Mixed Christian and Muslim marriages have an impact which reaches beyond the lives of the spouses, their children, and their parents. These marriages affect a wider community in ways which can be understood by identifying the enrichment and complications of family dynamics in West Bank households and attitudes towards the developments in social, political and religious developments, offers insight into the changing boundaries of the Christian and Muslim communities in the West Bank.

Emerging as a unique phenomenon, cross-religious marriages within the Palestinian community is not sanctioned by the traditions of religious and cultural exclusiveness. But this by no means signifies a smooth transition for those who decide to take the step, nor does it mean a smooth integration of the differences or an easy accommodation of religious and cultural complexities between the Muslim and Christian communities within the one household. In order to explore these phenomena, a sample of 101 households was chosen to form the basis of analysis. They were selected from East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah according to their concentration in these three towns. Though perhaps small for a comprehensive study, the sample covered the majority of known cases of Muslim-Christian intermarriages in the West Bank.

Religious intermingling brings with it a certain mixture of gains and losses, despite a welcome societal change which allows a choice of partnership, and associated lifestyle options. The analysis allows us to monitor the extent to which cross-religious intermingling is gradually emerging between Muslims and Christians, a trend which may signify the gradual dissolution of boundaries between these two communities. Whether it will continue at the same pace or gather momentum depends largely on demographic, migratory, and socio-political developments. For example, the level of education of this sample was found to be higher than those shown in a previous study (Ata, 1986). In this study, those having obtained tertiary education amounted to 72.3% whereas in the previous study it was 61%. The higher level of education, however, remains certain: the best answer lies in monitoring the marriage patterns of second and third generations.

One must be careful when assessing developments in the field, if only to the over-whelming religo-gender imbalance. In the majority of cases, male spouses are Muslim and females are Christian. Only in 4% of the cases was the reverse found to be true. As the latter type of marriage is not sanctioned in a predominantly Muslim society such as the contemporary West Bank, the data will not allow for a meaningful comparison between the two communities.

Pleasant and unpleasant features

Emotional strains and behavioural problems due to cultural and religious differences emerged as a cause of tension between the spouses. Most of these were mentioned by at least one partner, particularly as the person being interviewed perceived the causes of the differences. A few of these were serious and unresolved. They related to the community’s negative reactions, and much less to any negativity in personality, polarization of roles or absence of love at the beginning of marriage. The ratio of those who cited negative reactions by the community to those who cited incompatibility of backgrounds was five to one, precisely 48.7% and 12.95% respectively. The reac-
tions were perceived to come from relatives, friends, the community at large and one’s religious group. They were also highlighted as the most unpleasant features about the marriages. Depending on one’s liberal leaning, some react positively towards Christ-
ian-Muslim marriages have been encouraging. The decision that cross-religious mar-
rriages are better than mono-religious ones drew almost the same percentage (16.1%) as those who believed in the contrary (15.2%). The highest reaction (47.3%) was drawn when the Christian and Muslim reaction was a variation on the theme: ‘one person is better than the other’. ‘It all depends on how much one invests in it.’

Pleasant features were equally varied. The highest proportion of reactions (27.4%) was drawn when the spouses differ significantly. The quality and tolerance between the two communities. This was followed by 22.1% of the respondents indicating that a free and liberal life at home. A small percentage (7.9%) held that pleasant features were absent.

Attitudes towards children

Concerns about children and the future of mixed marriages are considered as the second highest-ranking elements that affect the relationships. Others included lack of communal and professional support from social and health groups, and the absence of social and psychology-based agencies to deal with feelings of marginality, alienation and exclusion. The follow-
ing aspects were perceived to come from relatives, and an liberal life at home. A small percentage (7.9%) held that pleasant features were absent.

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ly higher expectation for a ‘better’ life (at 56.9%) than those who have been married more than ten years (at 46.8%). One explanation for these slight differences has to do with the psychological and workable prece-
dence that has been set by couples in ‘older’ mixed marriages. Children who have already transcended the brutal realities of cultural differences are success stories.

Escaping from an unbearable situation of stigmatization may have affected a few respondents although that was not the rule. Most of the wives had tertiary educa-
tion, as did their husbands. This may have prevented them from taking an active role in the choice of their partners.

Gender Roles and Responsibilities

One measure of family style was the role of the breadwinner. Almost two-thirds of the spouses (62.5%) had income coming from jobs held by the male spouses, which was shared equally between the two spous-
es. This finding is considered a mark im-
provement on the realities of the 1980s where 12.5% out of total of 891 ‘non-mix-
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