: University affiliations of all survey participants.

Name	Age	Sect	Identifies as a religious person*
Abdullah	20	Sunni	Neutral
Ahmed	18	Sunni	Neutral
Ali	24	Shia	Neutral
Amira	21	Shia	Strongly Disagree
Chloe	21	Maronite Catholic	Strongly Agree
Leila	23	Shia	Agree
Louis	20	Maronite Catholic	Neutral
Maya	25	Greek Orthodox	Disagree
Rania	25	Sunni	Strongly Disagree
Rose	20	Maronite Catholic	Strongly Disagree

*Refers to Statement 14 on the survey: "I consider myself to be a religious person."

Figure 2: Age, Sect and Religiosity of interviewees with pseudonyms.

4.1 Research Design

As previously described, this study adopts a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collections types. Specifically I followed the "validating quantitative data model," a variant of the triangulation research design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 65). Quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred simultaneously, and the qualitative data is meant to validate the quantitative survey findings, as well as provide useful quotes that contextualize survey results (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 65). However, rather than collecting both data types in one instrument by attaching open-ended questions to the survey, interviews were conducted with the respondents listed in *Figure 2* based on their responses to the survey questions. This allowed time for greater contextualization of answers in each interview and made the survey easier to complete, both in person and online.

4.2 Data Collection

I created two identical versions of the survey (*see Appendix 1*), one in print and one online through Survey Monkey. I made both versions available in English and French. I chose these languages as most Lebanese university students are proficient in one or both of these languages and because English is my native language and I speak and write French at a B2 level. The survey consisted of 17 questions split into three sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to

provide some biographical data. In the second section, respondents were presented with a list of PSLs and were asked to rate which three were the most important to them. In the third section, respondents read a series of statements and rated their agreement with each on a Likert scale.

Each interview began with the interviewee filling out a paper version of the survey, after which I asked about the interviewee's responses. While the survey was used as a guide, the interviews were in a semi-structured format, as I asked several follow up questions. These conversations often led to tangential discussions on the protest movement or personal anecdotes related to PSLs. Interviews were held in public places chosen by the interviewee. Most often these were cafés around Beirut, though two were held in open spaces on university campuses. All interviews were held individually, except for one, in which the European husband of an interviewee attended. His presence added more context on the experience of having a civil marriage due to the legal situation in Lebanon, particularly from a foreigner's perspective. However, even in this interview, the conversation mainly centered on the main interviewee, and her interview highly resembled those of all other interviewees. Interviews averaged around 40 minutes. Interviewees were provided the option to choose English or French for the interview. All of them chose to speak in English, mainly due to their high proficiency in the language and the majority's attendance at American universities in Lebanon. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees for later transcription.

4.3 Sampling

In order to identify eligible survey respondents and interviewees, I used a combination of snowball and non-probability sampling (Clark 2006, 419). In order to participate in the study, I had three main criteria for respondents. First, respondents needed to be students at a university in Lebanon. While there are many Lebanese university students at universities around the globe (Dibeh et al. 2017), I limited the study to those enrolled at a university in Lebanon. Second, participants needed to be legal adults able to give consent. Third, respondents needed to have at least one parent with Lebanese citizenship, though the respondent did not necessarily have to have Lebanese citizenship. I made this choice in order to include individuals whose mothers are Lebanese citizens, but whose fathers are foreign nationals. Respondents in this situation cannot access Lebanese citizenship because of the patrilineal nature of the citizenship law, despite living

and studying in Lebanon and having a Lebanese parent. These individuals are already products of Lebanese differentiated citizenship, and I felt that they should also be included.

In order to gain access to respondents, I used a variety of strategies. First, in conjunction with my fieldwork, I completed an internship at the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This gave me unlimited access to the AUB campus where I met several students who responded to the survey and passed along the online version to their friends at AUB and at other universities. As Clark has previously shown to be the case in research in the Middle East, I found that the participation of my social networks in disseminating the survey lent more legitimacy to the study and helped me collect a large number of participants (2006, 419). I also took advantage of the congregation of young people at the protest movement in downtown Beirut, and on several occasions, I brought printed copies of the survey to Martyr's Square, the Ring Bridge and Riad el-Solh Square, where I located several university students. Finally, I used social networks to disseminate the online version of the survey, reaching out to professors at various universities and accessing student groups on Facebook.

4.4 Data Coding and Analysis

In order to analyze the results of the survey, I assigned every answer a numerical value to later run the results using SPSS. I ran several frequency calculations on all of the questions to determine the broadest results of the survey. This was followed by several cross tabulations to determine if sect or sex were statistically significant identifiers for how individuals responded to various questions. Due to the small sample size for many minority religious groups, it was not possible to calculate adequate results as separate entities. For this reason and due to the limits imposed by SPSS when samples are too small, I combined the sects into Christian and Muslim categories to properly run the software. This is not to say that any of these groups are necessarily aligned in more than belonging to the same broad religions. As will be shown in the findings, sectarian affiliation did not have a significant effect on responses, meaning that combining sects had little to no effect on the data.

To better analyze the interviews, I first transcribed all of them. I followed a naturalist tendency for transcription in which I "literacized" interviewees' responses by adding punctuation and proper grammar (Davidson 2009, 38-39). This was meant to facilitate reading and analysis by removing pauses or grammatical errors common in spoken language, as retaining these features is

not necessary for this study since it focuses on interviewees' words and reflections. After all transcriptions were completed, I read the transcriptions, noting important points, quotes and anecdotes. I then compiled my notes into a table with some biographical information, as well as the main arguments, stories and keywords from all of the interviews. I was then able to identify common themes and keywords shared between all or some of the interviews including references to specific laws and events, discrimination against women, social pressure, personal freedom and generational divisions.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The main ethical considerations made during this study involved the anonymity and confidentiality of my respondents. While this was mainly to ensure my participants' safety, I also felt that anonymizing responses would allow survey and interview respondents to open up more to me with the confidence that their words and anecdotes would not be traced back to them. I wanted to provide the most comfortable conditions possible so that participants could express themselves to the fullest extent possible. Survey response data is protected, and individualized results cannot be construed from this study. At no time was a name or any other personal information attached to any survey. In order to indicate consent to taking part in the study, respondents marked a box at the end of the survey detailing what their consent meant (*see Appendix 1*). Any survey missing this indication of consent was subsequently destroyed and is not included in this study. Interviewees indicated their consent both by marking the box on the survey and by verbally giving their consent to be recorded. Their verbal consent was recorded at the beginning of each interview. The recordings and subsequent transcripts are only available to me. All survey and interview participants were made aware that their participation was completely optional and that they could withdraw their answers at any time by contacting me. For interviewees, pseudonyms have been given to maintain anonymity. The names that I assigned reflect the participants gender and are relatively common names for each sect, minimizing potential confusion.

4.6 Positionality

There are several factors that influence my position vis-à-vis the participants and the broader study, which can be divided into three sections; pre-data collection, data collection and

analysis. First, my own background as a young American man studying Middle Eastern studies positions the entire development of the study. Before arriving in Lebanon, I read a great deal about the history and politics of the country. While writing the survey, my main understanding of the situation was from desk review of literature on the topic, mainly in English. Therefore, the surveys and early interviews were highly influenced by my position as a complete outsider, with my own preconceived notions of what was important. This is a main reason that in the survey, for example, there is a larger emphasis on civil marriage, as the literature emphasizes this specific law most often.

As data collection progressed, my knowledge of PSLs and Lebanese society in general increased. This helped me to develop more nuanced questions that delved deeper into topics that interviewees deemed important. During interviews, I held several simultaneous positions. My interviewees knew me as an outsider, often referencing American or 'Western' cultural references. This often led to more detailed explanations of PSLs to make sure I understood nuances. Despite these explanations, the fact that interviews were in English means that narratives with historical, social or cultural significance were inevitably lost. In most cases, survey and interview participants seemed enthusiastic about contributing to the study, offering hints to a foreign researcher about NGOs and past events. As an American researcher in the Middle East, there is often a stigma connected to American political intervention in the region (Carapico 2006, 429), potentially exacerbated by Hezbollah security-general Hassan Nasrallah's allegations that the US was funding the protest movement in Lebanon (Azar 2019). Participants were always aware of my nationality and did not express any issues with participating based on it. In fact, many expressed an interest in American politics and pop culture, leading to tangential friendly discussions. Individuals who declined to take part never explicitly stated that my national origin was an issue, often stating that they simply did not participate in surveys or they did not trust researchers, issues that are beyond my control.

The act of doing research, as discussed by Carapico (2006, 429), reveals further power dynamics between the researcher and the participant. A main site of power is through the act of recording and later transcribing an interview, which requires the researcher to interpret the meaning of the interviewee's words (Bucholtz 2007, 802). However, the fact that we are all students and nearly the same age, I believe, helped participants to feel more comfortable speaking to me. For female interviewees, I felt that our common age and my position as an outsider was

especially helpful in talking about more sensitive subjects. While women may have felt uncomfortable talking to men about issues related to PSLs, female respondents shared many personal stories that I never expected to hear on topics related to discrimination. In general, I believe that being previously acquainted or having mutual friends also helped to establish a certain level of immediate trust.

Finally, my own position was again important while analyzing the data. After leaving the field and beginning to analyze, as well as read more relevant literature, I realized that my own life experiences and views heavily influence my biases and how I read the data. However, I remain critical of how my biases and previous experiences impact my study by constantly reminding myself of the different contexts.

5 Findings

The surveyed population of Lebanese university students show a clear desire and preference for civil PSLs compared to the current system. Furthermore, demographic features related to sect did not strongly influence the answers given during the survey, while sex had a minor influence, as will be discussed below. I divide my findings into five main sections. First, I will explain the demographic makeup of the survey and interview respondents, followed by which PSLs were ranked as the most important to participants. The final three sections are divided into the themes that came from the interviews and are based on various survey questions: the desires of respondents related to PSLs; the anxieties respondents had in relation to PSLs in their futures; and their perceptions of divergences and convergences between themselves and other social groups in Lebanon.
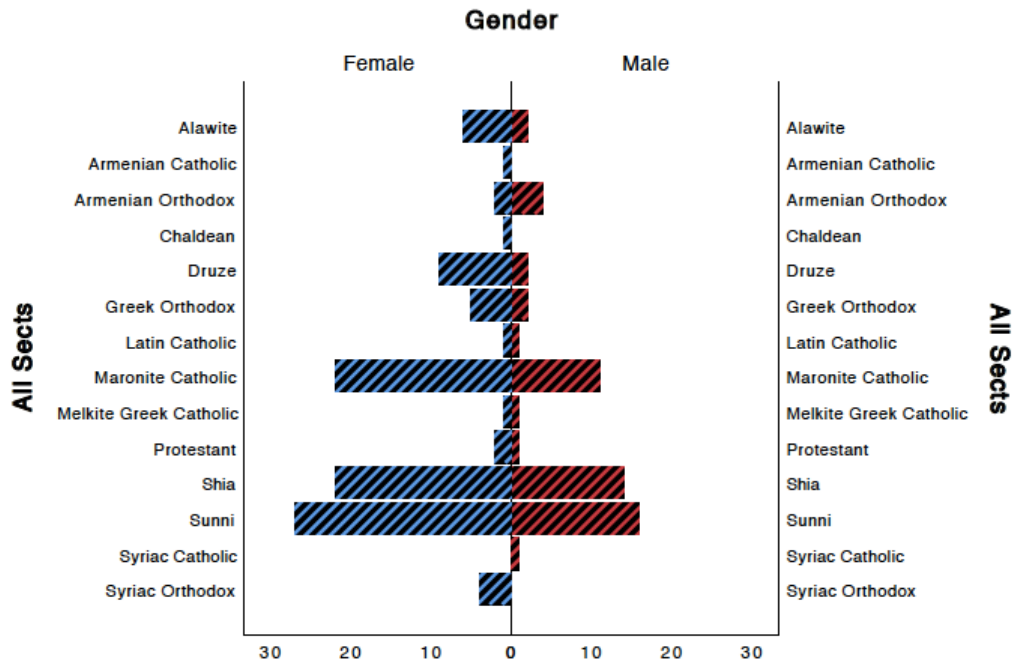
Figure 3: Sex and Sectarian demographics of survey respondents.

5.1 Demographics

The surveyed population consists of 158 participants. All of the participants are students at one of 14 universities in Lebanon *(See **Figure 1**)*. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 with a mean age of 21.6 years and were Bachelor's (60%), Master's (35%) and Doctoral (5%) students. While the direct geographical origin of participants is unknown, the majority were students at

universities in or around Beirut. As shown in **Figure 3**, participants are members of one of 14 of the 18 recognized sects, 62% coming from the Muslim sects and 38% from the Christian sects, mirroring some estimates of the Lebanese population ("The World Factbook" 2020). Also shown in the same figure is the distribution of males and females, with nearly 2/3 of respondents being female.

Due to the religiously inspired nature of these laws, I also asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statement "I consider myself to be a religious person." As seen in **Figure 4**, there is no clear majority at any level, showing a wide array of religiosities among participants. Notably in this sample, women were more likely to agree that they were religious while men were more likely to disagree. Variations based on sectarian affiliation were minimal, and religiosity was not found to have a strong relationship with any variables in the survey. However, among all groups there were diverse responses.

Religiosity of Survey Participants

Responses
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	23	14.6%
Agree	40	25.3%
Neutral	38	24.1%
Disagree	15	9.5%
Strongly Disagree	42	26.6%
Total	*158*	*100%*

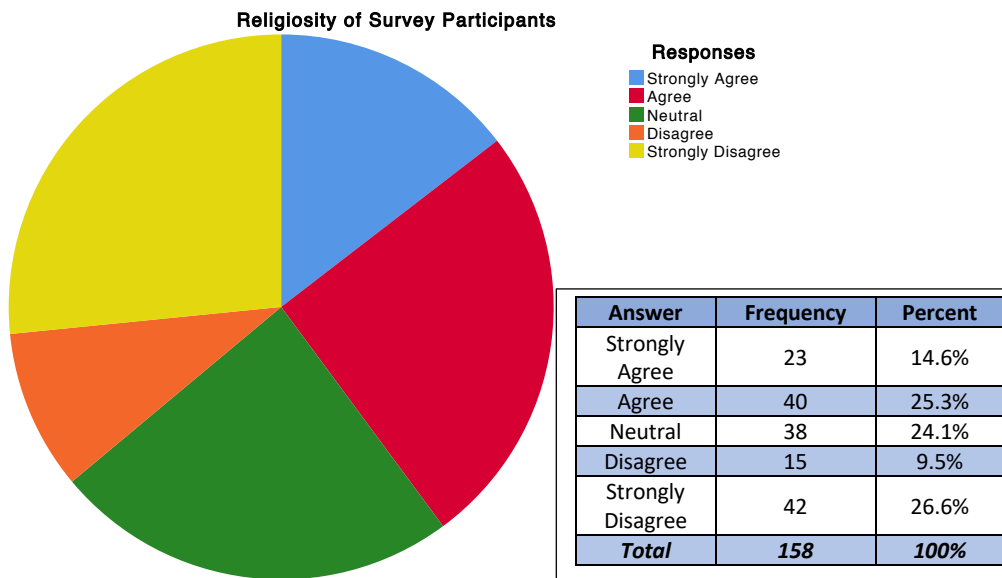*Figure 4: Survey responses to the statement: "I consider myself to be a religious person."*

5.2 Ranking PSLs

In section 2 of the survey *(see Appendix 1)*, respondents were asked to rank which three PSLs they considered to be the most important. Respondents were free to interpret "important" individually, with some choosing what they felt was important in their personal lives while others

chose what they felt was important to society at large, and by extension to their own lives. By far the most popular choice was that all of the PSLs were equally important, with a total of 42 participants choosing it as their first choice and three choosing it as their third choice, meaning that it received 129 total votes. This was followed by Child Custody / Guardianship with 71 total votes, Marriage with 67 votes, Adoption with 52 votes and Divorce with 51 votes. Sectarian affiliation had little to no influence on the laws chosen by respondents, while sex did have some influence on specific laws. In this section, I will focus on the results of this question and the discussions with interviewees concerning their choices.

Between Muslim and Christian students, there were no significant differences in the PSLs they identified as important *(See Figure 5)*. In other words, sectarian affiliation did not heavily influence opinions for the surveyed population on which laws are the most important, evidence of the shared obstacles that members of all sects face despite there being separate laws. The main exception to this was that Christians tended to rank adoption higher than Muslims, though this was only slight and can likely be attributed to most adoptions being prohibited in Islam. However, when discussing the various laws with interviewees, distinctions were made concerning the rights allotted to women of various sects. Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) had difficulty choosing which laws she found to be most important: "It depends on the sect. Some would be to my advantage in my sect, but in general in the society, I feel like some are important." She specifically cited child custody as an example of this, which she identified as the most important law. The laws for Greek Orthodox Christians, compared to those for Shia Muslims, are more flexible in this area, meaning that she would not have the same struggles as Shia women to retain custody of children. Rather than sectarian affiliation being the determining factor in this section, sex had a much stronger correlation with chosen PSLs.

Law	Choice 1		Choice 2		Choice 3		Total	
	Christian (Exp)	*Muslim (Exp)*	*Christian (Exp)*	*Muslim (Exp)*	*Christian (Exp)*	*Muslim (Exp)*	*Christian (Exp)*	*Muslim (Exp)*
	Total		*Total*		*Total*		*Total*	
All are equally important	15 (15.9)	27 (26.1)	0	0	1 (1.1)	2 (1.9)	16 (17)	29 (28)
	42*		0		3**		45***	
Adoption	7 (4.9)	6 (8.1)	11 (7.6)	9 (12.4)	3 (7.2)	16 (11.8)	21 (19.7)	31 (32.3)
	13		20		19		52	
Alimony	3 (2.3)	3 (3.7)	1 (.8)	1 (1.2)	3 (1.5)	1 (2.5)	7 (4.6)	5 (7.4)
	6		2		4		12	
Child Custody / Guardianship	17 (15.2)	23 (24.8)	8 (8.7)	15 (14.3)	5 (3.0)	3 (5.0)	30 (26.9)	41 (44.1)
	40		23		8		71	
Divorce	0 (2.3)	6 (3.7)	8 (9.1)	16 (14.9)	10 (8.0)	11 (13.0)	18 (19.4)	33 (31.6)
	6		24		21		51	
Inheritance	2 (1.9)	3 (3.1)	6 (6.5)	11 (10.5)	5 (6.8)	13 (11.2)	13 (15.2)	27 (24.8)
	5		17		18		40	
Marriage	11 (11.4)	19 (18.6)	6 (6.1)	10 (9.9)	8 (8.0)	13 (13.0)	25 (25.5)	42 (41.5)
	30		16		21		67	
Property	5 (4.2)	6 (6.8)	5 (4.9)	8 (8.1)	8 (7.6)	12 (12.4)	18 (16.7)	26 (27.3)
	11		13		20		44	
Other (Citizenship)	0 (0.8)	2 (1.2)	0	0	0	0	0 (0.8)	2 (1.2)
	2		0		0		2	
Other (LGBT rights)	0	0	0	0	1 (0.4)	0 (0.6)	1 (0.4)	0 (0.6)
	0		0		1		1	
Other (Universal Education)****	0	0	0 (0.4)	1 (0.6)	0	0	0 (0.4)	1 (0.6)
	0		1		0		1	
(Total)*****	155		116		115			
	155		116		115		386	

* When respondents chose this option, they did not choose any other laws. This is why the total is so high for "Choice 1" compared to the others.

** These respondents chose other laws as being more important, then stated that the remaining laws were equally important to them.

*** In reality, the total number of votes cast for this option is 129. (42 x 3 + 3 = 129)

**** These options were write-in options. While none of them are PSLs *per se*, they do reflect what is most important to these respondents.

***** Three survey respondents did not respond to this section of the questionnaire. And as stated previously, the total for "Choice 1" is higher because when respondents chose "all are equally important" as their first option, they did not need to continue making choices.

Figure 5: Survey responses on which personal status law was considered most important, divided based on sect.

Law	Choice 1		Choice 2		Choice 3		Total	
	Male (Exp)	*Female (Exp)*	*Male (Exp)*	*Female (Exp)*	*Male (Exp)*	*Female (Exp)*	*Male (Exp)*	*Female (Exp)*
	Total		*Total*		*Total*		*Total*	
All are equally important	11 *(14.6)*	31 *(27.4)*	0	0	1 *(1.0)*	2 *(2.0)*	12 *(15.6)*	34 *(29.4)*
	42*		0		3**		45***	
Adoption	9 *(4.5)*	4 *(8.5)*	4 *(7.0)*	16 *(13.0)*	8 *(6.6)*	11 *(12.4)*	21 *(18.1)*	31 *(33.9)*
	13		20		19		52	
Alimony	5 *(2.1)*	1 *(3.9)*	0 *(0.7)*	2 *(1.3)*	1 *(1.4)*	3 *(2.6)*	6 *(4.2)*	6 *(7.8)*
	6		2		4		12	
Child Custody / Guardianship	7 *(13.9)*	33 *(26.1)*	7 *(8.0)*	16 *(15.0)*	6 *(2.8)*	2 *(5.2)*	20 *(24.7)*	51 *(46.3)*
	40		23		8		71	
Divorce	1 *(2.1)*	5 *(3.9)*	5 *(8.4)*	19 *(15.6)*	6 *(7.3)*	15 *(13.7)*	12 *(17.8)*	39 *(33.2)*
	6		24		21		51	
Inheritance	2 *(1.7)*	3 *(3.3)*	10 *(5.9)*	7 *(11.1)*	6 *(6.3)*	12 *(11.7)*	18 *(13.9)*	22 *(26.1)*
	5		17		18		40	
Marriage	14 *(10.4)*	16 *(19.6)*	8 *(5.6)*	8 *(10.4)*	2 *(7.3)*	19 *(13.7)*	24 *(23.3)*	43 *(43.7)*
	30		16		21		67	
Property	3 *(3.8)*	8 *(7.2)*	8 *(4.5)*	5 *(8.5)*	11 *(7.0)*	9 *(13.0)*	22 *(15.3)*	22 *(28.7)*
	11		13		20		44	
Other (Citizenship)	0 *(0.7)*	2 *(1.3)*	0	0	0	0	0 *(0.7)*	2 *(1.3)*
	2		0		0		2	
Other (LGBT rights)	0	0	0	0	1 *(0.3)*	0 *(0.7)*	1 *(0.3)*	0 *(0.7)*
	0		0		1		1	
Other (Universal Education)****	0	0	0 *(0.3)*	1 *(0.7)*	0	0	0 *(0.3)*	1 *(0.7)*
	0		1		0		1	
*(Total)*****	155		116		116			
	155		116		116			

* When respondents chose this option, they did not choose any other laws. This is why the total is so high for "Choice 1" compared to the others.

** These respondents chose other laws as being more important, then stated that the remaining laws were equally important to them.

*** In reality, the total number of votes cast for this option is 129. (42 x 3 + 3 = 129)

**** These options were write-in options. While none of them are PSLs *per se*, they do reflect what is most important to these respondents.

***** Three survey respondents did not respond to this section of the questionnaire. And as stated previously, the total for "Choice 1" is higher because when respondents chose "all are equally important" as their first option, they did not need to continue making choices.

Figure 6: Survey responses on which personal status law was considered most important, divided based on sex.

While the correlation between gender and chosen PSLs was slight in most cases *(See Figure 6),* choices were often conceptualized differently between men and women. In the survey, women were more likely to indicate that all the laws were equally important or that child custody / guardianship was the most important. Women were also more likely to choose divorce as their second choice and marriage as their third. In these cases, women stressed the importance of their rights after a divorce, particularly in relation to their families, a point supported by several of the interviewed women. Men, however, showed slightly more inclination to choose marriage or adoption as their first choice, inheritance or property as their second choice, and were more equally distributed in their third choice. This is likely influenced by men's legal advantages during divorces, as they automatically retain child custody rights in most cases and are better situated to initiate divorces (Mikdashi 2018b). This is not to say that male respondents were entirely unaware or complacent about these laws, but that there was less impetus for men to know about them.

Interviewees contextualized these gender-specific results and were asked to explain their reasons for choosing specific laws. Female respondents often referred to social issues and anecdotes to explain which laws were most important to them. Like Maya, Rania (25, Sunni) did not choose laws based on her personal experiences, but on stories she had heard or witnessed. She found that marriage, child custody / guardianship, and adoption were the three most important issues for Lebanese society, citing the case of Nadine Jouni as a justification for the first two, and the lack of laws supporting adoption in Islam for the third. Similarly, Chloe (21, Maronite) chose child custody / guardianship, divorce and marriage. She found that in her Christian surroundings, "the most common problems women have had [are] being able to get divorced from, let's say, an abusive husband. In terms of property or inheritance or that stuff, usually it is a pretty fair deal." Since divorce is not possible within the Maronite courts, she found issues related to it to be especially important. Amira (21, Shia) deemed all of the laws equally important "because they are all attached to each other." In other words, Amira felt that the laws were interrelated. She found that all of the laws discriminated against women, and for that reason were equally important. She cited Shia divorce laws, child custody laws, and the legality of marital rape to show that fundamental changes were needed. Amira and Chloe also pointed out the importance of bribing religious leaders to get better treatment, a problem they thought could be solved by implementing a civil law. In addition, women also cited fears about their futures in connection to PSLs, a topic that will be explored in detail in a later section.

Unlike other respondents, Rose (20, Maronite) placed a great deal of emphasis on the rights of children within the realm of PSLs. She chose child custody / guardianship, adoption and divorce because "all three of them involve children, I listed them first because children have to suffer." Of the interviewees, Rose was unique in that she had previously experienced the religious courts while growing up. She explained that, after her father passed away, the Lebanese government required that her father's brother, with whom her family did not have communication for undisclosed reasons, be her legal guardian, in addition to her mother. Her mother could not be the sole guardian because she is a woman and a related man on the father's side must also have guardianship. Rose described the situation as something "we had to deal with, it was very unpleasant." Based on her experience, she said that as a child, "you have no say in anything. They just decide for you." Leila (23, Shia) shared this view with Rose, stating, "I know many cases, where in the case of divorce, it is so difficult for the children, and children end up not receiving their rights even." Rose and Leila showed that children, like women, often suffered because the religious courts act without considering individual cases independently and do not listen to children's needs. This is an accusation against all of the religious courts, not any specific one.

Men often had distinct conceptualizations about PSLs and different justifications for the choices they made. Abdullah (20, Sunni) chose marriage, property and inheritance as the three most important laws. For all three, he argued that "stability," whether emotional or financial, were key to his decision. This was equally applicable to men and women, in his opinion. For Louis (20, Maronite), background and stability justified his choices of marriage, property and child custody / guardianship. Louis found that his religious background made marriage more important than the rest due to it being a religious sacrament. Concerning property, he focused on stability, as he felt owning property meant having financial and social security. His discussion on child custody was less detailed, though he acknowledged his own advantages as a man concerning this law. Ali (24, Shia) found that these laws were equally important to him. He stated "personally, I haven't been affected by any of those [laws]. At first, I tried to number them as per what I hear people saying, but then after I thought about it while numbering them, my opinion is that they hurt each and every person as per his or her case." Ali did not make a distinction between the types of discrimination that men and women face in the current system, labelling the entire system problematic. Like Louis and Abdullah, Ali, did not cite specific stories or examples. While these men did not cite more

systemic issues of inequality like their female counterparts, they all recognized that women face discrimination, though with less details than women.

5.3 Desires of respondents

Respondents had several desires connected to PSLs and the changes they wish to see in the society. The main ones are for a civil PSL that guarantees equality, the ability to have a civil and cross-sectarian marriage in Lebanon and a decrease in social pressure coming from family, religion and the society at-large.

Choice	Gender		Sect		Total	
	Male *(Exp)*	Female *(Exp)*	Christian *(Exp)*	Muslim *(Exp)*	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29 *(26.8)*	48 *(50.2)*	31 *(29.2)*	46 *(47.8)*	77	48.7%
Agree	20 *(19.8)*	37 *(37.2)*	24 *(21.6)*	33 *(35.4)*	57	36.1%
Neutral	5 *(5.6)*	11 *(10.4)*	4 *(6.1)*	12 *(9.9)*	16	10.1%
Disagree	1 *(2.4)*	6 *(4.6)*	1 *(2.7)*	6 *(4.3)*	7	4.4%
Strongly Disagree	0 *(0.3)*	1 *(0.7)*	0 *(0.4)*	1 *(0.6)*	1	.6%
Total	**55**	**103**	**60**	**98**	**158**	**100%**

Figure 7: Survey responses to the statement: "I believe that the Lebanese state needs to implement an obligatory civil personal status law."

5.3.1 Civil PSLs

Chief among these desires was overwhelming consensus on the need for the implementation a civil PSL in Lebanon. As can be seen in *Figure 7,* the majority of survey respondents (85%) agreed or strongly agreed that an obligatory civil PSL should be implemented in Lebanon. Gender and sectarian affiliation had little to no impact on this answer, with near even results among all groups. Every interviewee agreed or strongly agreed to this point as well. Abdullah (20, Sunni) stated, "We are almost in 2020 and this is a century where we should look at human rights and the human benefits in life. So, if I love a person from a different religion, it shouldn't be an obstacle for me because, for me, love is more important." Similarly, Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) felt that a civil law would be fairer to everyone. She also argued that "If someone is religious and wants to take [follow] these [religious] laws and wants to accept these laws, they can decide on it themselves. Civil law does not stop these people from taking religious decisions."

In fact, these respondents viewed a civil law as an improvement to the current system as it would not affect those who are religious and wish to continue to follow religious laws in their private lives. Chloe (21, Maronite) was very clear that one must not forget the more religious people in Lebanese society. When describing a religious friend who believed that the religious laws were best, she said, "it is unfair to say that this part of society does not exist, because they do. And today, to come and say that their way of thinking is wrong, and our way of thinking is right, it just opens up the door to many different arguments that you do not want to get into." Her view was that mutual respect and communication between religious and secular individuals was necessary for progress and reform.

Interviewees thought civil PSLs would improve protections for women and children and would make life easier for everyone. Chloe voiced her support for a civil PSL, stating "It protects women. Today, it [the system] basically leaves it up to the religious courts for them to decide on issues. In addition, religious courts are often biased, or they are willing to take money to keep their dominance over society." Chloe's view was that a civil legal system would not have these biases and would serve people equally. Leila (23, Shia) and Amira (21, Shia) shared that, in addition to protecting women, the laws would be easier to understand. Amira stated, "when we have this one law, that we can all from different religions go to, it will be more organized." Leila echoed that it would be more "straightforward, especially for women."

A secular PSL is a logical alternative for these respondents to solve the endemic problems in the country. Rania (25, Sunni) associated many problems in Lebanon with the complexity of its politics. "I think that most of our problems and the complicated system in Lebanon are because you need to take into account every single religious group and sect." Ali (24, Shia) had a much stronger way to express the same idea. "I have come to understand what religious societies are and what religious courts are and who religious judges are. I have come to know nothing but corruption from these people." Ali and Rania, along with several other respondents, found the current system to be unnecessarily complicated and prone to corruption. The idea that the implementation of a civil PSL would fix this problem, however, was problematized by Rose (20, Maronite). She said, "even people who are supposed to be neutral and make the laws, they are still going to be [religiously] biased. So, are they going to do better than what we have now?"

The language of this survey question differs from the current discourse, which calls for a civil alternative in addition to the current system so as not to alienate the religious establishment

(El Hallak 2019). Many interviewees did not believe that an optional alternative would be strong enough to protect vulnerable groups from discrimination, particularly women. This sentiment was best expressed by Rose. When asked if an optional civil PSL would function well, her response was that "neither women nor children are going to be protected because Lebanon is still a masculine society. It is still patriarchal, and it is still dominated by men. The women in those households in which the men are closed-minded, very traditional, they are not going to have a say in choosing whether to go for a religious law or a civil law." An optional civil PSL would not have the strength to protect some of the most vulnerable people (i.e. women and children) in Lebanon, meaning that for Rose and for other respondents, a secular civil law needed to be the primary law.

In addition to this desire for a civil PSL, the majority of respondents believed that the Lebanese state would be stronger if it administered PSLs instead of the various religious establishments. In fact, 86% (136) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with that statement, with little statistical significance associated with sex or sect *(See Figure 8)*. Christians had slightly stronger feelings of agreement, though clear majorities in all groups agreed that the government would be stronger if it administered PSLs.

Choice	Gender		Sect		Total	
	Male *(Exp)*	Female *(Exp)*	Christian *(Exp)*	Muslim *(Exp)*	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	27 *(27.8)*	53 *(52.2)*	35 *(30.4)*	45 *(49.6)*	80	50.6%
Agree	21 *(19.5)*	35 *(36.5)*	18 *(21.3)*	38 *(34.7)*	56	35.4%
Neutral	5 *(5.2)*	10 *(9.8)*	5 *(5.7)*	10 *(9.3)*	15	9.5%
Disagree	2 *(2.1)*	4 *(3.9)*	2 *(2.3)*	4 *(3.7)*	6	3.8%
Strongly Disagree	0 *(0.3)*	1 *(0.7)*	0 *(0.4)*	1 *(0.6)*	1	.6%
Total	**55**	**103**	**60**	**98**	**158**	**100%**

Figure 8: Survey responses to the statement: "I believe that the Lebanese state would be stronger if it administered personal status laws."

Interviewees, though always agreeing with this statement, showed more skepticism that the state would be stronger, at least in its current form. While he wanted the state to implement civil PSLs, Abdullah said "I don't believe that it could happen at any time. Not even in a million years." He felt that change was impossible given the state's history of corruption and connection to the religious establishment, though he still desired it. Maya, Chloe, Ali and Amira all pointed out that a civil PSL, if implemented, would take power away from religious leaders, consolidating the power of the state. They all viewed this as a positive shift. Ali stated that taking these powers from

the religious institutions "would grant the state more legitimacy." Chloe took this point further, stating that when you implement a civil PSL, "you slowly start to chip away at their [sectarian leaders'] credibility in a sense, which will ultimately lead to the collapse of sectarian governance and the sectarian state." For her, a government without the influence of religious institutions that governed all PSLs would be stronger.

5.3.2 Cross-Sectarian Marriage

Choice	Gender		Sect		Total	
	Male *(Exp)*	Female *(Exp)*	Christian *(Exp)*	Muslim *(Exp)*	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	40 *(36.6)*	65 *(68.4)*	37 *(39.9)*	68 *(65.1)*	105	66.5%
Agree	9 *(10.4)*	21 *(19.6)*	14 *(11.4)*	16 *(18.6)*	30	19%
Neutral	5 *(5.9)*	12 *(11.1)*	5 *(6.5)*	12 *(10.5)*	17	10.8%
Disagree	0 *(0.7)*	2 *(1.3)*	1 *(0.8)*	1 *(1.2)*	2	1.3%
Strongly Disagree	1 *(1.4)*	3 *(2.6)*	3 *(1.5)*	1 *(2.5)*	4	2.5%
Total	**55**	**103**	**60**	**98**	**158**	**100%**

Figure 9: Survey responses to the statement: "I believe that I should have the right to marry someone from another religion without having to travel to another country to get married."

Overall, respondents wanted the freedom to pursue a cross-sectarian marriage in Lebanon. As can be seen in ***Figure 9***, over 85% (135) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I believe that I should have the right to marry someone from another religion without having to travel to another country to get married." Approximately 11% (17) of respondents indicated that they were neutral, and only 4% (6) disagreed with the statement. Men showed slightly stronger agreement, as did Muslims, though the difference is marginal. It is likely connected in part to social pressure, a topic explored in the next section. Interview respondents voiced clear support for the right to cross-sectarian marriage in Lebanon. As Rania (25, Sunni) said, "I would want my own country to take into account that there are people who don't give a shit [about religion]." Her view was that the state ignored the desires of secular-minded people who would rather have a civil marriage in Lebanon. Amira (21, Shia) echoed this sentiment with the question, "why should I travel [to get married]? It is my country. I want to get married here. It doesn't make any sense going abroad." For Leila (23, Shia), who married her French husband in a civil ceremony in Cyprus, travelling was not ideal, but required. She said, "we enjoyed it a lot, but

we would not have done it if it wasn't a necessity." If they could have had the civil ceremony in Lebanon, they would have done it. Ali (24, Shia) completely refused to have a religious marriage in Lebanon and said that he would travel to get married unless civil marriage became an option in Lebanon. He said, "If I go to a religious court, if I get a religious marriage, it is not so that the religious court can implement its will on me, but it is purely out of religious reasons." As a secular man, he refused to allow the religious institutions to have so much power over his life.

This did not mean that all participants completely rejected having a religious ceremony. While many participants were open to a relationship with someone from another religion and would seek a civil marriage if they chose to marry, they felt that if they married someone from their own religion, they would do the religious ceremony. When asked what he would do if he married a Christian woman, Louis (20, Maronite) said "I would go do it in a church because that is what is present in Lebanon. I don't want to travel just to marry someone under the civil right, or in a civil state. But, if I had the option here in Lebanon, I would do both." Rose (20, Maronite) gave a personal example of this situation. After her sister had a civil marriage in Cyprus, her mother pressured her to also get married in a church in Lebanon for religious reasons, despite the couple not desiring a religious marriage. The couple then symbolically married in a church, though they are still registered with their civil contract from Cyprus, meaning that in the event of a divorce, they will follow Cypriot civil law. Pressure from the family was often the given reason.

Choice	Gender		Sect		Total	
	Male *(Exp)*	Female *(Exp)*	Christian *(Exp)*	Muslim *(Exp)*	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	29 *(24.0)*	40 *(45)*	24 *(26.2)*	45 *(42.8)*	69	43.7%
Agree	11 *(10.8)*	20 *(20.2)*	14 *(11.8)*	17 *(19.2)*	31	19.6%
Neutral	9 *(9.1)*	17 *(16.9)*	11 *(9.9)*	15 *(16.1)*	26	16.5%
Disagree	5 *(7)*	15 *(13)*	5 *(7.6)*	15 *(12.4)*	20	12.7%
Strongly Disagree	1 *(4.2)*	11 *(7.8)*	6 *(4.6)*	6 *(7.4)*	12	7.6%
Total	55	103	60	98	158	100%

Figure 10: Survey responses to the statement: "I would marry someone from a religion other than my own."

More complex answers resulted from the statement, "I would marry someone from a religion other than my own." As can be seen in ***Figure 10***, approximately 63% (100) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 17% (26) were neutral and 20% (32) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sectarian affiliation had little impact on this statement. However, gender seems to have played a significant role. Men were more likely to agree with this

statement, while women were more likely to disagree. Interviewees showed that social pressure was a key factor in their conceptualization of this statement.

Women were particularly affected by social pressure related to marrying someone from another sect, particularly due to patriarchal religious laws that forbid women to marry a man from another religion. While every woman I interviewed was open to marrying someone from another religion, they felt that their families would make this difficult. Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) felt that family members would constantly be questioning her decision and pressuring her to be with someone from her own religion. She continued that choosing to marry someone from another religion meant "having to fight everyone around you to prove to them that this is going to be okay and that it is not risky. When someone is deciding to go through this, it is a big fight you are deciding to go into." Rania felt that her family would certainly make things harder, saying, "even if my parents would be okay with it, I have an uncle who would definitely not be okay with it, to say the least. But yes, I wouldn't have a problem with dating or marrying someone from outside my religion." Chloe (21, Maronite) also stated, "I think the easier option would be just to marry someone from the same religion. But ultimately, if you fall in love with someone from another religion, it is not the end." In other words, Chloe was open to falling in love with someone from another religion, though she was skeptical due to the issues it would cause. All of these women shared that the nuclear or extended families could strain the relationships and ultimately make life more difficult, though they were willing to deal with this for a good marriage. However, social pressure had a far larger effect for respondents than issues related to cross-sectarian and cross-religious marriage.

5.3.3 Less Social Pressure

While the term "social pressure" was not mentioned in the survey, it was a topic that came up in nearly every interview. Social pressure comes from several places, but families are the main source. Rose (20, Maronite) also points out that in addition to family, "we are on a leash and religion or politics or both are holding the leash." For her, religious institutions and the government had a significant influence on the creation of social pressure. She felt that there was no freedom or autonomy to make decisions independently about issues related to relationships and marriage. Rania (25, Sunni) felt that social pressure was justified by the various religions and sects. She felt that religions gave people the right to be intrusive about personal relationships that were outside

the accepted norms. Every choice is judged by the people in the respondents' surroundings. This sentiment was echoed by Louis (20, Maronite), who referring to a vast array of personal choices said, "everyone is going to judge."

Being judged, and potentially disowned, were serious obstacles for several respondents. For Amira (21, Shia), social pressure was particularly important concerning her personal choices regarding the veil and the traditional gender roles she felt were present in her community. She recounted, "I was engaged to a guy who was really religious. He was really bad to me, but everything he used to do was covered by religion." She said that religious leaders taught that even if he physically or verbally abused her "that I have to contain him and to accept what he is doing because this is what a good woman would do." It was very difficult for her to break that cycle because the religious establishment would back the man. Separately, in the context of the protest movement, she decided to stop wearing the *hijab*. While her parents and most of her siblings are not religious and accepted her choice, her extended family did not accept this decision, and they no longer speak to her. However, Amira argued that this was a personal choice stating "such details are something personal. Who I am going to love, who I am sexually attracted to, all of these are private stuff. It is none of their business." She wanted to have more freedom from these social norms, accepting the price of not talking to some members of her extended family in order to achieve some level of freedom.

For some respondents, one way to help mitigate the effects of social pressure was the implementation of a civil PSL. Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) felt that "even if this changed and there were civil laws, there would still be the societal pressures. Putting these laws as civil laws is a big step toward making them less prone to social norms and to limitations." In this sense, a civil PSL could act as a form of protection for individuals and allow easier access to civil marriage. However, for Ali (24, Shia), social pressure should not have the power to prohibit individuals from so many practices. He argued that "if you want to abide by whatever society wants in Lebanon, then you would just sit at home and do nothing all day." In this sense, Ali shows that to a certain extent, people must go against the social pressures in order to live their lives. However, he also recognized that his sex and economic independence made this easier for him to say. Ali said, "it is even easier as a man who has a decent job and a woman with a decent job would find it way easier to say this than a woman who doesn't have a decent job." In other words, economic independence, in addition

to sex, have an enormous effect on the effectiveness of social pressure. When still relying on one's family for economic support, families are able to exert more pressure on young people.

5.4 Discrimination against Women in PSLs

A common theme among female respondents was related to their anxieties concerning how they will be treated by religious courts if the system does not change. Women felt that they were facing discrimination regarding every aspect of PSLs. Rania (25, Sunni) said, "whether it is regarding anything, really any law, we are at a disadvantage all the time." She blamed the religious nature of Lebanese PSLs for this, stating "our laws are based on religion and religion is patriarchal." In fact, survey results showed the overwhelming majority of both men and women across religious backgrounds felt that religious PSLs discriminated against women *(See Figure 11)*. When asked, over 90% (143) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the current PSLs discriminated against women. Just 8% (13) were neutral and less than 2% (2) disagreed with the statement. While not a surprising finding, it shows an even wider consensus among respondents that the laws are unjust and require change.

Choice	Gender		Sect		Total	
	Male *(Exp)*	**Female *(Exp)***	**Christian *(Exp)***	**Muslim *(Exp)***	**Number**	**Percentage**
Strongly Agree	29 *(32)*	60 *(63)*	35 *(34.9)*	57 *(57.1)*	92	58.2%
Agree	18 *(17.8)*	33 *(33.2)*	22 *(19.4)*	29 *(31.6)*	51	32.3%
Neutral	6 *(4.5)*	7 *(8.5)*	2 *(4.9)*	11 *(8.1)*	13	8.2%
Disagree	1 *(0.3)*	0 *(0.7)*	1 *(0.4)*	0 *(0.6)*	1	.6%
Strongly Disagree	1 *(0.3)*	0 *(0.7)*	0 *(0.4)*	1 *(0.6)*	1	.6%
Total	**55**	**103**	**60**	**98**	**158**	**100%**

Figure 11: Survey responses to the statement: I believe that current personal status laws in Lebanon discriminate against women."

One of the most commonly cited concerns revolved around the case of Nadine Jouni. Rania, Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) and Amira (21, Shia) all cited this particular case and worried about what might happen if they were to get divorced. While only one of these women is Shia and therefore immediately subject to these laws, there was a broad understanding that women were never seen as primary custodians and could lose custody in the case of divorce. Rania stated, "I think it is especially triggering for me as a woman and I would not want to have to go through that if ever I get divorced or have marital problems and I need to fight for custody of my children." Nadine's death was heartbreaking for these women who feared similar situations in their futures.

Amira also cited concerns about marital rape, a term not recognized in Lebanese law, as well as the unfair divorce laws for women under the Jafari courts. While these women found religion to be behind these laws, Leila (23, Shia) made a distinction between the religions and their practice. While Leila found the religious laws to be unfair "in every single way," she also stated, "I am not saying I am against religion because I know deep within religious values, equality and equity are huge, but the way it was translated now benefits people who are in power too much." When she refers to the people in power, she refers broadly to the political and religious elite who profit from the sectarian system as it is today.

Women also recognized the progress that has been made, though they found it to be insufficient. Rose (20, Maronite) cited the case of the Lebanese parliament abolishing article 522 of the Lebanese Penal code that allowed a rapist to be exempt from prosecution after declaring an intention to marry the victim, though it did not fully abolish the practice. Rose said, "maybe you wouldn't be able to understand how I can see that as an improvement, but as a girl in Lebanon, living in Lebanon my whole life, it is." However, even where laws existed to protect women, she did not feel that they were being enforced to their full extent. Therefore, while progress is being made, women still face a great degree of discrimination at the hands of both the religious courts, due to their unequal treatment of men and women, and the government, due to its failure to properly enforce legislation protecting women.

5.5 Impediments to Change

Despite strong desires for a civil PSL from the surveyed population, little has changed. I speculated that there was a generational divide impeding change. For this reason, survey participants ranked their agreement with the following two phrases: "I believe that the Lebanese people, in general, want there to be civil personal status laws" and "I believe that my generation in Lebanon wants there to be civil personal status laws." As can be seen by comparing *Figures 12 and 13*, participants were more inclined to believe that their generation supported the implementation of a civil PSL than the general population.
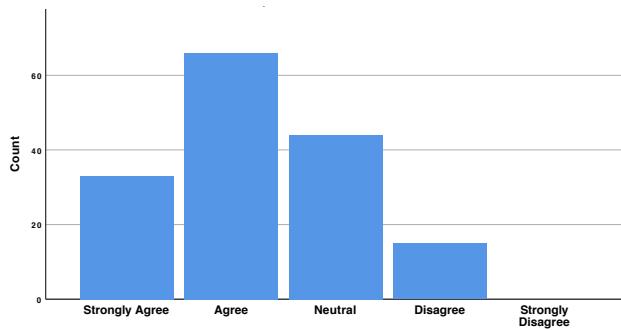
Figure 13: Survey responses to the statement: "I believe that the Lebanese people, in general, want there to be civil personal status laws."
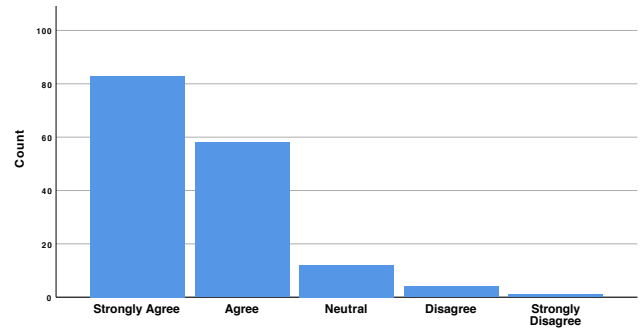

Figure 12: Survey responses to the statement: "I believe that my generation in Lebanon wants there to be civil personal status laws."

Generational differences were a partial explanation for interviewees, who mainly used the civil war to explain them. Rania (25, Sunni) explained that "our generation hasn't witnessed the civil war and so we don't have that ghost lurking over us." Similarly, Maya (25, Greek Orthodox) explained that older generations would be against a civil PSL "since the war made people go more to their comfort zones which are more traditional and closed-minded." In this sense, the civil war caused older generations to retreat to their sectarian communities, leaving as a result the heightened sectarian tensions that we see today.

Participants also felt that the heightened sectarianism did not apply to them. Louis (20, Maronite) expressed exasperation with the repetition of old problems, saying, "we are fed up with all of their problems that they are inheriting to us." He did not approve of sectarianism being forced on the younger generation by their parents, viewing it as an old problem. Rania also felt that the sectarian component to daily life did not represent her or the life she is living in Lebanon. She said, "I am [Sunni] Muslim. I live with Christians. My sister's boyfriend is Shia. My roommate's boyfriend is Muslim. And my cousins are Druze. How are you going to be able to break us apart? It is not possible for this generation." In this sense, sectarianism may apply heavily to some older segments of Lebanon's population, but it applies less to many, particularly younger, people as well. This generational division influenced by the civil war, however, was not a sufficient explanation for interviewees who expanded further to speculate why greater change has not happened.

In addition to the civil war generational divide, Chloe (21, Maronite) pointed out the importance of education and poverty in influencing people's opinions on PSLs. She said, "when

you have these religious figures, these political figures, citing that this is evil, that this is bad, and especially to the uneducated class, which unfortunately is a big portion of the society, that is where it creates problems. It goes back to education." Similarly, she said, "poverty plays into all of this and religious dominance and religious figures and their manipulation of religion to create a false reality in the minds of the poor and the deprived." Amira (21, Shia) also pointed out that socio-economic class can have an influence, with poor groups often having more traditional values than the middle and upper classes. She further alluded to a partial urban-rural divide, with rural areas often having more traditional values and urban areas having less. However, she pointed out that people with lower economic status in urban environments were also likely to have traditional values. Both women argued that religious and political leaders manipulated the society through fearmongering, particularly the poor and less-educated groups, to maintain their domination.

A common misconception that interviewees pointed out was that many in Lebanon equated a secular state and secular laws with an "atheist state." Ali (24, Shia) and Rania both rejected this idea, explaining that for many, religion will always be fundamental to their lives, but it should be separate from the state and laws. Abdullah (20, Sunni), Ali and Amira all pointed out that American and French university educations, available in large urban centers and mainly catering to the middle and elite classes, were key, as these universities advocated for more liberal values that could influence students to support secular laws. Education, socio-economic class and the urban-rural divide came together as a series of factors, in addition to the civil war, that influenced who would be in favor of and against the implementation of a civil PSL.

A final impediment to change described by the interviewees was the strength of the religious and political sectarian establishments in Lebanon. Chloe summarized this point by stating, "it is more about politics than anything else. It is about how you keep your upper hand because all of these religious institutions, at the end of the day, benefit financially. They benefit politically. They benefit in terms of power." The importance of the financial power religious institutions gain through their monopoly on marriage and other PSLs was highlighted by Ahmed (18, Sunni), who argued that they would never cede this power because they would suffer financially. However, as Rose (20, Maronite) pointed out, even the main supporting blocks of the religious institutions can withdraw their support, stating, "as much as you are attached to your religion and to the traditions of your religion, when it affects your personal freedom, you are still going to feel like it is affecting your personal freedom." In this sense, even some of the most

religious people could become disenchanted with religious PSLs if they are affected negatively by them. On a hopeful note, Amira said that "I am seeing that people are waking up in one way. They are being enlightened. I think, with time, people will stop being religious or abiding by these institutions and instead go to the Lebanese civil court." In her view, norms and values were in the process of changing within the Lebanese society, and a civil PSL could help to formally recognize these changes.

6 Data Analysis

As the findings showed, a majority of respondents support the implementation of a civil PSL. This, I argue, is indicative of a longer-standing social non-movement that has gained support from a broad segment of the population, in no way restricted by sectarian affiliation, religious beliefs or sex. It further reveals a disconnect between the formal structures that dominate Lebanese daily life and the needs of the general population, who over the last 30 years has witnessed segmented and incomplete desectarianization in the private sphere, in spite of patriarchal social pressures. These individuals require a civil PSL where none is available in order to practice their citizenship in Lebanon. The surveyed population came of age within this environment of social change. They have witnessed members of the previous generation in the ongoing struggle for civil marriage (Abillama 2018), equal child custody rights (Dabbous 2017; Mikdashi 2018b) and a singular citizenship (Mikdashi 2018b) their entire lives. Yet, little has changed and while some laws have been slightly adjusted (Dabbous 2017), there has been no substantial indication that the Lebanese state will implement a civil PSL. In the following pages, I will apply the theory of social non-movement to the attitudes surrounding patriarchal and sextarian structures to show that a civil PSL is a desired outcome of three decades of a spreading social non-movement that challenges the sextarian regime's normative claims on daily life. I will further show that this social non-movement has desectarianizing elements.

6.1 Intersectionality and Desires for a Civil PSL

As the survey results showed, civil PSLs are strongly desired by university students, who view the current system as discriminatory toward women and impinging on their personal freedoms. A majority of survey respondents (85%) felt that a civil PSL was necessary. These views had no significant relationship with sectarian affiliation or sex, showing a unified desire for civil PSLs among the surveyed population. This can in large part be attributed to the various advantages and disadvantages that Mikdashi identifies concerning the current application of religious PSLs (2018b). Advantages and disadvantages are based on sectarian affiliation and assigned sex, not actual religious practices or beliefs (Mikdashi 2014, 283). Therefore, individuals are treated differently for largely uncontrollable identity traits, viewed as problematic by a majority of respondents who want the state to treat all citizens equally under a unified law. In other words,

respondents wished to be treated as Lebanese citizens rather than Maronite men, Shia women or any other of the 30 different citizenships associated with the sextarian regime.

Despite the surveyed population being mostly unified in its desire for a civil PSL, an intersectional understanding of this population can problematize these results when discussing the desires of the broader Lebanese society. The surveyed population identified a division between themselves and the broader population, who they felt would support a civil PSL, though with less enthusiasm. The surveyed population is unique from the broader Lebanese population for a number of reasons, which requires a broader application of intersectionality, as called for by Nash (2008, 10). First, these respondents mainly live in urban centers, mainly the greater Beirut region. In general, urban centers are more diverse than rural settings, therefore respondents are usually more accustomed to living closely with other groups. In particular, Beirut as the capital is the most mixed place in Lebanon, where people from all sects frequently interact with each other. Second, respondents mainly come from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds, as evidenced by their attendance at mainly private universities where courses are mainly taught in English or French. The intersection of these identities has provided more opportunities for the surveyed population to desectarianize and adopt intersectarian social practices, as opposed to other segments of the population. Interviewees alluded to all of these factors as potential reasons for the perception that university students had different desires from other social groups and for the failure of a civil PSL to materialize. Conclusions about the general population's perceptions, however, cannot be made due to the limited scope of the surveyed population. Yet student perceptions reveal a potentially broader or broadening base of support for civil PSLs. This stems from individualized acts over the last 30 years that have normalized and legitimized alternative forms of being in Lebanon.

6.2 Development of a Social Non-Movement for Civil PSLs

Since the end of the civil war, a social non-movement has gained strength in Lebanon involving processes of social desectarianization, an acceptance of intersectarian social relations in people's daily lives and the creation of space for increased autonomy from social pressures and the sectarian system among certain segments of the population. This has primarily involved university educated individuals in urban spaces (mainly Beirut) of a middle to upper middle-class socio-economic class. These processes center around changing behaviors in individual people's lives that normalize changing values and legitimate themselves through the "quiet encroachment"

of the ordinary (Bayat 2013, 46). While notoriously difficult to measure the scope of a social non-movement due to its individualized and personal nature (Bayat 2013, 21), the survey findings point to significant value changes that have been normalized among the current university student population in Lebanon, mainly due to historical processes of individualized actions on the part of Lebanese individuals over the last three decades.

A key factor influencing the spread of the social non-movement is the decreasing religiosity of the Lebanese population. As shown in the survey, only about 40% (63) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were religious. The Arab Barometer measures even lower rates among the general population, with only 24% of individuals identifying as religious in its study (Arab Barometer 2019, 15). While these measures vary significantly, both show that many Lebanese do not strongly identify with their religions. Yet, a large number of non-religious individuals are required to follow religious PSLs, despite these laws being unrepresentative of non-religious people's beliefs and daily life practices.

In the absence of civil PSLs or practical solutions from the state, individuals over the last several decades have worked within the existing sextarian structures, as well as through legal loopholes, in order to gain better rights by enacting a number of behaviors in their daily lives that break with legally sanctioned societal norms. The manipulation of formal structures is a more formalized instance of Kandiyoti's "patriarchal bargain" (1988) and has been key to normalizing intersectarian relationships and non-sectarianism in Lebanon. In these cases, men and women accommodate and negotiate the existing "sextarian" and patriarchal structures, seeking out loopholes through which they can raise their social position or gain rights. As the state has refused to create the framework for a civil PSL, individuals have been forced to accommodate and then manipulate the structures in order to access the rights they are denied by the state. Examples of manipulations of formal structures include religious conversion to gain better divorce or inheritance rights (Mikdashi 2014); civil marriages abroad (Abillama 2018); and striking sectarian affiliation from identity cards (Mikdashi 2014). In all of these cases, individuals work within the existing structures, accommodating the system itself, to gain their desired rights in the absence of a unified PSL that treats citizens equally regardless of religious affiliation or sex. I argue that these manipulations have been instances of a social non-movement, as they can be viewed as "a tactic to get around the hostile or nonresponsive state" (Bayat 2013, 27). While the Lebanese state has not taken strong action to address the development of a civil PSL, the manipulations of individuals

have opened a space for the normalization of unified citizenship through the practice of individualized "encroachment" on rights (Bayat 2013, 46).

6.3 The Social Non-Movement Today

The results from the survey show that the social non-movement has had an immense impact on the social norms and values of current university students, who place less importance on sectarian affiliation, desire civil PSLs and want the religious establishment to resign itself to the private sphere. As Bayat demonstrates, unacceptable acts gain legitimacy when millions of individuals behave in a common way that can change social norms and values (2013, 21). There are three main aspects that constitute the practice of the social non-movement today. The first, the manipulation of legal loopholes through a formalized instance of the patriarchal bargain, as described in the previous section, is one of the key tactics of the social non-movement. These formal manipulations break with the normative claims of the Lebanese government and religious institutions, which expect the maintenance of intrasectarian, heteronormative relations.

This breakage with normative claims brings up the second aspect of the social non-movement today. As Allouche shows, intersectarian love and marriage can disrupt the normative affective attachments that are deemed acceptable by the Lebanese society and formal state structures (2019, 549). In much the same way that homosexual relationships break with heteronormative claims, intersectarian relationships break with intrasectarian normative claims (2019, 549). Since respondents have grown up within the context of this social non-movement, they felt that intersectarian love was normal and should be a right. The majority of respondents (85%) responded that they agreed that they should be allowed to marry someone from another religion without having to travel to another country in order to enter a civil marriage. This shows a general consensus among the surveyed population that intersectarian relationships are normal and should be a right.

The third major aspect of the social non-movement is its desectarianizing potential for the Lebanese population. Disrupting intrasectarian normative claims on social norms and values opens up space for greater intersectarian social relations and the normalization of intersectarian love and marriage. As shown in the survey, a majority of respondents (63%) agreed that they would marry someone from another religion. Challenging intrasectarian normative claims through marriage and daily social relations further challenges the political salience of sectarian identities, leading to the

"[re-imagination] of the place and role of identities in political life" (Mabon 2019, 29). If the main goal of the social non-movement is met – namely the implementation of a civil PSL – a more formal desectarianization in the public and private spheres could be facilitated, providing a legal and attainable framework for intersectarian couples to access their rights. It would further legally sanction intersectarian marriage without the need to manipulate a sextarian legal framework. As 86% (136) of respondents indicated, administrating these laws would make the Lebanese state a stronger entity. In the context of the anti-government and anti-sectarian protest movement beginning in October 2019, civil PSLs would likely grant more legitimacy to any future government, as citizens would be governed by the state rather than religious institutions.

Note that this social non-movement contains more formal structures, though it is mainly the amalgamation of individualized political, though quotidian, acts. One of the main organizations is Kafa, a Lebanese women's rights civil society group which has outlined a plan for a civil PSL that treats Lebanese citizens equally regardless of sect or sex (Kafa 2019). As Bayat points out, while social non-movements are individualized, organizations like Kafa and more unified movements can occur simultaneously with the non-movement; their development is indicative of already existing individualized social mobilizations (2013, 26). The demands of Kafa then give a formalized solution that codifies the main issues associated with the social non-movement. Similarly, the 2019-20 protest movement may be considered part of the social non-movement. While its primary concerns are the economic crisis, poor governance and a changed political system through elections (Cham and Salem 2019), social demands in the form of a civil PSL and increased protections for women have been voiced in the protests (Nassar 2019). Despite the existence of formal groups or protestations, the majority of actions within the social non-movement are individual and do not explicitly conform to the formal demands of civil society groups.

6.4 Women, Social Pressure and the Social Non-Movement

While Lebanese women are on the front lines of this social non-movement in their daily lives, they, like women in the Iranian sexual revolution (Mahdavi 2009, 4), are also more vulnerable to negative consequences of the non-movement. Partaking in the social non-movement eventually involves explicitly breaking social norms that encourage intrasectarian marriage and closed religious communities (Allouche 2019, 549; Salloukh et al. 2015, 33). They further must

challenge social pressures that call for the maintenance of conservative values and sexual mores by the neopatriarchal state (Moghadam 2013, 37; Sharabi 1988, 4). As discussed by multiple interviewees, social pressure, primarily coming from the family and inspired by conservative religious traditions, has a dissuading effect from pursuing intersectarian and interreligious romantic relationships, as family members are likely to disapprove or even forbid such relationships. By extension, social pressure upholds the sextarian regime and the public patriarchy by reinforcing laws that subordinate women in both the public and private spheres (Moghadam 2013, 37; Walby 1990, 179). In other words, social pressure acts as the primary tool for maintaining the public patriarchy and sectarianism in the private sphere, while the sextarian legal system maintains it in the public sphere, upholding the system of differentiated citizenships.

Despite the strength of social pressure in their daily lives, 90% (143) of survey respondents agreed that women are discriminated against in the current system of PSLs, demonstrating high rates of dissatisfaction with the current system and a strong desire for change. Furthermore and as previously discussed, the majority of respondents (63%) agreed that they were open to marrying someone from another religion. This shows that respondents are challenging social pressure in their daily lives and are less likely to allow social pressure to dominate their decisions. For women, this can also be traced back to their rejection of being treated as the "*femme couverte*" or their husbands property in marriage (Shehadeh 2010, 216) and being treated as second-class citizens in divorce, child custody and all related matters (Mikdashi 2018b). They often cited the highly publicized and tragic case of Nadine Jouni as a reason for their distrust of the current system. These specific issues required women to rely on a "benevolent husband" (Shehadeh 2010, 220) rather than real social protections guaranteeing their equality. As Shehadeh points out, reliance on this "benevolent husband" fixes nothing, as men retain their higher position within patriarchal power structures and cannot truly renounce this power unless it is legally rectified (Shehadeh 2010, 220). Instead, respondents felt that laws that guarantee women's equal stature in these matters were necessary to appease their worries related to their futures.

6.5 Limits of a Civil PSL

The main aim of this social non-movement is the implementation of a civil PSL that treats Lebanese citizens equally. However, even in the best circumstances, there will still be numerous obstacles and limitations that will impede the realization of true equality. In particular, the notion

that a civil PSL will provide gender equality must be challenged, particularly in the context of other informal patriarchal structures that are still dominant.

A civil PSL will not be enough to ensure women's equal treatment in society. As previously discussed, secular laws and systems by no means guarantee equality, despite purporting to do so (Scott 2013, 29-30). Secular laws are not the antithesis of religious laws, as the state reconfigures religious doctrines to extend its control over these laws (Mahmood 2013, 47). Activists, as well as interviewees, feel that a civil PSL would result in the equal treatment of women in Lebanese society (Mikdashi 2014, 281). However, this notion must be challenged as women in nominally secular societies have not achieved gender equality (Scott 2013, 29). This is not to say that a civil PSL would not treat women more fairly and improve their rights, as well as the rights and freedoms of all Lebanese citizens. While a civil PSL would weaken the sextarian framework of citizenship in place in Lebanon today, it is not an end-all.

Respondents felt that this civil law should be obligatory, rather than an alternative to the current system or the proposed 19th sect (El Hallak 2019; Muhanna 2013). In fact, interviewees were critical of the discourse around the implementation of a secular 19th sect that would allow people to opt for a civil marriage. As Rose (20, Maronite) discussed, an optional civil PSL would not be able to protect many women who are subjected to greater social pressure from their social surroundings. These individuals would lack real freedom to choose the civil option and would then remain subjects of the sextarian regime. In order to be freed of social pressures derived from the private element of the public patriarchy, Rose felt that women needed obligatory protections that could not be sidelined through a defense of religious practice. For individuals like Rose, an obligatory civil PSL had the potential to provide the most protections and rights for all Lebanese citizens and to eliminate women's second-class citizenship.

7 Conclusions and Implications

I sought to answer two main questions using survey and interview data collected in Beirut Lebanon in November and December 2019. *How do university students in Lebanon perceive of the current system of PSLs and a civil alternative to these laws? Beyond these perceptions, how are these individuals contributing to social change in the Lebanese context?* Concerning the first question, Lebanese university students hold negative perceptions of the current system of PSLs that are adjudicated by religious courts. Their views are centered on the discrimination of women and their lack of freedoms within the system. They opposed the second-class citizenship of women and the obstacles women face in divorce and child custody battles. The surveyed population desires a civil PSL that treats all Lebanese citizens equally, regardless of sex or sect. They desire the freedom to pursue civil marriages in Lebanon, free from the constraints imposed by religious institutions. Furthermore, they find that social pressure, rooted in conservative religious traditions and sectarian divisions, imposed by the family, can have a dissuading effect on pursuing intersectarian marriage, though a civil PSL would facilitate intersectarian marriages, which they view positively.

Regarding the second question, the surveyed population is currently partaking in a social non-movement that has been in practice since at least the end of the civil war. This social non-movement involves formal manipulations of the sextarian system, resulting in a highly formalized bargain with the patriarchy. It further involves individuals pursuing intersectarian relationships in their daily lives, romantic and otherwise. In their daily lives, individuals partaking in the social non-movement defy norms and values that encourage intrasectarian relationships and impose social pressure to conform to the *status quo.* While there is no identifiable leader of the social non-movement to make claims, the identifiable aim is to seek the implementation of a civil PSL. Until its implementation, however, individuals seek out their rights separately, increasing pressure on the unresponsive state to reform.

There are several implications resulting from this study. Primary among these is the finding that a long-standing social non-movement is changing norms and values among Lebanese university students. Some segments of the population have broken sectarian barriers and intersectarian relationships have normalized immensely. This framework can be applied in other societies where religious divisions have been at the center of conflict and where patriarchal structures reinforce sectarian divisions. Pertinent examples today include Egypt, India, Iraq,

Northern Ireland and Syria, though this list is far from exhaustive. Even without formal structures in place, individuals create spaces for the accumulation of rights through a variety of actions in the private sphere that are part of their daily lives. Furthermore, this study expands on the ways in which social non-movements can take place, recognizing the elements of the "patriarchal bargain" used to manipulate formal structures and create a space for change. Even when the state remains unresponsive or hostile to the changes, the individuality of social non-movements makes them practically impossible for the state to control once they begin (Bayat 2013, 27). This study also adds to the development of the (de)sectarianization thesis, in that it shows the ways in which segments of the Lebanese society have practiced desectarianization from the bottom in the absence of top-down desectarianization efforts. In fact, participants in the social non-movement have developed more intersectarian practices in spite of sectarian laws that seek to maintain disparate communities. Similar practices may be or become visible in other divided societies, particularly in connection to PSLs, a system of laws that affects everyone in their daily lives.

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Appendix 1

A copy of the survey provided to respondents during the fieldwork, in English.

Survey on Personal Status Laws in Lebanon

The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of university student opinions on the possibility of civil personal status laws in Lebanon. Survey results will be used for a master's thesis project at Lund University (Sweden). All data shall remain anonymous. Thank you for your contribution.

Section 1: Biographical Data *(Please use the questions to describe yourself. This is for statistical organization related to the research project).*

1. Gender *(Please choose one)*: a. Male   b. Female   c. Non-Binary

2. Age: _____   3. Department: _____   4. University: _____

5. What degree are you seeking? a. Bachelor's   b. Master's   c. PhD

6. With which religious sect do you identify? *(Please circle the one that describes you. If other, please specify.)*

Alawite	Armenian Catholic	Armenian Orthodox	Assyrian	Chaldean	Copt	Druze	Greek Orthodox	Isma'ili	Jewish
Latin Catholic	Maronite Catholic	Melkite Greek Catholic	Protestant	Shia	Sunni	Syriac Catholic	Syriac Orthodox	Other	

Section 2: Personal Status Laws

7. Which three of the listed personal status laws are the most important to you? *(Please choose 3 of the following. Put the number 1 next to the most important, 2 next to the second most important and 3 next to the third most important. If all are equally important, please only choose that option).*

___ Adoption	___Alimony	___Child Custody / Guardianship
___Divorce	___Inheritance	___Marriage
___Property	___Other (Please List)	___All are equally important

Section 3: Opinions *(Please choose the degree to which you agree with each statement).*

8. I believe that the Lebanese state needs to implement an obligatory civil personal status law.

    Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

9. I believe that the Lebanese state would be stronger if it administered personal status laws.

    Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

10. I believe that the Lebanese people, in general, want there to be civil personal status laws.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

11. I believe that my generation in Lebanon wants there to be civil personal status laws.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

12. I believe that current personal status laws in Lebanon discriminate against women.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

13. I believe that the various religious establishments should retain the administration of personal status laws.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

14. I consider myself to be a religious person.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

15. I consider myself to be a secular person.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

16. I believe that I should have the right to marry someone from another religion without having to travel to another country to get married.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

17. I would marry someone from a religion other than my own.

        Strongly Agree – Agree – Neutral – Disagree – Strongly Disagree

☐ By checking this box, I certify that I am above the age of 18 years and that I consent to my answers being used for academic research. I understand that participation in this research is optional. I understand that this survey is completely anonymous and that the answers will not be traced back to myself. This is for the use of the researcher only.