Transforming Norms and Desires:
Gendered Self-Fashioning Amongst Young, Educated Jordanians

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis captures young educated Jordanians' profound ability to express and enact alternative feminine and masculine subjectivities and gender relations. It does so by exploring young people's complex and continual processes of becoming relational selves negotiating often constricting gender norms. Their agentive force is driven by strongly-felt and creatively-realised inner desires and aspirations in the context of their unique social interactions and lived experiences. This thesis argues that young people's self-identity and possibilities of becoming are not constrained by the limits of hegemonic structures and ideologies operating upon them. On the contrary, young people actively engage with power structures and often find effective ways to enact desired realities. In doing so, this thesis expands the meanings, possibilities, and outcomes of agency, which is not limited to narratives of resistance or compliance with power, but belongs to everyone and renders each individual an agent of change. Indeed, the Middle East gender studies literature, while it has allowed for an alternative embodiment of agency to appear, by remaining careful in claiming ordinary people's ability to dismantle the gendered status quo in their everyday lives, has also prevented us from completely overcoming dichotomous narratives. Moreover, scholarly resistance to including masculinities within discourses on gender has also hindered the possibility to assess the parallel, often similar struggles of women and men and their mutual yearning for driving positive change. By triangulating qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and family observations, this research shows that young Jordanians have largely co-opted the significance of gendered expectations to normalise a new set of values by staying within the system. The research findings contribute to individualising young people's values change, whose significance lies in its potential to transform Jordan's gendered status quo from within, circumventing a range of west-centric and essentialising expectations in the process.

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Arab Barometer
BA	Bachelor's Degree
DoS	Jordanian Department of Statistics
FG	Focus Group
FO	Family Observation
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GGGR	Global Gender Gap Report
IGC	Intergenerational Conflict
IGCI	Intergenerational Conflict Issues
IP	Interviewee Profile
ISA	Ideological State Apparatus
IT	Information Technology
JMB	Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood
MA	Master's Degree
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
UJ	University of Jordan
UN	United Nations
WVS	World Values Survey

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Research Aims and Questions

This thesis's research voyage began in 2014 when, as a fresh graduate student in Middle Eastern Studies, I moved to Amman, Jordan's capital. There I studied local Arabic, worked with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supporting refugees and vulnerable people, and taught for about three years at two public universities, one in the centre and one on the outskirts of the country. While my experience in the humanitarian sector gave me a glimpse of the country's diversity, with its intrinsic contradictions and disparities, working in academia allowed me to engage with the ordinary Jordanian youth, whose unflinching determination to shape most desired life pathways – despite the difficulties they face in society and (sometimes) in their family – inspired me to embark on this research journey. As these young women and men eagerly helped me to better understand their world, eventually they made me realise how much of their desires, aspirations, and longing for change we – young generations who aspire to build a more egalitarian and just world – share, but how different the social dynamics affecting our agency may be.

This thesis aims to establish young, educated Jordanians' agency in relation to the hegemonic structures and ideologies operating upon them, showcasing their willingness to shift undesired traditional gender norms and establish more desired egalitarian ones. It does so by inquiring into the complex elements forming the *self* and its *agentive dynamics*, showing how intangible aspects of human subjectivity such as dreams, aspirations, and yearnings constitute powerful forces of transformation that can creatively drive change at the individual and societal levels (Sehlikoglu, 2018; 2020). In doing this, my thesis exposes young Jordanians' dynamic process of becoming agents, resulting from the complex interplay of lived experiences, diverse social structures of power and inequalities impinging on their lives (McNay, 2004). Thus, it ultimately establishes women and men as primary agents of their own destiny and advocates of their own rights.

As this research investigates young people's potential for disrupting hegemonic gender norms and hierarchies – between men over women, parents over children, husbands over wives – it has mostly inquired into the binary dimension of gender that is dominant, yet not exclusive, in Jordan. Rather than endorsing an exclusionary stance, this approach raises further questions about the potential of young people to dismantle hegemonic assumptions about gender from a heteronormative position. Indeed, young generations disrupting notions of gender normativity can push the boundaries of binary thinking, destabilising the heteronormative assumptions of Jordan's gendered status quo.

Given its intended purpose, this research focuses on four primary areas of investigation: How do young people position themselves in relation to dominant discourses defining normative femininity and masculinity, gender roles, and gender relations? How do young people engage with gender norms they no longer identify with to carve more desired selves and life trajectories? What do their dreams, longings, and yearnings reveal about the change they want to bring about on both a personal and societal level? Finally, are young people's desire for change enough to pose an actual threat to Jordan's gendered status quo?

Although the subject of agency in Middle East gender studies has been widely addressed, it has often overlooked ordinary young women's and men's complex dynamics of actions, and particularly the role of the inner realm of aspirations, dreams, and longings as agentive forces able to disrupt power relations. Discourses of agency that are entrenched in the dichotomy tying women's agency to subversive practices of *resisting to* or *bargaining with* an essentialist *patriarchal system* have hindered a comprehensive analysis of systemic inequalities. These dichotomies contain the dangerous seeds of obscuring multiple forms of oppression that people face and, by positioning women and men at opposite ends, do not allow us to consider the possibilities of a united struggle that tackles the roots of social inequality. The tendency to conflate gender with women – rather than with women and men together – further endorses these constructs, resulting in partial analyses underestimating women's and men's ability and desire to effect change. This thesis seeks to address these gaps by stressing the similarities in women's and men's experiences of gender oppression, while simultaneously pointing to the constant

differences in their lived experiences, agentive capacities, and outcomes that encompass but also transcend the category of gender. This allows one to step beyond dichotomous narratives highlighting people's universal humanity – complex selves, multiple and contradictory feelings – whilst locating their desires, expectations, and aspirations within their own context.

My research argues that young people do not simply internalise gender normative ideologies produced by the state and reproduced by state apparatuses, such as the family and the education system. On the contrary, they actively engage – in surprising ways – with these state apparatuses through *a relentless exercise of will and action[1]* that enables women and men to shape alternative pathways of womanhood(s) and manhood(s). In their everyday life practices, they challenge, resist, and reshape gender norms to live according to their new values. My research participants' agentive capacities are to be located within and in relation to the *family*, the core institution of Arab societies, whose foundational role in the individual's life course makes it the primary place where agentive capabilities are born and develop. The individual and the collective self meet in the family, where the individual's agency finds diverse ways to emerge, according to the circumstances it encounters. Thus, the family is not merely a site of reproduction but also, and more importantly, a site of disruption of power relations, which can occur in countless ways.

I define *youth agency* as the ability of young people to find a *way* – when and if needed – to make their own choices, meet their own expectations, and build their own life trajectories by *staying within the system* and quietly subverting it from within. In fact, I suggest that young people's success in transforming society and promoting actual change should not be identified in their rejection of societal and familial gendered expectations, but in their ability to *co-opt hegemonic gendered meanings*, as this enables them to embody alternative gender identities and practise more desired gender relations. This process allows young people to promote broader change. By foregrounding the new set of values young people identify with, this research calls for an urgent need to address the demands of Jordan's young generations to live in a fairer, more egalitarian, and just society.

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[1] Through this thesis, *italics* have been used to denote titles, foreign words, and to create emphasis in writing.

In the first section of this introductory chapter, I delineate the research context and set the framework to position young people's agency. I then show how hegemonic discourses of privileged masculinity and submissive femininity are not ahistorical and essentialist, but are produced by the state and reproduced by state apparatuses (e.g., education, family, tribe, the media), fixed in the law to guarantee their perpetuation and supported by dominant, male-centric, religious discourses to allow for normalisation. Furthermore, I highlight the research contribution to the field in relation to previous gaps in the literature, and then frame the main theories that have guided me in interpreting my findings. Next, I discuss the research methodology and address the significance of the research methods, the research sample, the fieldwork activities, and data analysis. Finally, I conclude this introductory chapter by outlining the thesis layout and explaining how its final organisation reflects the progression of the research aims and arguments.

The Research Context

Jordan: Historical Overview of State Formation

The genesis of modern Jordan took roots in the tumultuous years that followed the end of World War I,[2] when the European powers of Britain, France and Italy partitioned the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, reshaping the geopolitical history of the Middle East. Britain's bold pre-war promises – besides the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine – further included the unification of the Greater Syrian territories under the rule of the Hashemite family, whose leader, the Sharif of Mecca, Husayn bin Ali al-Hashemi, had granted Britain support in exchange for leading an Arab military uprising against the Ottoman Empire. After the war, as the British promises failed to materialise, Abdallah, the Sharif of Mecca's son, moved north, gained support from southern Jordan tribesmen and pushed the British to recognise his increasing power by coming to an agreement with him. In 1921, Abdallah was appointed ruler of a new political entity named the Emirate of Transjordan (Milton-

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[2] The First World War (1914-1918), also known as the Great War, saw the contraposition between the Central Powers (mainly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey) and the Allies Powers, (mainly France, Great Britain, Russia, Italy and Japan, and later the United States) and led to the defeat and fall of four empires, namely the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, and the successive creation of new territorial entities and spheres of influences that reshaped the geopolitical map of the world.

Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2001, p.20), which further fuelled his dream of an Arab Empire in Greater Syria. Originally annexed to the British Mandate territories of Palestine, Transjordan soon became a separate and distinct territorial entity from Palestine (Katz, 2005, p.27). For the British colonial power, Transjordan provided a buffer zone that separated, and hence protected, its borders from the French in the north and the Zionist settlers in the west. Furthermore, it provided a safe corridor that linked mandated Palestine to Iraq. Transjordan's *raison d'être* was found in the convergence of interests between the British colonial power and Abdallah's political ambitions. This has led many scholars to emphasise the artificial character of the country at the expense of its leaders' political capabilities and its population's agency. It is perhaps this tendency to attribute Jordan's very existence mainly to foreign interests that still fuels a scholarly literature on the country that aims to justify its stubborn presence. In Transjordan, British officials adopted a new form of colonialism, known as late colonialism, which allowed a certain level of autonomy and political participation of the local elite, in the form of tribal leaders, while retaining control over finances, the army and foreign affairs (Alon, 2007). This form of colonial rule – proven to be a success perhaps because of its continuity – has led to the definition of Jordan as "one of Britain's most successful colonial projects in the Middle East and elsewhere" (Alon, 2007, pp.5-6). Abdallah's tribal policies and the interest of (some) sectors of the population in supporting these policies have been crucial to the success of the British Mandate in Transjordan and the development of the Jordanian state. As Alon (2007) notes, Jordan's state-formation process saw the active involvement of tribes, whose autonomy as social and political actors has not been curtailed. In 1946, global changes after the end of the World War II led the British to sign the Transjordan Independence Treaty. With Emir Abdallah's self-proclamation as King Abdallah I, Transjordan's transition from emirate to kingdom formally ended. However, Jordan's declaration of independence in 1946 was merely a formal declaration, as the army continued to be led by British officers and the country to depend on massive British subsidies (Massad, 2001, p.12). In 1957, when King Huseyn dismissed the British head of the army, General John Bagot Glubb, known as Glubb Pasha, indirect British rule over Jordan finally ended (Massad, 2001, p.13).

From the late 1940s, the newly established Kingdom of Jordan underwent significant transformations. The 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict resulted in the annexation of central Palestine (then renamed the West Bank), which changed Jordan's demographic boundaries and demographic constitution (Massad, 2001, p.12).[3] In the late 1950s, Jordan's exposure to regional politics fuelled an anticolonial nationalist tide that culminated in an attempted coup against King Huseyn in 1957. As a counter-response, the King imposed martial law, which suspended the constitution and elections, banned political parties, dissolved associations and trade unions, shut down newspapers, and placed the press and media under state control from April 1957 to 1989 (Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2001, p.39). In so doing, King Huseyn silenced the leftist opposition and restored the status quo by consolidating Hashemite rule over the state, society, and the Jordanian army. Before 1989, fewer restrictions had been applied to the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood (JMB) and its affiliated political party – the Islamic Action Front (officially established in 1992) – compared to other political forces. The Hashemite regime has used the JMB as a tool against the country's leftist movement, given the latter's strong ties to the Nasserist and Ba'athist regimes in Egypt and Syria and the threat they posed to the stability of Huseyn's regime in Jordan (Jabiri, 2016, p.11). The relative freedom that the JMB enjoyed in Jordan's political and social arena may be one reason for the strong position it has held in the country ever since the return to multiparty politics in the 1990s. The 1990s ushered in an era of political liberalisation to tackle urgent economic hardship that had led to bread riots in the most loyalist areas of Jordan in 1989 (Jabiri, 2016, p.19). The several liberalisation measures – at times contained – resulted in society's active engagement in political activities, an expanded public sphere and a strengthened civil society (Ryan, 2002, pp.25-26). With Abdallah II's ascension to the throne in 1999, the process of political liberalisation has taken a back seat, despite his commitment to pursue a reformist agenda (Ryan, 2002). The negative features of the overall liberalisation process, such as uneven development, public discontent, low voter turnout, press and civil societies' restrictions on freedom of expression, and weak political parties, have led analysts to question the regime's

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[3] The most immediate consequence of the annexation of the West Bank was a demographic shock which the country underwent when approximately 900,000 Palestinians, half of whom were refugees who had fled the territories conquered by the Israeli forces, joined the 450,000 Transjordanian citizens. For a detailed account, see Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe (2001) and Alon (2007), among others.

real intention to democratise the country (Ryan, 2002, p.135). King Abdallah's promotion of democracy and the implementation of its foreign allies' development policies raised significant questions. Specifically: is this a genuine regime project or merely a *façade* programme carried out by the regime to please both the political oppositions and the civil societies' lobbing while reinforcing state authoritarianism and ensuring the Hashemite's survival?

Besides the answers we might provide to this question, it is certain that King Abdallah's democratisation process has not quite worked out for large sections of Jordanian society who took to the streets out of frustration before and during the 2011 uprisings and until recently.[4] After 20 years of Abdallah's reign, Jordanian society is still demanding greater social, economic, and political freedoms and rights. As Ryan (2002, p.131) foresaw, one has to wonder whether the reforms in the form of liberalisation, privatisation, and foreign investment are sufficient economic solutions to social problems. The recurring protests in the country may already give us an answer. Jordan's stagnant economy, prominent unemployment rate (mainly among the educated youth), high cost of living and low wages, rampant corruption, lack of trust in institutions and scarcity of opportunities for its young population are the country biggest challenges. The Arab Barometer (AB) Wave 5 Jordan Country Report indicates the presence of an overwhelming sense of hopelessness among the country's younger generations, with 59 per cent of Jordanians aged 18-29 wanting to emigrate, a figure that has doubled in the last two years, and men are more likely to migrate than women (53 per cent versus 36 per cent) (Robbins, 2019). My interviews with youngsters confirmed a desire to migrate from a country deemed unable to fulfil their desires, beyond economic reasons. This brief historical overview provides a framework to situate the lives of the young people who inhabit this country whose struggles, yearnings, and expectations of fulfilment largely depend on the country's ability to successfully address these challenges, and mostly, the state's willingness to respond to its citizens' demands to live in a fairer and more just society.

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[4] Jordan has witnessed multiple waves of protests since 2011, particularly against austerity measures, including the country's largest protests in 2018. Protests have often been addressed with changes in government tactics and leadership. However, more recent protests in the country have been countered with the use of force, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression have been imposed, particularly against the teachers' syndicate.

The Genesis of Jordan's Gendered Status Quo

In Jordan, as elsewhere, state consolidation occurred through the overhauling of the legal system, moulded to serve the needs of a centralised state (Sonbol, 2003, p.20). The purpose of the law was to juridically homogenise and unify a population that adhere to a distinct set of identities by establishing a new national identity that, once successfully implemented, was internalised by popular Jordanian nationalism without any acknowledgements of its juridical and military genealogy (Massad, 2001, pp.276-277). Modern Jordan underwent significant legal transformations, first as part of the Ottoman Empire, then as a unified Emirate of Transjordan under British Mandate, and lastly as the independent Kingdom of Jordan, under direct and indirect colonial rule. As European civil laws became a model for legal reforms globally, in the Middle East newly-established colonies those have been incorporated into the previous Ottoman laws and other sources of legal codes. Specifically, Jordan's multiple legal systems have been characterised by tribal, *Shari'a* (Islamic law) and modern laws (Sonbol, 2003, p.9). The Jordanian civil code was based on Egypt's, modelled after European legal codes (Sonbol, 2003, p.255), which had also been indirectly introduced to personal status matters (Sonbol, 2003, p.38). For instance, the Ottoman-era Family Code – introduced in Jordan in 1917 – gave a European conceptualisation and outlook to gender (Sonbol, 2003, p.38). Notably, a new relevance was given to the concept of the family as the basis of society, in which everyone had a clearly defined gender role; whereas, previously, the family had played a minor role in Islamic legal thought, as compared to the individual, clan or tribe (Sonbol, 2003, p.38). Because of these changes, a new form of patriarchy based on the concept of the family laid the groundwork for new personal status laws in which the state plays a primary role in enforcing discrimination in personal matters that "were not its business before" (Sonbol, 2003, p.39).

By the time nation-building was being developed, the coexistence of multiple laws benefitted the state, newly wealthy elites, and bourgeois classes and allowed for state hegemony without disturbances from powerful elements, as Sonbol (2003, p.21) clarifies in relation to Jordan's tribal courts.[5] Tucker (1999), Sonbol (2003), and

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[5] In countries like Jordan, whose predominant social structure was tribal, tribal courts were allowed to exist for some time. In Jordan, they existed until May 1976, but even after the abolition of the courts, tribal laws still underlie the Jordanian legal system. Considering the importance of tribes to the modern Jordanian state, tribal laws formed the basis of the Jordanian legal system and continue

Jabiri (2016), among others, suggest that women's rights were further curtailed through the process of codification of Muslim Family Law, first derived from the 1917 Ottoman Family Code (Sonbol, 2003, p.20). Prior to this, the premodern *qadis* (judges) of the *Shari'a* courts, which formed the legal system, were sensitive to the *'urf* – common law – to the point that their interpretation has been influenced by local tradition, that constituted *Shari'a* in cumulative practice (Sonbol, 2003, p.11). However, an extensive literature on Islamic Family Law (Messick, 1992; Moors, 1999; Tucker, 2008) argues in favour of flexibility in the interpretation of *Shari'a* laws, which allows for fluid relations between individuals (Messick, 1992, p.65). The Ottoman court *qadis'* practices were then replaced by the application of a homogeneous legal code (derived in Jordan primarily from the Hanafi Code), which was codified by government-selected jurists and applied uniformly to all citizens (Sonbol, 2003, p.37). Sonbol (2003, p.37) further states that "this code became the instrument for constructing gender, family and other personal relations".

The impact of colonial rule on shaping new normative masculinity and femininity identities in Jordan goes beyond the influence of European legal codes in the making of modern Arab state-nations. In the Jordanian context, Massad (2001, p.138) foregrounds the effect that British colonial administrators, particularly Glubb Pasha, had on the Arab legion[6] tribesmen adopting a Western form of hypermasculinity, which was subsequently institutionalised in the Jordanian national identity through the military forces. Interestingly, Massad (2001, pp.137-139) highlights Glubb's gendering Orientalist discourse, mirroring "a feminisation of the Oriental other and a supermasculinization of that other". Glubb defines the Bedouin male gender performance as feminine, compared to the model of British men, as Bedouin men had ringlets like the "young ladies of the Victorian age" and long hair for which they were named "Glubb's girls" (Massad, 2001, p.138). In the early Forties, when engaging in battles, Bedouin soldiers were required to shave their heads, but most refused as they "valued their long hair" (Massad, 2001, p.137). By the end of the

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to impact on issues related to murders and gender-based crimes until nowadays. For a detailed account of the role of tribal law in Jordan, see Sonbol (2003, pp.42-48).

[6] Military force (1,300 all ranks) formed by the British in 1923. Nominally the commander in chief of the Arab legion was the Emir, but *de facto* the Arab Legion was under control of a British officer. The first commander was General Frederick Peake, known as Peake Pasha, who was succeeded in 1939 by General John Glubb, known as Glubb Pasha, who was dismissed by King Huseyn in 1956 (Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2001, p.23).

Forties, Massad (2001, p.137) states that British masculine standards prevailed and "long hair had disappeared completely from the Jordanian army". Whilst Glubb describes Bedouin men as feminine, both in terms of their gender performance and traits, women were once referred to as "medieval witches" (Massad, 2001, p.138) due to their assertive attitude and temperament. As Massad (2001, pp.143-144) states, the British advent brought about "immense changes" in the lifestyle of all the population; in particular, Glubb was to transform the military identity of the Arab Legion and form the very national identity of Transjordan. Thus, the notion that Arab men's disposition is characterised by "a streak of gentleness" (Massad, 2001, p.139) – which much surprised Glubb Pasha – was soon replaced by the British-derived model of unemotional and brutal hypermasculinity. As Massad (2001) argues, this model served the construction of hegemonic discourses of masculinity later naturalised and essentialised through the definition of Jordan's military national identity. The lack of extensive studies on gender relations among Jordan's indigenous people before the colonial era renders a comprehensive analysis of Jordan's pre- and post-modern gender discourse a somewhat hazardous task. It is worth mentioning, however, that the establishment of a unified state – which brought together a non-homogeneous population with diverse cultural traditions – led to the gradual disappearance of the indigenous population's multiple understandings of gender. Jordan, indeed, consists of a mosaic of culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse people, influenced in their traditions by Greater Syria and Northern Palestine in the north and by the tribal culture of southern Palestine, Sinai, and the Arabian Peninsula in the south (Sonbol, 2003, p.21). It can be argued that this diversity, which has characterised Jordan since its inception, can be grasped in the coexistence of multiple sets of cultural values, beliefs, religious morals and traditions in today's population, despite the state's efforts at homogenisation. Pointing to this fact helps us to recognise the artificiality – thus, the non-essentialist – character of what came to be the "normative gender" when – during Jordan's nation-building – duties and responsibilities of Jordanian women and men were enshrined in the Nationality Law, as to create a new collective, yet exclusionary, identity.

Middle Eastern nationalist movements constructed a unified and supposedly authentic cultural identity based on either ethnic, religious, territorial location, cosmopolitan, or a mixture of those (Pratt, 2007, pp.32-33). An essential aspect of

the nationalist narrative was the distinction between a material and spiritual dimension (Chatterjee, 1993, p.6) that reversed the binary division of the superior West and the inferior East, claiming the "subjects" ability to self-govern (Pratt, 2007, pp.33-34). In Jordan, the anticolonial moment witnessed the construction of a new national identity based on three fundamental features: tribalism, Islam and loyalty to the Hashemites. In Jordan, as elsewhere, this nationalist discourse, produced new power hierarchies at the level of society by privileging certain groups over others (Pratt, 2007, p.34). As Massad (2001, p.276) explains, "the new identity and national culture were then deployed not as the new products, which they in fact were, but as eternal essences that had always existed". As widely recognised in scholarly literature, nationalism was expressed through gendered narratives (Massad, 1995, p.467). Thus, a new gendered status quo, protecting male dominance and curtailing women's freedom and rights, was established and legitimised at the state and societal levels through the recurrent rhetoric of moral values and Islamic principles. State nationality laws reiterate the masculine character of the nation, institutionalised through the symbol of the army – which, to some extent, still nurtures dreams of power and pride among young Jordanian men, who refer to it as *masna' rijal*, the men's factory. Women, instead, according to the 1928 Jordanian Nationality Law, amended in 1961 and 1963, were considered their husbands' followers (Jabiri, 2016, p.7), merely wives and mothers of Jordanians. The Nationality Law features Jordan's discriminatory citizenship laws for women and establishes male-centred privileges. Jordanian women married to foreigners had no right to retain their citizenship until 1987, and to this day they cannot pass on their citizenship to their foreign husbands and children. In contrast, children of Jordanian men automatically acquire Jordanian citizenship (Jabiri, 2016, p.7). Ending gender discrimination in nationality laws is one of the main battlefields of women's activism in Jordan. The problematic issue is the subject of an acrimonious debate in the country, where various claims coexist in support of the current nationality law. These claims include women being a threat to Jordan's national identity, adding an economic burden on a country that is already unable to support its own citizens, or unbalancing Jordan's demography in favour of the Palestinian population, and lastly, the leftist claim that naturalising Palestinians through marriage can provide "a basis for the alternative homeland of Palestinians in Jordan" (Jabiri, 2016, p.8). The law enshrines the patrilineal dominance of

nationality, while women cannot be agents of nationality, and their contribution to the nation is secondary (Massad, 1995, p.472; 2001, p.45).

Jordanian law introduces further gender discrimination by allowing a distinction between civil and personal status law in two distinct realms, mirroring the division between the public and private spheres. As per Article 103 of the 1952 Jordan Constitution, which was emended in 2016, "matters of personal status are the matters specified by law and in accordance therewith fall within the sole jurisdiction of the *Shari'a* Courts when the parties are Muslims". Women's discrimination was introduced in the country's legal framework by stipulating that all issues pertaining to the family and personal status law, including marriage, divorce, child custody and support, alimony and inheritance, fall under the patriarchal interpretations of *Shari'a*. As Prettitore (2015, p.34) put it, "family law issues, even if linked to religious interpretations, reflect social norms and gender role divisions within the family, and in many areas, the line between what is Islam and what is cultural norms is not very clear". However, the influence of social norms in defining women's rights and roles within society, whether they follow under *Shari'a* or civil jurisdiction, restricts women from enjoying full rights (Prettitore, 2015, p.34). Regulating the private sphere separately serves to preserve that spiritual domain of the nationalist anticolonial discourse framed above.

Simultaneously, the personal status laws place women under the control of a "male guardian" (Sonbol, 2003, p.7) depriving them of their full status as legal citizens. Afaf Jabiri (2016), in her comprehensive analysis of the concept of *wilaya* – guardianship over women – notes that the Muslim family law provision of *wilaya* is the basis for women's legal and social subordination. The system of *wilaya* is also considered a critical factor in legitimising the power of masculine institutions such as the family, tribe, and religion over women. In Jordan, the provision of *wilaya* applies to women until the age of 30 and to men until the age of 18 (Jabiri, 2016, pp.3-4). According to an Amnesty International report (2019), Jordanian authorities collude with the male guardianship system to restrict women's freedom of movement and choice over important life decisions. The report refers to so-called "protective custody", the administrative detention of a woman whose life is threatened by a male guardian accusing them of dishonouring the family honour through alleged immoral

behaviour. Women who transgress gender norms in Jordan can pay the price of their choices with their life, either by being killed by a male relative or imprisoned until a male relative decides to release them. Women can also be detained on suspicion of *zina* (adultery), for being absent from home, or for any supposed immoral behaviour whose interpretation is carried out arbitrarily by a male relative. The *wilaya* system is an example of how patriarchal rule extends over a woman's life and how discrimination and even significant denial of human rights can be exercised under Jordanian law.

In 2010, the Jordanian government changed the Personal Status Code by introducing amendments that narrowed the equality gap between women and men. Specifically, the amendments addressed the following: allowing a wife access to a no-fault divorce; forbidding husbands from moving the family's residence to a new city; restricting a husband from taking a second wife; guaranteeing the wife's right to work outside the home (Prettitore, 2015, p.33). Furthermore, the minimum age for marriage was raised from 16 for boys and 15 for girls to 18, while dispositions regarding the right to marry between 15 and 18 was left to the discretion of a *Shari'a* judge if deemed in the best interests of the child (Prettitore, 2015, p.33). These reforms, considered to be "consistent with Islam", have been prepared by the Office of Chief Justice of the *Shari'a* Courts based on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (Prettitore, 2015, p.33). Sonbol (2003, p.253) states that "the penal code and other laws regarding elections, citizenship, national health insurance, and social security all work to undermine women's rights further". For instance, about the labour law, Sonbol (2003) argues that while Jordanian law has encouraged women's entry into the labour market, it has also encouraged women to take early retirement and consider their work as transitory. Through the law, which fixes men's prerogatives and women's discrimination as normative, Jordan's masculine state epistemology of colonial origins has been constructed.

As women's rights are curtailed on the basis of Muslim family law, Sonbol (2003) retraces the origins of Jordan's modern legal system to examine what is Islamic and what is not. Several Jordanian lawyers and judges admitted that what is considered Islamic law in Jordan has different origins (Sonbol, 2003, p.255). Indeed, Jordanian social relations that are "perceived and conceived as Islamic" derive from certain

traditions of Bedouinism and peasant culture, whose supposedly "Islamicness" gives them legitimacy (Sonbol, 2003, pp.253-256).

Discriminatory laws against women are captured within a cultural discourse that legitimises the hegemonic order, which in Jordan, and mostly everywhere else in the region, is deeply gendered. Therefore, one must question the cultural discourse that guarantees the hegemonic order "formed of Jordanian political and commercial elites and their tribal allies" (Sonbol, 2003, p.254). Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Italy's most notable Marxist theorist, develops the concept of cultural hegemony to explain the consent of the subordinates to the ruling class in capitalist societies. For Gramsci, the ruling class extends and maintains its rule over the population – not only through force – but through cultural means, consisting of ideologies, values, norms and beliefs of the dominant group then reproduced by state apparatuses, and accepted by people as "common sense" (Hoare and Smith, 1971). People's consent to domination is achieved when constructed, and temporal social and cultural norms are accepted by society as inevitable, natural, essentialist and given at all times. For Gramsci, the law, along with the education system and other institutions, becomes the instrument by which "every state eliminates certain customs and attitudes and disseminates others, as to create a new type of civilisation, hence a collective life and individual relations of its citizens" (Hoare and Smith, 1971, p.508). Sonbol (2003, p.256) highlights how Jordanian laws protect the privileges of few (tribes, elites, families) and deny the fundamental human rights of other groups (e.g., women, children) by providing justifications and excuses, such as that of protecting women, the family honour, culture and tradition, and the Islamic values of the country, which in Gramscian terms constitute the hegemonic discourse. The paradox of cultural hegemony is that the newly constructed order of things, its social norms, people's acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, appears as the way things have always been. Gender roles, standards, and relations are deeply entangled with cultural hegemony, fixing a gendered status quo that aims to gain people's consent and acceptance of social inequalities, providing the means to maintain hierarchical relationships between people and between the citizens and the state. However, as I demonstrate in this thesis, younger generations are becoming increasingly aware of these hegemonic discourses and are distancing themselves from the dominant masculinity and femininity models "on whose imagery", Sonbol says, (2003, p.258)

"there is much insistence, despite the life of people illustrates complexity and productivity". It is towards this complexity and productivity that this thesis turns its focus by showing how young people re-shape desiring selves, despite – and beyond – the codified gendered norms that naturalise constructs of normative femininity and masculinity. Young people's shifting desires, aspirations, and expectations of themselves and others contain the seeds for de-naturalising gender norms and disrupting gender hierarchies. In this sense, desires, hopes, and yearnings are the agentive and driving forces of transformation that can pose a threat to the country's gendered status quo.

Specifically, in this research, I argue that the family is a significant site to analyse as it is within the family that young people's new, contrasting desires emerge, made visible by intergenerational conflicts over socially accepted gendered expectations. Thus, the family may provide the central battlefield where hegemonic notions of gender collide with emerging alternative selves, laying the groundwork for a redefinition of hegemonic gender ideologies and a renegotiation of gendered boundaries on the part of young people. By locating young women's and men's actions within and in relation to the most important social institution in Arab society of which they are core members – *the family* – I contend that the youth are not an isolated category or a solely discrete unit of analysis. Instead, they are active members and part of a larger societal body, in which their agentive capabilities are first formed and then shaped by numerous factors and interactions during the evolving process of self-formation.

Middle East Gender Studies: Perspectives on Scholarship

In the following sections, I review thematically the main scholarly approaches on Middle East gender studies pertaining to this research topic. The review is divided into three main parts. The first one reflects on *Muslim women's agency*, the second on *Arab family and youth studies,* and the third on *masculinity;* finally, dominant methodological approaches and limitations in studying gender attitude change will be addressed. The review begins by stating the research problem and ends by outlining the research contribution to the field.

The Middle East feminist scholarship has consistently pointed to patriarchal structures of family and society, religious interpretations and state structures, policies and regulations as major obstacles to Arab\Muslim women's autonomy (e.g., Muhanna, 2013, p.32). Scholarly debates on Muslim women's agency (e.g., Kandiyoti, 1988; Joseph, 1996; 1999; Moghadam, 2013; 2020, among others) have taken for granted women's subordination to a male domination system and assumed that women would either resist to or comply with power. Debates on agency have also been concerned with the outcome of agency, categorising women's actions as either strategic choices aimed at subverting the system or tactical\pragmatic ones aimed at granting women temporal survival or immediate benefits. Recent scholarly work (e.g., Mahmood, 2005; Al-Ali, 2007; Malmström, 2012; Muhanna, 2013; Le Renard, 2014; Jabiri, 2016, among others) has sought to bypass these essentialist dichotomies by pointing to the complexity of women's subjectivities and the multiple dynamics affecting their choices. In some cases (e.g., Jabiri, 2016), the difficulty in overcoming this impasse led scholars to conflate these dichotomies by emphasising how Muslim women make use of structures for different purposes and navigate difficulties according to specific circumstances and personal needs. Nevertheless, in most narratives, women are either heroines or strategic planners, yet remain victims. Women and men have been often encapsulated within a pre-set gender system against which they could not do much except elaborate strategic plans. To successfully overcome dichotomous narratives, we need to fully dismantle the Orientalist epistemology that still dictates the way we conduct research. For instance, approaches to the study of social change may still reflect colonial assumptions about what change is more desirable (for whom?) and what change is worth analysing, how, or when. These approaches have hindered the recognition of people's ability to engage with prevailing gender ideologies, affecting the sufficient scrutiny of the complex formation of their selfhood, or their evolving agency in all its capacities and meanings. Furthermore, Eurocentric methodological approaches to the analysis of social change often prioritise exploring quantifiable phenomena indicating tangible and revolutionary change, and neglect, or dismiss, the value of other, intangible, aspects of human subjectivity. Enquiring into the realm of dreams, longings, and yearnings can inform us on ordinary people's desired change and help us understand their dynamics of action, of which those act as driving forces of transformation. This research gives credence and legitimacy to this ethereal dimension by highlighting its

transformative potential. It fills the outlined gaps by acknowledging that an agentive force guided by dreams, aspirations, and expectations shapes people's self-making beyond hegemonic gender discourses and can effect wider change. In this context, agency is not exceptional to heroic subjectivities or limited to sensationalist narratives on resistance, but belongs to everyone and encompasses diverse and multiple pathways and outcomes. In the next section, I critically engage with dominant approaches to Muslim women's agency in Middle East feminist anthropology, drawing on Sertaç Sehlikoglu's (2018) chronological and thematical review of the scholarship produced since the 1960s. Therefore, I set out on my approach to agency which seeks to go beyond the dualism of resistance or compliance with power.

Approaches to Muslim Women's Agency

Prior to the 1960s, a pervasive Western "male bias" (Moore, 1988) primarily characterised the Middle East anthropological literature, hindering a fair interpretation of Muslim women's lives (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.74). This resulted in an abundance of reductionist literature produced by men, which focused on men and applied a male perspective in analysis. Methodological limitations, such as gender segregation preventing men from entering women's spaces, characterised this literature, burdened by the bias of an already androcentric field with significant colonialist ties (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.74). Since the 1960s, a new body of literature on Muslim women has sought to reverse this "male bias" and defy the colonial imaginary of Oriental femininities and masculinities. This literature has amplified the so-far invisible women's voices by providing real accounts of women's lives (Sehlikoglu, 2018, pp.74-75). The new way of approaching women's agency applied Marxist theoretical lenses that also informed later analyses of women's agency, tying it to concepts of resistance to male dominance and placing women's struggle for self-empowerment between two ends of a spectrum: family and Islam (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.76).

By the end of the 19th century, a new colonial narrative of Islam centred on women emerged (Ahmed, 1992, p.150), linking the root causes of women's status in Arab\Muslim societies to an ahistorical and essentialist Arab and Islamic backward culture. European narratives describing Muslim men as dominant patriarchs and

women as powerless victims fixed the imaginary of the inhabitants of a diverse region, obscuring, if not erasing, the heterogeneity and complexity of their human existence. As Adely (2019, p.452) notes, gender constitutes "the most pernicious colonial baggage shaping engagements with the Arab world". Although an Orientalist narrative, brought to light by Edward W. Said's 1978 ground-breaking publication *Orientalism,* has been challenged, its legacy still haunts knowledge production on the region. By defining Orientalism as "a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power" (Said, 1978, p.12), Said calls for the Western scholarship to acknowledge its role in elaborating a distorted idea of the Orient, which allowed for its hegemony over the East. "Orientalism" ushered in post-colonialist literature a critical discourse that, by uncovering the discursive dimension of colonialism, aims to overcome Eurocentrism's disciplinary and geographical boundaries. In relation to women's agency, post-orientalist scholarship has called for the revision of previous research approaches (Abu-Lughod, 2001) and resulted in the deconstruction of essentialist categories of analysis describing women's "given" submissive status. Thus, a new concept of "culture" emerged highlighting its contested, dynamic, and hybrid features (Abu-Lughod, 1993). Concurrently, constructs of patriarchy, women's subjugation, and honour were no longer treated as static cultural determinants, "but rather as dynamic discursive practice related to other structures of power" (Deeb and Winegar 2012, p.542). New research approaches have included the use of ethnographies to portray the particularities of women's everyday lives within certain communities emphasising how specific these portrayals are and yet do not apply to every person living within the same context. Scholars with part or full Middle Eastern heritage, such as Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Soraya Altorki, Lila Abu-Lughod, Miriam Cooke, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, among others, stressed the importance of ethnographies in uncovering the complex meanings of social structures and people's realities, which are as specific as people's definitions and understandings of them. This approach was able to defy prejudices regarding the passive, weak, oppressed and veiled "Muslimwoman" (cooke, 2008), and marked a significant shift in the field, by expanding our knowledge of women's role within Muslim societies and the complexity of gender relations (Abu-Lughod, 2001). Meanwhile, other significant

theoretical contributions on gender and sexuality by Michael Foucault[7] (1978) and Judith Butler (1990) consolidated the shift from women to gender studies and paved the way for analysing gender first as a system and later as a regime (Moghadam, 2020). Another contribution was made by Third Wave Feminism and intersectionality theories (Crenshaw, 1989), which emphasise the strong ties of gender with other forms of oppression, such as religion, class, and ethnicity.

The brilliant work of scholars such as Margot Badran, Leila Ahmed, Valentine Moghadam, Deniz Kandiyoti, Lama Abu Odeh, and Suad Joseph from the 1980s continues to guide our ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches to the study of gender in Middle Eastern societies. Their post-orientalist writings (during the 1980s-1990s) analyse women's agency as heavily dependent on broader systems such as the state, nation, religion, and kinship relations identifying them as primary barriers to women's empowerment. However, as Abu-Lughod (1998, p.5) notes, the mere emphasis on state policies and national projects tends to render women primarily objects of reform and manipulation. This literature's major limitation lies in the scholarly inability to recognise women's agency within the self, along with the prolonged failure to connect gender studies with men. An analysis of the gaps existing within post-Orientalist writing should also acknowledge that, sometimes, scholars involved in Orientalist critiques in the attempt to deconstruct dichotomies end up reproducing old Orientalist binaries (Al-Ali, 2000, p.24). Being trapped in Western hegemonic discursive categories, such as colonised versus coloniser, Orient versus Occident, Islam versus secularism, is detrimental to self-referential analyses of culture and society (Kandiyoti, 1996, p.16). For a better understanding of Middle Eastern societies, it is necessary to broaden the research agenda to include critiques of other social institutions that reproduce gender hierarchies, such as the military, the law, educational institutions, and the family (Kandiyoti, 1996, pp.16-17) and to stress the importance of heterogeneity when studying people's lives.

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[7] While Foucault's significant contribution to modern theory does not need to be remarked, it is instead important to acknowledge his terrible accusations of paedophilia on Tunisian children, accusations that have long been known in Tunisia and long silenced, or condoned, in the West. This sheds important light on the role of colonialism and white privilege in allowing crimes to be committed against local populations.

In the 2000s, a new trend in scholarship emerged to counter the post-9\11 negative narratives on the submission of Arab women, the dominant Arab man, and the *hijab* (headscarf) as a symbol of oppression, while justifying the legitimate existence of other self-makings. This new trend, called the "piety turn", focused on Muslim women's agency and piety (Sehlikoglu, 2018, pp.79-81). Ushered in by Saba Mahmood's (2005) work on pious Muslim women's self-making (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.82), the piety turn challenged a limited secular thinking, unable to look beyond its own categories. However, although it tackled issues of concern to liberal feminism (precisely, Islamic feminism and, more generally, that of religious women), this literature also produced further generalisations. The greatest paradox of the piety turn literature lies in the centrality of religion overshadowing other subjectivities, which results (again) in *generalising* and *otherising* a diverse population whose religious identity does not exhaust the complexity of elements that constitute their subjecthood. Sehlikoglu (2018, p.81) recognises that "under the influence of Mahmood's work, Muslim women's subjectivity began to be perceived as that of agents, also religious agents, whose agency does not necessarily correspond to liberal expectations". However, she further points to the limitations of the piety literature, which contributed to confining women's agentive possibilities within the boundaries of religion (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.81). As Schielke (2010, p.2) states, "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam", to the extent that, as further emphasised by Deeb (2015, p.95), "the pious Muslim became the only visible Muslim". Indeed, "most Muslims, like most humankind, are sometimes but not always pious, and follow various moral and immoral aims" (Schielke, 2010, p.2). These scholarly trends – even though much needed – if they end up dominating accounts of women's agency may limit our understanding of the people inhabiting Muslim societies rather than enhance it. Likewise, narratives (or findings) that happen to resonate with Western-liberal thought should not be neglected in order not to run the risk of being negatively labelled within the scholarly community.

Since the 2010s, attempts to move beyond religious self-makings have turned the scholarly focus towards the everyday life of the people inhabiting Arab\Muslim societies. Literature on art, fashion, desire, sport, and youth culture bloomed in the 2010s (Sehlikoglu, 2018, p.82), as scholars finally seemed to have recognised other "human" aspects of Muslim lives. However, this literature, despite being innovative

and exciting, at times, resonates with a sensationalist tone that dehumanises people's accounts. Examples of dehumanising narratives include indulging on how Muslim women (despite all) enjoy fashion, or discovering that men can (after all) be caring and loving partners. This last point is particularly relevant for studies of masculinities countering the re-articulation of the colonial discourse in the post-9\11 era, as mentioned above in relation to women. I shall return to this point later.

This thesis expands agency meanings, possibilities, and outcomes beyond dichotomous narratives by connecting the intangible aspects of subjectivities, consisting of dreams, hopes and longings with the tangible ones, represented by one's relational lived experiences. This permits us to unpack people's most desired gender self-makings and the agentive dynamics that lead to multiple life trajectories. Indeed, agency is defined by the complexity of inter and intrapersonal relationships; thus, it is constantly evolving and shaped not only by a combination of social, economic, and political factors, but also, and above all, by the boundless personal experiences and relational dynamics one may encounter. This approach to agency captures how subjectivities are fragmented and multiple, but also temporal and unique, as they respond to the historical circumstances people live in and personal challenges people face (Sehlikoglu, 2018; 2020). To shed light on how multiple agents make their own choices despite and beyond structures of inequality, this research focuses on the *creative aspect of agency*. Creative agency is guided by the complex realm of one's aspirations, desires, and expectations, and its value lies in its potential to transform the individual and enact social change.

The literature examined has failed to sufficiently acknowledge people's multiple agentive forces, insisting on describing women as mere objects of other's projects (e.g., colonialism, nation-state building, nationalism, Islamist projects), and men as mere planners and beneficiaries of these projects, whose privileged position within a male-dominated system has not been sufficiently questioned. Yet, how can we understand young people's agency if crucial institutions – specifically the family and the education system – shaping individuals' agentive capabilities are not carefully scrutinised? How can we understand changes in gender relations if men are left out of the analysis? How can we better assess social change by surpassing the limits of methodological approaches and their need to measure unpredictable human

behaviour? The following sections address these questions, by first exploring the existing literature on the Arab family and youth studies in the regional and local Jordanian context, and then focusing on masculinities studies and methodological approaches to analysing gender attitude change.

Arab Family and Youth Studies

In reviewing scholarly production on gender in the Middle East, it strikes the gradual disappearance, or loss of interest, in family studies. While efforts have been made to defy dichotomous approaches to women's agency by highlighting selves beyond the romance of resistance (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1990) or compliance with power (e.g., Kandiyoti, 1988), or, in more recent studies, within both (e.g., Muhanna 2013; Jabiri, 2016), a similar process is absent in relation to crucial social entities such as families. Moghadam's (2020, p.469) statement that "the family remains the locus of female control (including sexuality) and social reproduction" perfectly conveys the dominant scholarly approach to family studies. Indeed, a few studies (e.g., Joseph, 2018) have recognised the relevance of the family in understanding the social transformation of Arab societies, of which it constitutes the most crucial social entity. However, more studies are needed exploring the heterogeneity of Arab families, parent-youth complex dynamics, and young people's agency within the family, beyond narratives of personal struggle against a patriarchal institution. This thesis aims to fill these gaps by overcoming the concept of the family as a monolithic entity that merely reproduces the social order. On the contrary, I argue that families are as complex as the individuals who constitute them and are characterised not only by tensions but also harmony and, above all, they may function as system disruptors.

Suad Joseph's (2018, p.3) much-needed review on Arab family studies from the 1960s onwards appears extremely useful to scholars who wish to contribute to this critical field, which, as she states, "has taken a back seat for several reasons". First, the ongoing political processes in the region have led scholars to focus extensively on disciplines such as political science and history, perceived to be more prestigious than others, and second to overemphasise certain topics, such as Islam, while significantly neglecting others (Joseph, 2018, p.3). Third, the development of a literature challenging cultural constructs, including the Arab patriarchy (of which the family is at the core), led to the progressive dismissal of family studies rather than

its further theorisation. As Joseph (2018, p.4) put it, the family constitutes "a powerful vector of social action" and it is as dynamic and fluid as the multiple variables and conflicting power relations that shape it. Families are the bedrock of political, ethnic, religious identity, and loyalty; thus, "the production of families in the Arab region is foundational to the production of Arab societies" (Joseph, 2018, pp.1-3). Therefore, we cannot ignore families when analysing social change.

Within family studies, the concept of "patriarchy" has been a useful analytic to theorising women's subordination. Introduced by early Western feminists, patriarchy[8] was first conceptualised as a universal, trans-historical and transcultural phenomenon responsible for women's subordination everywhere in the world (Acker, 1989). Later, feminist theory challenged the idea of patriarchy as a *natural* system based on biological determinism, laying the groundwork for examining the roots of patriarchy historically (Lerner, 1986). The lack of proper conceptualisation of the term[9] brought feminists to progressively dissociate from patriarchy and to embrace the concept of gender.[10] Arab patriarchy was theorised as a gendered, kin- and age-based system of domination that privileged the male and elder over the female and younger. The term "classic patriarchy" denoted male-headed households typical of the geographical area labelled by Caldwell (1978) "patriarchal belt"*,* where societies are characterised by male dominance, control over women's behaviour and the importance of blood ties. The priority given to kinship implies that patriarchy originates in the family – the basic unit of Arab societies (Krauss, 1987; Barakat, 1993) – and is then "reproduced within other realms of social life" (Inhorn, 1996, p.4). Subsequent literature shedding light on gender and structural changes concerning the modernised institutions of state and family resulted in theorising new forms of patriarchy, called "neo-patriarchy" (Sharabi, 1988; Moghadam, 1993). Sharabi (1988) argues that neo-patriarchy originated in the marriage of

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[8] The term *Patriarchy* means "the rule of the father". The word has its etymology in the Greek *patriarkhēs* (patriarch), which is a compound of the word *patria* (lineage, descent and father) and *arkho* (rule).

[9] For a more comprehensive analysis of how the concept of patriarchy was developed in feminist writings, see Beechey (1979, pp.66-82)

[10] Acker (1992) states that in sociology, feminist scholars switched the early meaning of gender from *sex* or *women,* to one denoting gender as the social construction of identities and roles between men and women.

imperialism and patriarchy on the heels of attempts at modernisation by Western imperial states. Building on Sharabi's theory, Moghadam (2020, pp.469-473) posits a modernised form of neopatriarchal state, whose contradiction lies in promoting "gendered modernisation" while maintaining patriarchal family laws intact. In this sense, "the neopatriarchal state, family, and family laws reflect and reinforce each other" (Moghadam, 2013, p.17). By conceptualising the Arab family as inherently patriarchal and based on fixed, hierarchical dyadic relationships (e.g., husband-wife, father-son), much of this literature reflects the liberal feminist derived model of the autonomous and individualistic self.

The consequences of structural changes brought scholars to argue that modernisation and globalisation forces altered the social structure of societies in a way that had positive implications for women's condition (Moghadam, 2013, p.28). Urbanisation, infrastructure development, legal reforms, mass education and employment have been considered to have undermined classic patriarchy (Moghadam, 2013, p.133). The most immediate result of these social changes was the replacement of the extended family with the nuclear one (Moghadam, 2013). Thus, the emergence of a new (modern) Arab family has been highlighted, characterised mainly by monogamous marriages, independent households, an increasing role for women in critical decision-making, such as divorce, and a new pattern of gender roles. This recent literature stressing the role of structural change on families (e.g., Fargues, 1997; Moghadam, 2004) applied quantitative data analysis to analyse structural norms or drew on survey data to investigate socio-cultural and political changes. In studying social change, we may note that, on the one hand, using questionnaires to assess people's attitudes can be helpful in predicting, to some extent, people's behaviour and evaluating whether the preconditions for a change in social norms are in place. Yet, on the other hand, surveys carry the risk of being partial or leading to biased conclusions. Scholars must acknowledge the underlying assumptions that can be unconsciously hidden behind our research questions or choice of research methods. Indeed, sometimes, quantitative methods for measuring social change may carry the contested legacy of classical modernisation theory, which, through the language of variables, keeps reproducing controversial dichotomies of

modernisation versus tradition, where the West is modern, civilised, and more educated, and the East is traditional, backward, and less educated. For instance, scholarship on gender equality attitude change, looking at the relationship between gender equality and levels of religiosity or educational attainment, has assumed a shift in women's status due to the rise in educational attainment, the delay in marriages, and the decline in fertility rates. My research suggests the lack of a powerful connection between gender-egalitarian attitudes and sociodemographic variables, particularly parents' educational attainment, ethnicity, family settlement patterns, social class, and religiosity. Like Fargues (2005), some scholars argue that education constitutes an element of authority. Therefore, girls who have attained a higher level of education than their fathers might challenge the patriarchal system. My findings, by contrast, suggest that women's educational attainment is not sufficient to defy patriarchal authority, which is not based on education but on the control of economic resources. Although we recognise that women's prospects for empowerment without financial independence are very limited, I further suggest that financial independence may not be the dominant key either. Women's admission into education has contributed to the rise in the age at first marriage and decreased fertility rates. Yet this has never constituted a genuine threat to the patriarchal system. Survey research approaches may not allow us to identify concepts and development paths that do not coincide with those of Western societies. Indeed, the failures of such theories to fall in line with linear expectations of societal progress, and hence the shortcomings originated from the actual theory of global inapplicability are often explained in terms of paradoxes, such as "gender paradox" or "education paradox". For instance, in the World Bank's 2005 gender report on Jordan, the country was labelled a "gender paradox" in consideration of its peculiar trend of women's high educational attainment not followed by equal work participation and a significant decline in fertility rate (World Bank, 2005, cited in Adely, 2012a, p.11).

Jordan registers one of the region's highest levels of female literacy and one of the lowest rates of women's employment. According to the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) 2021, Jordan literacy rate stands at 97.8 per cent for females and 98.6 per cent for males (World Economic Forum, 2021). The Jordanian Department of

Statistics (DoS) employment report for the first quarter of 2021 shows that the unemployment rate among Jordanians with a bachelor's degree or higher is 37.7 per cent, with 25.1 per cent of males unemployed against 79.6.2 per cent of females (Department of Statistics – Jordan, 2021). Besides economic reasons, many studies have pointed to prevailing sociocultural norms and Jordanian tribalism as the main factors holding back women from participating in the country's labour force (e.g., Amawi, 2000; Rubenberg, 2001; Sonbol, 2003; Quawas, 2017). Conversely, Adely's (2012a) ethnographic work entitled *Gendered paradoxes: educating Jordanian women in nation, faith, and progress,* addresses women's education from perspectives that differ considerably from the common trends of development mapped out by global policymakers and analysts. She points to the meanings that education has taken on in the Jordanian context, which is strongly linked to discourses of respectability, class, faith, and marriageability. Adely's analysis, on the one hand, helps us defy narratives of development trajectories. However, on the other hand, it carries the risk of inscribing the significance of women's education in larger social and state narratives. Furthermore, inscribing education meanings into pre-existing gender norms further justifies the reproduction of these norms and generalises people's willingness to maintain the status quo. My research offers further insights into the meanings of education for young Jordanians, and by identifying intergenerational divergences on its significance, it opens up possibilities to discuss young men's and women's co-optation of dominant narratives on education.

Compared to other Arab countries, Jordan has not attracted much scholarly attention, as its socio-political reality has been judged at times too stodgy to be worthy of extensive research. Also, considering its involvement in the 2011 uprisings, the protest's significance to its people has been dismissed, so that in response to widespread sceptical analysis, Fida Adely (2012b) wrote the provocative article entitled *"When is something, something?".* Academic interest in Jordan has fallen into specific topics, reflecting the dichotomies to which the country has been pinned. Literature on the regime's inexplicable stubborn resilience has abounded (e.g., Fischbach, 2000; Massad, 2001; Carroll, 2003), along with that on Jordan's resistance to democratic transition (e.g., Joffe, 2001), the impact of liberalisation policies, its geopolitical role in the international and regional arena, its "humanitarian

role" in absorbing refugees from neighbouring countries, Palestine first, then Iraq and Syria (e.g., Sullivan and Tobin, 2014; Lenner and Turner, 2019; Tobin, 2020). Much attention has been devoted to proving Jordan's invention, first as a colonial entity and then as a postcolonial Hashemite project. Similarly, its population's identity has been described either as someone else's fictitious project (e.g., Massad, 2001) or in perpetual crisis due to its ethnic division (e.g., Brand, 1995). The country lacks ethnographic research prioritising Jordanian people's agency, often forgotten or even discredited in scholars' commitment to fixing the country's imaginary resting upon impassable dichotomies. Very little attention has been paid to young people and their families, intergenerational conflict, and ordinary young people's ability to drive social change; families have been analysed as kinship and tribal groups whose existence is strictly linked to that of the state, while youth (and women) have become a salient category in the status of perpetual victims, either in the hands of Islamist groups or stack in waithood, disillusioned by the lack of future prospects. Recent literature focuses on the impact of education, globalisation, technology, and other drivers of social change in analysing young people changing cultural practices, including gender roles, marriage, dating, love, and partnership (e.g., Droeber, 2005; Shunnaq, 2009; Kaya, 2009; Abdallah, 2009; Al-Bakri, 2020; Adely, 2016; Schwedler, 2010; El-Dine, 2016; 2018). The literature on marriage and love in Jordan (e.g., Kaya, 2009; Shunnaq, 2009; Abdallah, 2009; Shahrani, 2016; Adely, 2016; El-Dine, 2018) highlighting the constant tension between the notions of *"hubb romansi"* or romantic love, and marriage, understood as family arrangement, has brought scholars to develop alternatives to Western conceptualisations of romantic marriage. Notably, Adely (2016) introduces the concept of *insijam* – compatibility between spouses – as a basis for marriage among young Ammanis.[11] *Insijam* refers to the harmony, or chemistry, between partners, along with the material compatibility of respective families, which lay the groundwork for love to emerge. My findings add further nuance to Adely's concept of *insijam* by exploring the possibility that marriage practices based on family economic, cultural, and religious compatibility may take a back seat in front of partners' desire to prioritise their own shared goals and values. The scholar Geoffrey Hughes (2015; 2017; 2021) sheds light on the so-called "marriage crisis" in Jordan; by highlighting the difficulties young men face in getting married due to the country's high unemployment, poverty,

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[11] People who are native or inhabitants of Amman, Jordan's capital.

and high cost of living, he shows how traditional notions of marriage have shifted along with young people's expectations of marriage. Furthermore, it also sheds light on the social and political dimensions of the issue, the inherent contradictions produced by kinship groups, state institutions, and Islamic movements, and the new notions of personhood, state, and social relations they bring about. My research further contributes to our understanding of how young people negotiate between family and society narratives of marriage with their own desires.

Interestingly, besides its potential, this latter literary production may be affected by the subtle influence of powerful narratives of development, dichotomies between tradition and modernity, and the impact of globalisation forces on non-Western societies. These analyses constantly expect to find "something", either something that associates Jordan with Western values or restates its "stubborn" difference from the West.

Women's agency in scholarship on Jordan has been described as in constant resistance to that of the family, considered the ultimate agent of individuals' life on behalf of other structures, such as the state, the law, and religion. Women have been described as victims of male dominance, which in Jordan mainly meant tribes and tribal practices, or victims of the state and its nationalist projects fixing the masculine character of a modern nation, where women, even though they are educated, fundamentally remain mothers and wives (e.g., Sonbol, 2003; Jabiri, 2016). Relevance has been given to female submission in the legal system, the family status law and its reforms and criminal laws (e.g., Warrick, 2005; Prettitore, 2015; Jabiri, 2016; Al-Rabadi and Al-Rabadi, 2018) Historical analysis of Jordanian women's movements and legislative changes have also been addressed, as well as obstacles to women's political and economic empowerment (e.g., Brand, 1998b; Dababneh, 2005; Pettygrove, 2006; Pietrobelli, 2013; Pratt, 2020). Seteney Shami (2018), in her contribution to Joseph's review of Arab family studies, identifies three primary research interests in Jordan's literature on the family as both structural and cultural perceptions: tribe and tribalism, the nuclear family and lastly, women's status and honour (Shami, 2018, pp.169-170). Women's subordinate status within society has often been linked to the country's tribal character, whose violent practices, such as the honour crime, have been brought into the spotlight by the work of Rana Husseini

(2009). The trend on "women and honour" has greatly influenced the knowledge production on gender in Jordan. Abu-Lughod (2011, p.50) warns about the powerful seduction of the honour crime, highlighting how this form of violence has become "as a robust category that does significant political and cultural work". Abu-Lughod's contribution to the feminist debate in the Arab world allows us to unsettle the usefulness of Western development and legally dominant narratives about the understanding of Arab women's status and the political implications of cultural representation.

In a scholarly analysis, Jordan is strongly represented through dichotomies. Jordan's description as a predominantly tribal society (e.g., Shryock, 1997; Shami, 2018) – a perspective challenged by some (e.g., Fischbach, 2000) – has served to construct its inherent dichotomies, i.e., Transjordanians versus Palestinians (or Jordanians of Palestinian origin) and Bedouins versus urban and rural dwellers. Shami (2018, p.172) brilliantly notes that these imprecise dichotomies are "historically constructed and ideologically saturated categories that obfuscate more than they clarify". My research turns away from an approach that has for far too long been driven by narratives about the ethnic divide, which, at least for this research aim, focusing on the urban middle-class youth, is no longer relevant. Instead, I argue that both family ethnicity and settlement patterns (urban, rural, and Bedouin) as young people's political and identity markers are in decline. The young, urban Jordanians I met, consisting mainly of people who were born and raised in Amman but whose family backgrounds are diverse, no longer relate to their fathers' identity markers.

The topic of Arab Youth has attracted much attention due to its demographic relevance, while it has not been sufficiently explored in relation to other family dynamics, with a few exceptions (e.g., Al-Tawila et al., 2003; Dwairy et al., 2006a; 2006b; Rasmi and Daly, 2014; 2016; Rasmi et al., 2017). With two-thirds of the world's Arab population under the age of 35 (UNICEF, 2019) – and roughly 70 per cent in Jordan falling into this age group (Department of Statistics – Jordan, 2020) – it is a scholarly responsibility to draw attention to this relevant group's desire for social and relational change. States affect families as unitarian entities and affect their younger members, as state policies condition their immediate and future realities. In the past decades, this social category has become the focus of studies

featured by sensationalist tones, such as those concerning the potential of the "youth bulge"[12] or its growing alienation and disillusion due to governments' inability to meet their aspirations of becoming active citizens, or lastly youth Islamist activism (Cantini, 2016, p.84). As Adely (2012a, p.164) states, a growing body of literature has focused on Arab youth subcultures to find "signs of youth resisting dominant cultural norms" while the ordinary youth everyday practices have been overlooked. Adely (2012a) insists on the importance of looking at educational spaces as fundamental arenas in which young people's everyday practices appear. Considering that approximately 70 per cent of young people are in higher education in Jordan (GGGR, 2021),[13] linking youth to education appears to be an urgent task, specifically for what concerns the analysis of potential social transformations and gender attitude change. In relation to Jordanian educated youth studies, Daniele Cantini (2016, p.7) highlights that recent studies which moved away from an understanding of educational institutions as merely implicated in reproducing the status quo have only resulted in developing a more complicated theory of social reproduction. While exploring youth subcultures and resisting practices, this theory neglected the significance of young people's everyday practices in enabling remarkable social change. Adely's brilliant work (2004, 2012a) represents a significant shift towards a better understanding of ordinary educated youth and gender issues. Cantini (2016) explores how youth subjectivity is shaped at the University of Jordan (UJ), Jordan's most socially and politically prominent educational institution. He suggests that the UJ is an institution integral to the regime's survival, and that it plays a crucial role in shaping young people's social and political identities. Specifically, he contends that the university reflects broader social mechanisms (such as class, gender, educational level, ethnic and geographic origins) and is essential for the construction and maintenance of society (Cantini, 2016, p.5). While Cantini stresses UJ's crucial importance in keeping normative orders, I am concerned with how young people respond to gender norms on a daily basis by implementing diverse practices with peers on campus. Educational institutions are spaces where power is perpetuated but

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[12] The term, coined in the mid-1990s by Gunnar Heinsohn, refers to a demographic profile characterised by a growing number of young people between the ages of 15 and 29, who make up the majority of the population. Social scientists' opinions on the impact of the Youth Bulge on societies, are divided between negative and positive views, as it is often considered either a major challenge or an opportunity.

[13] According to the GGGR 2021, 37.4 of women and 31.5 of men are enrolled in higher education in Jordan. The number of women attending university has overtaken that of men.

also arenas where power is contested. I look at these contested spaces on the UJ campus to understand what they might tell us about young people's shifting gender relations. Indeed, as students' first gender desegregated arena, the UJ's campus provide a space where young people's practices of gender relations can be observed and analysed and where shifts in dynamics can be identified.

Discourses on Arab Masculinities and Values Change Measurements

Similar to studies on youth, also studies on masculinity appear to be dislocated from family and gender studies, as both are often exclusively conflated with women, a phenomenon that Joseph (2018, p.4) explains as "a derivative of the gendered binary framework". When, in the 1980s, masculinity studies started to emerge, those constituted a separate field rather than being progressively englobed within gender studies. Studies on masculinity in the Middle East in general and, in Jordan in particular, have first and foremost explored masculinity in colonialist, postcolonialist, and nationalist discourses, focusing on the role of hegemonic models of masculinity in state formation (e.g., Massad, 1995; 2001; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Achilli, 2015; Balslev, 2017). Fewer studies have addressed Islamic masculinity (e.g., Ouzgane, 2006) or male identity formation (e.g., Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, 2000). Conversely, most literature on gender has taken for granted assumptions on the misogynist and unemotional character of Arab men, who are dislocated from their social reality and subjective dimension to inhabit a privileged, yet separate, sphere, from that of women and children. Arab\Muslim men's subjectivities remain predominantly marginal, and their desires, aspirations, expectations, and lived experiences of gender are often assumed rather than listened to. Most Western media circles are responsible for promoting a distorted image of Arab\Muslim masculinity. As Paul Amar (2011, p.38) states, public discourses and vernacular theories of masculinity on "atavistic, misogynist, and hypersexual masculinities" have served as "primary tools for analysing political change and social conflict in the region". Such narratives about Arab masculinity are the legacy of Orientalist discourses that have "generated support for war, occupation and repression in the region" (Amar, 2011, p.39). Therefore, masculinities have been eradicated from their own context of formation, and the structures implicated in their production obscured so that masculinities could be "moralised, criminalised, racialised, and colonised" (Amar, 2011, p.39).

Some scholars (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 2002; cooke, 2002; Amar, 2011; Deeb and Winegar, 2012) have primarily criticised stigmatised portrayals of Muslim men as oppressors and Muslim women as victims, pointing out how these discourses serve the Western, imperialist agenda. Katherine Pratt Ewing (2008), in her compelling reading on the stigmatised Muslim masculinity in Germany, warns that Western feminist's tropes about the oppressed Muslim woman and the misogynist Muslim man have become so naturalised that they often go unnoticed (2008, p.2). In the post-9\11 era, in an attempt to counter the resurgence of Orientalist narratives about Arab\Muslim men, Inhorn (2012) has ushered a literature on "emergent masculinities" to draw attention to new notions of manhood, gender relations, and sexuality, as well as aspects of male subjectivity that had previously been neglected. However, these ethnographies (Inhorn, 2012; 2018), while trying to rescue Arab men from essentialised negative images, may carry the risk of further objectifying and dehumanising Arab men just as much as other narratives victimise Arab women. Narratives centred around a supposed "masculinity in crisis" emerged simultaneously (Amar, 2011), suggesting that men's identity crisis was due to the inability to perform their traditional gendered roles in a rapidly changing society. This limitation in the literature stems from underlying assumptions about how men define their masculinity and their role within family and society, rather than exploring their multiple subjectivities. I argue that a new critical approach to masculinity studies should be committed to voicing men's heterogeneous identities and realities rather than "discovering" their hitherto forgotten or denied humanity. Furthermore, alternative approaches to masculinity studies have emerged after the 2011 uprisings, when accounts of plural, subordinate, or alternative embodiments of masculinity have been considered (e.g., Ghannam, 2013; Merabet, 2014; Menoret, 2014; DeSouza, 2019). Concurrently, some scholars (e.g., Hafez, 2012; Kandiyoti, 2014; 2019; Pratt and Rezk, 2020) analysing the gender implications of the 2011 protests, have highlighted the significance of young women's and men's shifting notions of gender hierarchies in destabilising the status quo. Interestingly, alternative gender self-makings were recognised as a potential "threat to both hegemonic masculinity and the regime" (Kandiyoti, 2019, p.25). My contribution to masculinity studies fits into this recent scholarly trend, and by looking into the multiple understandings and embodiments of masculinity amongst ordinary Jordanian men it

opens up new avenues for exploring young people's ideological change and the implications of men's rejection of hegemonic notions of masculinity for the stability of Jordan's gendered status quo.

Scholars often rely on opinion surveys as a primary resource to gauge people's values change. Social research networks such as the World Values Survey (WVS), the Arab Barometer (AB), and the Arab Opinion Index, investigate social change over time, either globally or within the Arab region, by periodically producing opinion polls. Instead, other research projects have a specific target, such as the Youth2Power, which focuses on Middle Eastern youth, or the Arab Transformation Project, which explores trends in socio-political transformation before and after the 2011 uprisings. Most surveys tracking social transformation in the region investigate gender role attitudes to assess societies' shift towards more egalitarian values. Kathrin Thomas' (2019) Arab Barometer report on women's rights suggests that Arab publics support women's and men's equal access to education, employment, and political office. The report further states that support for women's right to divorce and equal inheritance is increasing, even though most people think that men are the family's ultimate decision-makers. Despite differences in opinion across Arab countries, recent surveys reports (Thomas and Robbins, 2018; Thomas, 2019) confirm an overall trend in the Arab world: young, highly educated people hold more egalitarian gender attitudes, and patriarchal attitudes are decreasing, primarily for what concerns women's rights in the public sphere and, to less extent, also in the private one. Additionally, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) (El Feki, S. et al. 2017),[14] confirms the rise of gender egalitarianism, not only among women but also among young men.[15] Indeed, this study brings to the fore aspects of men's public and private lives, including gender dynamics in the household and childhood gendered experiences. Drivers of gendered-based violence and the impact of stress on men's wellbeing have also been explored, exposing the

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[14] IMAGES MENA was the first multi-country study on masculinities in the Arab region. Coordinated by UN Women and the NGO Promundo, together with local research partners, it collected quantitative data and, to a lesser extent, qualitative data in four Middle Eastern countries, specifically Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine.

[15] The AB V report (2019) suggests that women generally hold more egalitarian attitudes than men.

high level of pressure men experience in performing their expected gender roles. Further findings show men's increasing interest in engaged fatherhood and slow but steady participation in household duties. This study mainly contributes to disrupting misconceptions and assumptions about the privileged status of men in male-dominated societies. My research findings on fatherhood and men's engagement in household chores and, to some extent, also gendered childhood experiences align with those presented in the IMAGES survey. However, my research transcends and goes beyond previous surveys' findings and contributes to enhancing and broadening our understanding of Arab masculinities in two ways. First, by adding the perspective of young men from Jordan, it provides data from a country that was not included in the 2017 IMAGES report. Second, by triangulating data from in-depth interviews and family observations, it bridges the gap between men's attitudes and actual practices of gender equality, shedding further light on men's behaviour within the private sphere.

The use of quantitative methodologies to measure change, on the one hand, helps us to detect changes in public opinion on critical issues. However, on the other hand, it is not exempted from gaps that hinder a comprehensive analysis of gender values change. Indeed, gaps may concern questionnaires design capturing people's self-perceptions, rather than their actual practices and behaviours towards gender roles,[16] while assessments based on cultural and religious values measurement risk reproducing the modernisation theory framework mentioned earlier. Overall, besides surveys' attention to different cohorts of people, the results may tend to homogenise the attitudes of a diverse population, erasing intersectional differences, thus, obscuring our understanding of what hinders, or triggers, change. Nevertheless, surveys allow researchers to track change longitudinally, laying the groundwork for designing research projects that cover gaps in quantitative analysis. My research addresses these gaps by complementing a broader quantitative analysis – that has already demonstrated young and educated women's and men's shifts towards more egalitarian attitudes – with a qualitative one

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[16] The IMAGES MENA 2017 explicates the importance of considering the difference between people's support for gender equality in theory and in practice, by considering that people' egalitarian attitudes are not actually reflected in practice.

that provides an on-the-ground snapshot of the day-to-day complex life dynamics of gender relations experienced by an important segment of Jordanian youth. Ultimately, by doing this, my thesis centres on the voices of these people whose desire for transformation I attempt to capture, and gauge, by drawing on their inner realm of desires and their accounts of lived experiences.

Research Contribution

This research contributes to the less scrutinised field of *Arab family and youth studies,* acknowledging the agentive enactments of femininities and masculinities in today's Jordan. Specifically, it enhances our understanding of young people's subjectivity formation, and the relational dynamics that shape their agentive capabilities and practices; it incorporates men's perspectives into Middle Eastern gender studies; it defies essentialist notions of a monolithic *Arab family* and derived concepts, particularly hierarchical gender relations and fixed *traditional gender roles*; it acknowledges the transformative power of young people's agency and their ability to bend norms and shape aspirational selves; it challenges discourses on men retaining authority and women (and youngsters) being submissive and powerless; it defines gender roles not as rigid but as multiple, fluid, and temporal; it recognises that specific gender roles may be taken up by individuals to fit temporary needs – as may be the case with young married couples – or may represent a strong identity choice that transcend their apparent significance; it demonstrates that fathers are not unemotional and distant; parent-youth relations are not merely gender-based; young families members' agency may be "relational", yet, a relational agency is by no means less agentive than an individualistic one.

This thesis recognises the relevance of family studies in understanding social change as families are central to state formation, and they are "critical units in the social, economic and political reproduction of their societies" (Joseph, 2018, p.7). Families are "invented" by the state, as state sanctions families through legal construct (mediated through religious laws) regulating marriage, inheritance, divorce, child's custody, women's and men's roles, children's socialisation through the education system, the legal status of citizens through nationality laws, youth conditions of work, and employment practices (Joseph, 2018, p.9). While Middle East scholarship has perfectly grasped the relationship between the state and the family, it has not

sufficiently considered young women's and men's subjectivity and their agentive practices that fall outside state control and are shaped by multiple social relations, not merely by structural ones. Nonetheless, subjectivity formation is influenced by the boundaries of norms, but this formation is much more fluid than we might expect. The complex nature of power relations at their intersection with dynamic selves, forged by different personal and social experiences, re-establishes the complex reality of individuals who hold diverse attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and aspirations and escape any attempt at scholarly theorisation. As highlighted above, states forge family structures, thus, families are vital to the reproduction of the state. If families are critical entities in reproducing and securing the state's gendered status quo, the opposite may also be true. In this thesis, I prove how parent-youth gendered expectation misalignments reflect young people shifting gender ideologies. This is key to the understanding of social change and young people's demands for change. Ultimately, I argue that families are sites where personal and political struggles reunite, as young members push to cross old gendered boundaries and shape new ones that aim to redefine power relations between parents and children, women and men, and ultimately, the state and its citizens. The research beneficiaries are policymakers, grassroots movement activists, and NGOs pushing for change, as these should conduct informed research on how to address young people's challenges by setting development plans to meet their shifting expectations; furthermore, this research contribution to enhance an understanding of Arab family dynamics may help various actors address and resolve conflict between family members.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, based on – but not limited to – post-structuralist and critical feminist theories and postcolonialist perspectives, informed by decolonial thought. Building on McNay's theory of agency, this thesis understands gender inequality as embedded in both symbolic and structural forms of oppression. To connect questions of identity with other, more or less visible, power relations, it adopts McNay's (1999; 2000; 2004) concept of gender as a "lived social relation", rather than fixed subject positions, exploring gender practises with the mediation of concepts such as agency and experience. In this sense, we connect subject identities to dominant discourses and social structures, revealing

the economic, political, and cultural forces impinging on people's lives (McNay, 2004). In applying this theoretical framework, I am fully aware of the limits of Western epistemologies and the legacy of colonialism in knowledge production, as well as the need for conceptual diversity. While I recognise my scholar limit to apply a more suitable, decolonised, theory to my research – which I believe should be developed primarily by scholars from the region – I build on McNay's feminist critical theory, which, by heavily relying on people's lived experiences, has allowed not to alienate individuals from their own context.

This research conceives the subject as a relational self, capable of autonomous acts, and part of a large web of relations. In this sense, my theory of agency is personalised and contextualised. Indeed, positioning agentive capacities within the realm of intangible aspects of human subjectivity, such as desires and aspirations, allows me to *personalise* agency, while locating it within the relevant context where young people's dynamism is moulded, i.e., family, university setting, and peer community, allows me to *contextualise* it. This process uncovers the interplay of gender with personal dynamics and larger structures of power that influence agency.

To support my argument that people negotiate their positions within the family and society by finding creative ways to shape most desired selfhoods and gender relations, it is crucial to acknowledge how Western epistemic dominance limits our understanding of societies outside the Western world. Indeed, permanent constructs such as "male domination and female subordination" and derived fixed conceptualisations of femininity and masculinity are the legacy of Western cultural domination and represent the main obstacle towards a more inclusive theorisation of complex and plural subjectivities, agency, and self-makings.

The hierarchies of power of the current world order – originated from the European colonisation of the Americas in 1492 – are based on the relation of direct political, social, and cultural domination of Europeans over the conquered of all continents (Quijano, 2007, p.168). The implications of colonialism, aptly described by Anibal Quijano's (2007) term "coloniality of power", go beyond political rule to affect knowledge production. Indeed, the dominance of Western epistemologies is embedded in the constitution of knowledge worldwide (Oyèwùmí, 2016).

Colonialism carried out a work of systematic repression of indigenous communities by expropriating from the coloniser their expertise and by imposing the rulers' patterns of expression, beliefs and images (Quijano, 2007, p.169). The coloniser set a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning, which allowed for halting the dominated cultural production and establishing social and cultural control over them (Quijano, 2007, p.169). During this period, the "superiority" of Europeans and the "inferiority" of non-Europeans were not only racialised but also naturalised. Even though political colonialism ended, the legacy of cultural domination still permeates non-Western societies and continues to have severe implications in knowledge production, particularly as the social discriminations produced by the colonial power – further codified in "racial", "anthropological", and "national" categories – have been assumed to be objective (Quijano, 2007, p.168). In the operation of global colonial power, the category of gender was introduced as a colonial concept and fused with race (Lugones, 2007). A new colonial\modern gender system was organised in the colonised societies – which differs from the colonisers – characterised by heterosexual gender hierarchies and hegemonic femininity and masculinity models. Within the dominant heterosexual patriarchal analytical framework, implications of heterosexuality, capitalism and race have been obscured in favour of an ahistorical approach based on "patriarchy", a system implying the universality of male supremacy and women's subordination (Lugones, 2007, pp.186-187). Although Black feminists' intersectional approach stresses that gender is not an isolated category, Western-based strict conceptualisations of gender still dominate theoretical frameworks. Specifically, these conceptualisations theorise the existence of a given gender order characterised by a dominant form of masculinity, called hegemonic, which subordinates all forms of femininity and marginalises non-hegemonic forms of masculinity, such as homosexuals (Connell, 1987). Conversely, femininity – or "emphasised femininity," as Connell calls it – besides being subordinated, also accommodates the interests of men and ensures their domination (Connell, 1987). Feminist theorists reminded us that gender is, first and foremost, socially constructed; thus, it is not inherent to human nature and should be primarily understood in historical terms (Oyèwùmí, 2016, p.4). Yet, the difference between sex and gender (Butler, 1990) is not fully acknowledged. Bourdieu's term doxa (1977, p.164) theorises an objective consensus of the sense of the world, where the social and natural are "self-evident".

In the doxic mode, perceptions, schemes of thoughts, and traditions are perceived as "natural", and this naturalises and legitimises the social order and its masculine and feminine separate words features. Bourdieu's theory of doxa appears helpful in understanding why people perceive the masculine and feminine as cultural constructs inherent in human nature and in locating the construction of the social order within the political dimension. Bourdieu (1977, p.165) states that "the symbolic power to construct social reality and determine, impose, and normalise its principles is a significant dimension of political power". The reproduction of the social order, comprising of women's and men's separate and hierarchical worlds, serves the interests of men, who occupy a dominant position within this structure (Bourdieu, 1977). As Gramsci reflects in his essays entitled *I Quaderni del carcere, Q 25,* the term "common sense" signifies the community's acritical adherence to a set of values and beliefs, which tend to perceive the social order as natural and given at all times (Hoare and Smith, 1971). However, as Gramsci further clarifies, common sense needs to be de-naturalised, as it is not only the product of a historical process but also a stratified concept; hence, multiple and conflicting "common senses" can exist simultaneously within a society, and across social classes. Gramsci's synchronic aspect of common sense helps us understand why people within similar socio-cultural categories hold different understandings, beliefs, and attitudes towards gender.

Within the Middle Eastern studies literatures, even though diverse aspects of women's agency have been proposed, the understanding of a naturalised gendered order, where women are powerless and men are dominant, has remained somehow unquestionable. For example, Kandiyoti's (1987) assertion that femininity is an ascribed status, while masculinity is something to strive for, reinforces the understanding that women accept their subjugated status and confines their agency within the choices of either resisting or accommodating power, while men's agency is somehow unlimited. Similarly, post-structural and feminist theories, while emphasising that both genders are social categories shaped and re-shaped by political, institutional, economic, and religious agendas at local and global levels (Kandiyoti, 1994; Connell, 2000; Adibi, 2006), have questioned the normativity of traditional gender roles and identities only to a limited extent.

The humanist tradition of social sciences is responsible for establishing the dichotomies of the modern Western discourse (i.e., male\female; rational\irrational; conscious\unconscious) from which a partial understanding of the world is derived. The humanist model has elaborated a masculinist, elitist, and racist vision of the world that has largely neglected the marginalised members of society. Rather than recognising the interactive nature of agency, it sees agentive acts as individual acts (Davies, 1991). Within the humanist discourse, agency is the feature of any "sane" adult human being, while women, children and the insane are not agentive (Davies, 1991). The agentive self is conceived in a perpetual agonistic relationship with something external, the society, against which one needs to stand out. An agent takes responsible "rational" actions and "free" choices, which rest on a moral base (Davies, 1991). As Davies (1991) further states, the problem with this model of agency is that the agent's actions receive approval from those who are powerfully positioned within the dominant discourse and share the same system of values (Benson 1990, cited in Davies 1991, p.45). Those in power have access to moral authority, the power to tell others what to do, what is right or wrong; those who have moral authority are defined as powerful and superior, and those who do not are defined as inferior (Davies, 1991). Structuralist theorists, such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Emile Durkheim among others, have challenged this notion of an individualistic self. Within the structuralist discourse, the self is no longer sovereign, but is constituted in relation to broader systems and structures that operate and act upon him, leaving little space for individual action. In structuralist thinking, the concept of agency is no longer central. Similarly, the post-structuralist thought – as developed by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Louis Althusser, which retained many structuralist theories, particularly Lacan's – recognises that subjective selves are positioned within discursive systems from where they cannot escape. In post-structuralist thought, an individual's autonomy or agency is defined by one's ability to recognise their discursive constitution and their power to resist, subvert or change this discourse (Davies, 1991). The limit of a post-structuralist feminist notion of agency is that the discursive system defines subjectivity and the extent to which it can be reconstructed. Foucault (1988, p.51) sought to go beyond this impasse of agency and structure by developing a "subjectivation" theory stating that "the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty,

as in Antiquity, on the basis, of course, of several rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment".

Drawing on Foucault's notion of the subject emerging from constraint, the gender theorist Judith Butler pushed the post-structuralist theory forward by recognising that "constraint is constitutive but not fully determining gender subjectivity" (McNay, 1999, p.177). For Butler, gender identity is not natural or inevitable, but is open to change; it is a "temporalised regulation of socio-symbolic norms and practices" where the performing gender reiterates symbolic norms upon the body, but simultaneously "opens up the possibility to transcend them" (McNay, 1999, pp.176-177). As this influential theory of performativity informs us, subjectivities are multiple, complex, and never complete, but always negotiated, produced or performed, through everyday practices and relations with others (Jackson, 2004). Butler explains (1995) that we cannot stand outside discourses that constitute us, but we can derive agency from within those discourses (Butler, 1995 cited in Jackson, 2004, p.682). Thus, although subjectivity is open, fluid, and always negotiated, its possibilities of becoming are constrained within the boundaries of discursive fields. This particular "constrained" concept of agency – for which "we can only revise or disrupt what discourses produce and refashion alternative ways of being that only revise normative, common-sense truths" (Jackson, 2004, p.685) – does not allow us to understand "how the symbolic indeterminacy relates to other social structures and how it may catalyse or hinder change" (McNay, 1999, p.178). This renders Butler's theory of agency too abstract and, as McNay (1999) acknowledges, deprived of social depth and historical specificity, resulting in a negative model of action as the displacement of constraining social norms. McNay criticism of Butler's theory of agency aims to be complementary to Butler's work rather than purely critique. Indeed, McNay overcomes Butler's theory by providing an account of gender as a "lived social relation", which bridges the gap between the materialist and cultural dimension of feminism and helps us connect the symbolic and structural forms of oppression. With the help of mediating concepts such as agency and experience, McNay recognises the possibility of reconnecting questions of identity formation to a context of visible and latent power relations, thus contextualising and historicising gender experiences (McNay, 2004).

This research applies McNay's theory which, by recognising that the socio-symbolic order is not a uniform realm of constraints, permits not to limit people's agency but to move forward in considering how the symbolic order is constituted by conflict values and recourses which can be "creatively" and "actively" appropriated by actors to institute new value systems and new forms of collective identity (McNay, 1999, p.187). McNay's (2000, p.5) notion of creative dimension of agency conceptualises that there are creative and productive aspects immanent to agency which helps us understand how "when faced with complexity and difference, individuals may respond in unanticipated and innovative ways which may hinder, reinforce or catalyse social change", and, in this way, "agency necessarily involves a partial transcendence of its material conditions of emergence". Unlike Butlers' individualistic paradigm, McNay's theory of agency appears more suitable to my research as it is creative, positive, and active and has the potential to transcend the private sphere and effect social change. The scholar's conceptualisation of agency relies on the imaginative and creative dimension of action emphasised in social reproduction theory by philosophers such as Paul Ricoeur, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel de Certeau and Alain Touraine. In Touraine's (1977) theory of self-reproduction, society is re-reproduced by a complex process that involves values clashes between groups, changes in consciousness and social protests (McNay, 1999, p.189). For McNay (2000; 2004), the reproduction of normative gender identity does not derive from the "exogenous imposition of gender norms"; instead, it comprises an individual's participation in the process involving negotiation and conflict emerging through people's experiences. In this construction of gender, intended as a lived relation, agency and experiences are central. Paying attention to experience also serves to uncover the process of negotiation and conflict otherwise obscured, while agency is the capacity to act according to the demands of a specific social context characterised by a variety of complex local and global forces at play.

McNay's theory of creative agency enables me to understand how young people interact with the complex social norms acting upon them and actively and creatively negotiate their position within family and society. People's experiences of gender are diverse, complex, and unique as these are shaped by specific structures of oppression, personal and material circumstances, such as people's ability to respond to and negotiate, more or less creatively, with norms acting upon them. Furthermore,

the category of gender itself does not assume a unified gendered experience – of oppression for women and privilege for men – but, as this research highlights, women's and men's experiences are remarkably similar in that both are affected by oppressive gender ideologies. The fact that the symbolic realm is constituted by conflicting values means that actors may appropriate those cultural values to create new value systems which can become a resource for further action, such as enacting new forms of collective identity (McNay, 1999, p.187). Building on McNay's theory, in this research I identified in parent-youth divergent expectations – which I named *intergenerational conflict or IGC* – the conflicting values that young people creatively and actively appropriate by deploying different creative strategies, such as the meanings co-optation, to establish a new set of values. I consider intangible aspects of subjectivity as driving forces of change, both on a personal and societal level, that enable to re-establish people's agency over hegemonic structures and people's multiple self-makings and pathways to self-empowerment. As McNay (2004) argues, the process of becoming agent results from the complex interplay of lived experiences and social structures of power and inequalities operating on people, and this proves that outcomes of either resistance or compliance with power are too simplistic as multiple outcomes exist in between. Indeed, as desires are numerous, along with people's agentive capabilities depending on multiple factors, people's pathways are endless.

In Jordan, the prevailing gendered status quo was a nationalised political project, as the post-independence state and its masculine institutions promoted the hegemonic gender order (Massad, 2001; Sonbol, 2003; Jabiri, 2016). State institutions such as the law, school, religion, tribe and family, the media and other forms of communication are considered the individuals' main socialising agents (Sonbol, 2003). The family plays a crucial role in socialising normative femininity (Jabiri, 2016), as it is in the family that social roles are learned and expectations are gendered (Sonbol, 2003). Social learning theories developed in the Western context stress that parents influence children's gender development through interaction style (Mischel, 2015), sex-typed treatment (Freud, 2017), encouragement of sex-typed activities (Lytton and Romney, 1991), and socialisation goals (Block, 1983; Eccles et al., 1993; 1994; 2000), while also affirming children's active role in observational learning (Bandura, 1986). On the one hand, social learning theories explain how

socialising agents – parents, peers, school, and media – affect children's development of gendered roles, interests, attitudes, and behaviours. Yet, on the other hand, cognitive theories emphasise the individual's role in constructing a gender schema (Bem, 1981) by selectively organising information on gender (Miller, 2016). Notably, the dual-pathway gender schema theory (Liben and Bigler, 2002) recognises individual differences and interests in gender stereotypes formation and influences on children. Parke et al. (1994) theorise a tripartite model of parenting that recognises parents' role not only in terms of their interaction style but also as instructors and opportunity-providers, thus, managers of children's activities and experiences. Recent critiques of gender socialisation dynamics within the family point to the importance of other factors in gender development, particularly exposure to parents' marital relationship, relationship and activities, family structure, context relevance, and influences from the immediate and larger social, cultural and economic context (McHale et al., 2003; Miller, 2016). The family socialisation process is more complex, and diverse family experiences generate individual differences in gender development (McHale et al., 2003, p.143). Despite the role of parents in early socialisation, schools – among other institutional and cultural contexts – reinforce gender dichotomy by both normalising hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1996) and promoting the modern and educated femininity model (Najmabadi, 1998). The centralisation of education and state control over curricula and textbooks guarantee the continuation of the gender prevailing discourse. In Jordan, as Sonbol (2003, p.150) states, "schools, reemphasise the passivity of women and the activeness and even aggression of men and the importance of patriarchy". Despite current educational regimes being deeply gendered (Najmabadi, 1998), gender beings are never fixed, nor are constructs of femininity and masculinity (Butler, 1990). While reproducing the gender order, institutional settings also offer subjects the opportunity to subvert the norms and disrupt the hegemonic discourse (Butler, 1990).

In theorising the relationship between power and space, Michel Foucault (1986) argues that spaces can perpetuate and resist power. Foucault (1986) theorises the existence of "other spaces" called "heterotopias" that co-exist besides those controlled by the power, where individuals' behaviour is under control. Within heterotopias, people temporarily escape the hegemonic order by subverting social

norms and power relations (Foucault, 1986). Heterotopias are counter-sites, or "enacted utopias", which are "fundamentally unreal spaces" where society is perfect (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Through these spaces, people question and resist the hegemonic order, and by re-imagining a different world, they practise "liberty", which lead to redefining the self and its relation to the other. Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopias helps us understand young Jordanians' ability to challenge and subvert gender norms in the spaces they inhabit in their everyday life, such as the UJ campus, but also the family context. I contend that in the life cycle leading to adulthood, young, educated Jordanians construct and make use of different spaces as heterotopias, where they project the realities their desiring selves and relationalities would like to inhabit. Thus, first, as children, they temporarily inhabit "the street", a reality where children play and gender hierarchies do not yet seem to exist, which functions as a heterotopia, or even a utopia; then, as they enter higher education, the UJ campus further serves as a heterotopia, as within this space they find ways to enact alternative gender identities; finally, young adults use different urban spaces where heterotopias can be enacted without consequences. For instance, some neighbourhoods such as Jebel al-Weibdeh, Jebel Amman, the university district, and spaces like cafés, bars, and hotel lounges offer young adults – whose choices are wider due to their financial independence – the opportunity to find their most suitable heterotopias. An example of this kind was a hotel lounge in Amman that hosted a Tango night every week, where young people could embody alternative identities and cross gender boundaries. Finally, I understand young married couples' households as the ultimately enacted heterotopia, where women and men deploy desired self-makings and gender relations by living their utopian reality. Heterotopias allow young people to challenge the order of things and to inhabit "even though temporarily" the reality they most desire. By enacting heterotopias, Foucault's subject not only re-imagines reality but can also effect social change. As outlined above, despite Foucault's late ethical turn opened up possibilities for reconceptualising the passive and subjugated self into an active agent capable of self-empowerment and collective transformation, the French intellectual's definition of the self's ability to resist power remains too underdeveloped to fit the aim of this thesis. Feminist theorists understood Foucault's concept of the subject as "a docile body enmeshed in relations of power" (McLaren, 1997, p.109). The problematic negative paradigm of "subjectification as subjection" is rooted in Foucault's

constructionism and Lacan's psychoanalysis theory (McNay, 2000, pp.2-6); feminist theory has adopted such a construct in which the individual emerges from constraints and the subject is passive. This unidirectional, negative, and largely passive subject identity "results in an attenuated account of agency" that does not allow to explore individuals' capabilities for independent reflection and to act to difference with more creativity and less defensiveness (McNay, 2000, p.3). The phallocentric construction of a social order, immutable in front of social and historical changes, hinders our ability to see women as active social agents while locating agency within "the residual categories of resistance to or dislocation of dominant norms" (McNay, 2000, pp.4-8). McNay (2000), while stressing that notions of patriarchal domination do not explain people's practices in negotiating complex social relations, argues against the negative paradigm of subjectivity by proposing a more creative, generative concept of agency that best suits the research at hand.

To conceptualise women's and men's agency outside the structure of power defining and constraining them, I further draw on Moore's (1994; 2007) and Sehlikoglu's (2018; 2020) alternative feminist theories of gendered subjectivity. These complement McNay's (2000; 2008) theory of creative agency, serving the thesis's aim to capture the encompassing, fluid, multiple, relational, and historical forms of agency. Furthermore, these theories recognise the transformative power of human agency, as the intangible aspects of human subjectivity enable people to change and transform social life (Sehlikoglu, 2018; 2020). In her inquiry into the relationship between the social and the individual, Moore (2007) calls for anthropologists to formulate a theory of the imaginary that enables us to understand the possibilities for people to transform themselves and the world in which they live by locating their capacity for agency within the unconscious domain of fantasy and desire (Moore, 2007, p.44). Furthermore, Sehlikoglu (2018, p.87) encourages focusing on the relational character of social change and seeing agency no longer as embedded in the individual, but formed through the interaction of individuals interacting with the mechanisms operating on them. Women's agency is never fixed, but it is fluid and dynamic; therefore, conceptualising it either as resistance or compliance with power, or both, is reductive. Agency is shaped by the multiplicity of people's lived experiences, opportunities, social and economic settings, family backgrounds, religious and cultural understandings, along with subjective and interpersonal

aspects (Mahmood, 2005; Muhanna, 2013). By locating agency in the context of the family, rather than re-asserting essentialist dichotomies, this thesis highlights the relational features of agency and its outcomes' dependence on a multitude of aspects embracing complex interpersonal dynamics, including connectedness, love, and care. As Joseph (1999) states, saying that relationships shape the self is to assert the obvious. However, the notion of relationality should be historically and culturally specific, as relational selfhood co-exists with other notions of selves, also individualistic ones (Joseph, 1999). This fluid conceptualisation of agency, unique to the individual and its family dynamics, links people's action to their own desires and its outcomes to their – constantly shifting – opportunities, so it does not put any limit to people's and their societies' possibilities of becoming.

Non-Western feminist theory of intersectionality, informed by decolonial thought, also appears helpful in capturing models of agency and multiple self-makings. An intersectional approach allows us to historicise social reality and understand gendered norms and identities as constructed and fictional. However, it also enables us to recognise multiple structures of oppression shaping one's life experiences and choices beyond the category of gender. To produce an intersectional, thus, more comprehensive analysis of femininities and masculinities, I build on Hasso's (2018) decolonial axiomatic framework, which has been proposed for theorising Middle East masculinities, but it also suits the analysis of femininities. Inspired by Sedgwick's seven axioms of sexuality (2008), Hasso's framework identifies three axiomatic assumptions; first, masculinities are "lived and experienced heterogeneously in response to situational and historical conditions, even within cultural categories such as "Arab" and "Muslim""; second, colonialism and imperialism do not exhaust the factors shaping gender discourses; third, "men, no more or less than women, are irrational, emotional and fragile in their psychic structures and embodiments". The benefit of such a decolonial approach is that it makes masculinities, erased by ahistorical generalisation, "legible" again by positioning them beyond the workings of ideologies, law, institutions, and systems (Hasso, 2018). Masculinities and femininities are multiple, malleable, and achieved in context, proven through behaviour, they operate through identification and disidentification at conscious and unconscious levels but are structured by social institutions and cultural discourse (Hasso, 2018). Institutions, selves, and others

cultivate gender identities, and the ways women and men experience inequalities, relate to power structures, and create possibilities are diverse (Hasso, 2018). Intersectionality has been a primary analytical tool for theorising oppression, uncovering how the intersection of gender with other variables, particularly race, shape individuals' unique experiences of power relations. Besides its crucial contribution to women's studies, intersectionality, defined as the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing and interlocking vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality (Nash, 2008), proves limited when trying to expand the notion of subjectivity beyond structures of domination. As Nash (2008, p.4) notes, the paradoxes of intersectionality lie in its ambiguous definition and lack of a defined methodology, in black women's use as a prototypical intersectional subject, perpetually oppressed, and most importantly for the research at hand, in the incoherence between intersectionality and the lived experience of multiple identities. To answer Nash's (2008, pp.9-10) question "who is intersectional, all identities or only marginalised subjects?", I draw on Wing's (1990) conceptualisation of identity, stating that multiple categories secure not only oppression but also privilege, and both work in complex ways to constitute subjects' experiences and identity (Nash, 2008, p.10). Furthermore, in responding to Crenshaw (1989) defining Black women as "multiply burdened", Wing (1990, p.196) brilliantly states that Black women are more than entities subject to a multiplicity of oppression, discrimination, pain and depression, and that their essence is also characterised by strength, love, and joy. This thesis applies a broader understanding of intersectionality that is flexible enough not to further constraint human potential by recognising that all subjectivities are intersectional, but intersectionality goes beyond categories of oppression that polarise and essentialise people. Specifically, I apply an intersectionality approach to analyse diverse family dynamics occurring between young people and their parents. These help us to understand first what shapes young people's self-formation and agentive capabilities and then what guides their dynamics of action through the life cycle leading to adulthood.

Overall, this research benefits from several theoretical approaches that complement each other and are theoretically consistent with the values of qualitative research, which is open to various possibilities. Moreover, the fluid conceptualisation of agency I draw upon ultimately helps us to expand subjectivities by allowing for their

transformative dynamism beyond the constraints of ideologies and structures of oppression.

Methodology

This research applies a qualitative methodology to reflect its ontological and epistemological standpoint, which views reality and people's interpretation of it as dynamic and complex and understands people's actions in relation to their own relational, symbolic, and historical context. My epistemological perspective has been inspired by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) invisible "epistemologies of the South" which recognises the need for a pluricultural knowledge challenging the unified, Western, rational ways of knowing and its related methods. This approach gives value and credibility to non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge whose significance has often been discredited for not being quantifiable or measurable, so objective. To acquire knowledge on the young, educated Jordanians' self-determination, this research draws on the inner and outer, intertwined and intersectional world of subjectivities. The inner world is the domain of dreams, desires, and aspirations, while the outer is the domain of experiences and social relations of the world we inhabit. A methodology of intersectionality has been applied to serve the research's exploratory intent of identifying factors shaping one's subjectivities and understanding different dynamics of actions. My methodological approach to intersectionality is context-driven (McKinzie and Richards, 2019), as it enables us to understand peoples' ability to negotiate power relations in relation to the context-specific features of intersectionality, going beyond broad generalisations on class and ethnicity. Furthermore, inductive reasoning has been used so that meanings can unfold, patterns appear, and behaviours can be understood. Rather than asserting that no assumptions or hypotheses guided this research, I can undoubtedly say that these were progressively challenged – if not deconstructed – as the connections I expected to find did not appear crucial, leaving space for others to emerge. Reflexivity is also a necessary tool in the process of acquiring, understanding, and transmitting knowledge. Therefore, I am aware of the implications of knowledge production and its wider implications outside academia. These should indeed be closely examined, while remaining careful that, to paraphrase Foucault, knowledge and power are inextricably related. Indeed, "all knowledge is situated and, therefore, partial" (Haraway, 1988), and no analysis is

without cultural and theoretical framing. This research reflects two situated – hence partial – knowledge viewpoints. First, that of the outsider researcher (myself) and second, that of the research participants who shared their life stories with me. Neither perspective is comprehensive – let alone "true" for everyone. On the one hand, my positionality is that of a "Western" researcher – conscious of the rich legacy the term conveys – with significant ties in Jordan, which happened to become my second home country. My understanding of foreign culture has been informed first by the environment I grew up and the leading academic perspectives of the countries where I studied, Italy first and the UK later, then by my personal and professional experiences in Jordan and the Middle East region. The sum of these factors contributed to shaping the way I understood and analysed my respondents' narratives. On the other hand, there is the position of my participants, reflecting the opinions, attitudes, and life experiences of a specific – more or less privileged – sector of Jordanian society, consisting of urban, middle-class, higher educated people. While the narratives I present in this thesis may not be true for all young, educated Jordanians – these are surely "true" to the people I met; thus, it is in this light that I shall locate their significance.

The Focus: The Jordanian Highly-Educated Youth

My personal experience in Jordan and my fortunate interaction with the educated youth guided me to develop this research. Its journey – which began when I moved to Jordan in 2014, three years before I joined my PhD programme at the University of Leeds – has been characterised by a progressive work of acknowledgement of unconscious assumptions and partial understandings. While living in Jordan, I had the opportunity to observe and access the world of the youth that I later came to study. Rather than being a broad generalisation, the expression *world of the youth* conveys the specific reality of a community of young Jordanians whose world I familiarised with and became part of while living in Amman, first as a student and later as a young professional in my first work experience. This community of people broadly shared the features of my future research participants, consisting of young Jordanians who were either in higher education or already employed, who were mostly born and raised in Amman and self-identified as middle-class. Despite divergences in the definition of the middle class, my participants understood this social category in economic rather than cultural terms. Indeed, most of them had at

least one, and sometimes both, parents who were employed in the public or private sector and whose educational levels ranged from elementary (fewer in number) to university (in greater number).[17] However, despite their shared cultural and socio-economic background, these young people's attitudes and behaviours, aspirations and expectations, privileges and difficulties appeared anything but homogeneous.

The primary participants selection criteria were based on the combination of two features: being university-educated and young. In Western cultures, the word youth defines a life stage between childhood and adulthood, which is socially significant and physiologically complex (Kehily, 2007, p.12). Being socially and culturally constructed, youth is not a universal life stage tied to a specific chronological age, but it takes different meanings according to socio-cultural and historical understandings (Kehily, 2007). In its National Youth Strategy 2019-2025 (Jordan Government, 2019),[18] Jordan defines youth as a group of people aged 12 to 30 who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence. In this research, I apply an ethnographic perspective to the study of youth, which defines it as a "period of transition", a liminal phase of people who are no longer children and not yet adults (Hall, 2003, p.117). I consider this transition period not to be linear but to be characterised by different in-between stages during which people's expectations, social roles, and responsibilities keep shifting along with their ability to make choices, thus, implement change. For the purposes of this thesis, looking into *youth agency* – and with relevance only to my sample and its context – I identified three crucial in-between young people's life stages, including first their transition to higher education, then to the workplace, and lastly to married life. Each stage is relevant as it enables young people to broaden their world by expanding life experiences and relational possibilities. My understanding of youth outstrips temporal and spatial limits, as it neither identifies age as a primary criterion nor treats the youth as an isolated unit of analysis. Youth, here, refers to a transitional phase in which individuals – who are no longer children and not yet adults – are actively involved in shaping their most desired role to undertake within their family and society.

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[17] For information on the educational background of the participants' parents, see Appendix A: *A1-A2*.

[18] The strategy sets out the government's aims to create opportunities for young people, to enable youth development of potential.

Sample and Fieldwork Sites

This research benefitted from the contributions of 67 young women and men who participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews or focus groups. The young and university-educated participants were further divided into two samples: *students*, including people who were currently enrolled in higher education programmes, and *professionals*, who included those who had already graduated and entered the workforce (see Appendix A: *A1-A2*). This selection allowed for further categorisation of people not merely by level of education but also by features such as gender, age, and employment status. The student sample consisted of young women and men between the ages of 18 and 24 who were financially dependent on their parents; the professional one instead included a broader age range of people between 25 and 36 who were economically independent. The average age of my student sample is 22 years old, while that of the professional is 30 years old (see Appendix B).

The fieldwork took place in Amman between March and April 2019 and had the University of Jordan (hereafter UJ) campus as a core site of activities. The choice of the UJ campus appeared suitable to narrow down participants' recruitment to the categories of young and university-educated and to ensure the heterogeneity of the sample. Indeed, the UJ reflects Jordanian society's socio-cultural heterogeneity, as tensions regarding social-class divide, political and ethnic identity, and tribal affiliations are clearly evident on campus. However, my interest in this institution went beyond that of being a microcosm where I could observe the country's contradictions at play. Here, the UJ is not merely a place where inequalities are reproduced, but also a place where new possibilities arise as young people share experiences that transcend class privilege. In the recruitment process, students were selected by field of study, specifically Humanities (including Social Sciences) or Sciences (including Applied and Natural Sciences). This selection criterion reflected both study assumptions and students' general perception of the UJ faculties' division as highly reflective of students' socio-economic backgrounds. At UJ, a well-acknowledged faculty hierarchy exists, associating the better-off daughters and sons of Jordan's upper and middle classes with STEM faculties and the poorer and lower social strata with the Humanities and Social Science (Cantini, 2016). However, while

I did not strictly associate faculties with social classes, I somehow related those with students' diverse backgrounds. The UJ admission process outlined below sheds further light on how the UJ student population encompasses the features of heterogeneity.

The UJ is the first and most renowned state-supported university in the country. Established in 1962, it paved Jordan's way for becoming a regional leader in the education sector, compensating for its lack of natural resources by investing in human capital. The University is highly regarded by families and young people due to its very competitive, merit-based admission system, subjected to the minimum *tawjihi* (General Secondary School final examinations) average grades; each programme grade requirements reflect broader social perceptions of degree programmes (Humanities vs Science) and related careers prestige, rather than labour market demands. Thus, the grades entry requirements for the faculties at the bottom of the scale (e.g., Arts, Languages) are just above the minimum (50 out of 100) required to pass the *tawjihi* (Cantini, 2016, p. 45), while for others (e.g., Engineering, Medicine) can be considerably higher. Students can apply to the UJ through two competition programmes: *tanafusi* (competitive) (also called *adiyya,* regular) or *mowazi* (parallel). The *tanafusi* programme permits students to compete through higher grades by paying low fees, whereas the *mowazi* permits students to compete with lower grades by paying higher fees. However, if the latter programme gives better chances of entering degree programmes by paying higher fees, this does not guarantee a place to study as the entry competition is limited to those who pay higher fees. Admission criteria at UJ, on the one hand, allow the best students, regardless of social status, to have access to a high-quality education system relatively for free. However, on the other hand, it ensures the reproduction of social inequalities and privileges, as daughters and sons of better-off families can afford to enrol in more prestigious study programmes. Overall, the UJ student population consists of young Jordanians who come from (relatively) lower- and (mostly) middle-class families, rather than upper-class ones whose offspring are often enrolled in expensive international private schools and pursue their studies abroad. Besides providing me with a vast and variegated sample of young people across gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and family background, the choice of UJ as leading fieldwork site was suitable due to my familiarity with the context in which I had first studied Jordanian

colloquial Arabic and then worked as an Italian Language Tutor, for three years. A wide relationship network of former colleagues and students enabled me to easily access university spaces and recruit participants across faculties. This factor was crucial in allowing me to finalise my fieldwork tasks by gathering a large amount of data in a month's time.

As per the professional sample, the main selection criteria were gender, employment status, and therefore financial independence,[19] and age. In this case, the type of university degree was not considered, as it no longer appeared relevant for defining the heterogeneity of the sample. Interestingly, other elements enriched the diversity of this sample, namely personal struggles for independence and a high level of family conflict, together with variables such as marital status and independent household arrangements that emerged spontaneously when looking at this (older) category of people. These variables, rather than constituting elements of comparisons, added nuances to young people's ability to negotiate life choices at distinct stages of life.

As per the recruitment process of students, I chose to randomly approach students on the UJ campus and proceed with the interview after verifying the selection criteria and obtaining their consent. To ensure the sample heterogeneity, student participants were approached in different faculty buildings or in students' most-attended social spaces. For the recruitment of professionals, I found it exceptionally convenient to approach them in some young adults' most preferred spaces (e.g., cafés and cultural centres) located in Amman's neighbourhoods mostly frequented by urban, middle-class and educated youth (e.g., Downtown, Jebel Amman, Jebel al-Weibdeh, and the University Street).[20] Furthermore, a few of my former students who fit into the selection criteria – that in the meantime had graduated and started working – constituted part of the research professional sample. Interestingly, the pre-existing bond of trust between us and my familiarity with their personal stories enabled them

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[19] In this thesis, the variable of employment status has been treated as equivalent to financial independence. Indeed, this was the case for my participants. Notwithstanding this, I am aware that employment does not always equate to financial independence, as other factors, beyond the scope of this thesis, may affect an individual's ability to make an independent use of their salary.

[20] While I am aware of the importance of looking into other, more disadvantaged, neighbourhoods in Amman, and obviously beyond the context of the Jordanian capital, I shall underline that the choice of these neighbourhoods for recruiting professionals appeared the most suitable for the research at hand focusing on urban, educated, and middle-class youth.

to feel confident enough to disclose intimate accounts of their lives and family dynamics. With many of them, I was glad to know that they had vigorously pursued their dreams by getting the desired job, having been granted the much-hunted scholarship, or being offered a place to study abroad. Lastly, for the family observations, I relied on networks of acquaintances previously established during my stay in Jordan, which enabled me to conduct observations in their households. For these last two samples of participants, i.e., former students and acquaintances, confidentiality was ensured, and anonymity protected by assigning pseudonyms and removing any direct identifiers.

Description of Activities

The research relied on four qualitative methods for data collection: a) interviewee profile; b) semi-structured interviews; c) focus groups; and d) family observations. When approached, students and professionals alike were asked what research activities they would like to take part in. Most students took part in one research activity only (i.e., semi-structured interviews). Whereas, a few agreed to take part in either semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, or semi-structured interviews and family observations.[21] Below I describe each method of data collection and its relevance to this research, particularly as each method addresses different research aims and questions.

The interviewee profile (IP) collected participants' sociodemographic information to set out the intersectionality purposes of the thesis (see Appendix E). As it is only relevant to highlight similarities and differences between individuals' dynamics of action, it was compiled only by participants who took part in the semi-structured interview. The IP collected data on the participant's gender, age, ethnicity, higher education level, degree programme, parents' education level, employment, marital status, place of residence, household type, family settlement background, and religion. As per the category of gender, even though this thesis primary used a gender binary approach, this did not preclude the possibility of non-binary gender perspectives to emerge. Indeed, in the IP, participants were given the opportunity to

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[21] 10 participants (out of 44) took park in both SSIs and FGs; while only three couples (out of six) agreed to attend SSIs during the one-day family observation in their home. Having access to the personal life stories of the wife and husband, incredibly enhanced my understanding of the family dynamics of the observed household.

identify themselves outside the gender binary system,[22] while an open attitude towards gender identities was maintained during the interviews to allow for the emergence of alternative understandings of gender. To reflect on the specificities of the Jordanian context, Jordan's primary ethnic division of Transjordanians versus Jordanian of Palestinian origins was also considered along with their settlement patterns, namely urban, rural, or Bedouin; variables of parental education levels and place of residence (either Amman East and West or another city) were applied to confirm the family socio-economic background. In fact, Jordan's capital is divided into two parts: the modern and more prosperous West Amman and the older and less prosperous East (and downtown) Amman. The two parts of the city are characterised by clearly perceptible differences in development and mark a social class divide by place of residence, with the upper and middle classes living in the modern – but by no means homogeneously wealthy – neighbourhoods of West Amman and the lower-income households living in East Amman, place of many Palestinian refugee camps (Jabiri, 2016). Rather than being used to pre-determine the value of pre-set intersections, this demographic information allowed the most meaningful intersections-in context to be identified. In the data analysis process, individuals' unique actions and strategies were analysed against the aforementioned sociodemographic variables to understand what factors play a significant role in young people's ability to negotiate power. The data analysis revealed the significance of gender, employment status, and financial independence, first, and second of marital status. Thus, the relevance of other sociodemographic variables, namely religion, ethnicity, parents' education level, family settlement patterns, and place of residence was progressively disregarded.[23] In fact, preliminary findings have shown the overall significance of the variables of gender and employment status (thus, financial independence), together with other intersectional factors in shaping people's agentive capabilities and strategic actions. As I show in

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[22] Only one female student participant self-identified outside the binary paradigm.

[23] Data on participants' place of residence presents limitations and may not be accurate. Indeed, most research participants appeared unable to locate their neighbourhood, whether in Amman East, West or centre. It was not clear to what extent their eventual answer was genuine. This could either reflect young people's shifting notions of the dynamics related to class and place of residence in Amman, or their actual recognition and thus their vulnerability in answering this question. My preliminary findings suggest the first possibility, also considering that young people are distancing themselves from other identity markers (i.e., parents' settlement patterns, and, to a limited extent, also ethnicity, especially among Jordanians of Palestinian origin). Further research is needed to shed light on this interesting finding.

Chapter 2, these critical intersectional factors, which emerged in semi-structured interviews data, included parent-youth unique dynamics and family's multiple and diverse understandings of traditions, religion, and gendered expectations in defining one's privileging or constraining position towards power structures. Therefore, in this research, the demographic variables collected in the IP were not used to draw general conclusions on my sample of participants, let alone the Jordanian youth.

The semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were conducted with 44 individuals, 22 students and 22 professionals, divided roughly equally between women and men. The SSIs with students took place in public places on the UJ campus, while those with professionals took place in cafés in Amman's most popular neighbourhoods for young, middle-class professionals. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and a half and consisted of 28 open-ended questions for students (see Appendix F) and 26 for professionals (see Appendix G). The SSIs proved helpful for two reasons. First, as participants felt comfortable narrating their own story since the interview took the form of a natural conversation, and second, as I could identify emerging ideas to explore further. SSIs questions addressed the research's object of enquiry, namely *young women's and men's agency* in relation to (rather than against) *society, family* and *relational selves,* which are the three main underlying research themes. Specifically, the first theme explored young people's perceptions of societal expectations of gender, their understandings of gender norms and traditional gender roles – that are not assumed a priori – along with their personal experiences of being a gendered self within Jordanian society. The second theme included questions pertaining to family dynamics, i.e., parent-youth connectedness, family gendered expectations of daughters and sons, and intergenerational conflict issues. Analysing young people's agency within, and in relation to, family dynamics allowed for contextualising, rather than generalising, people's unique capacities to gain power over their life choices. This theme's set of questions uncovered people's pathways to self-empowerment and their unpredictable trajectories, which depend on subjective experiences and different family dynamics that are not static but shift as young people transition into adulthood. Most importantly, fundamental research questions were answered, namely: in which family context is intergenerational conflict more likely to occur? What are the most common domains of conflict between young people and their parents? What does intergenerational conflict inform us about?

What are the most common strategies young people apply to gain agency in different family contexts? What is young people's most sought-after outcome of agency? Lastly, the third SSI theme explored young people's gender self-making, reflecting alternative conceptualisations of femininity and masculinity and emerging understanding of gender relations. These questions inform us about young people's desired change and their active commitment to such change. Additional questions were asked to understand how opposite-sex peer socialisation affects gender relations and the role of higher education spaces in allowing young people to cross gendered boundaries and establish new, more desirable ones.

Focus groups (FGs*)* were conducted to enrich the data analysis by expanding the research inquiry to dominant agents of gender socialisation. A total of 33 individuals took part in six FGs discussions. The FGs gathered participants based on gender, age, and employment status. Specifically, two FGs were conducted with all-female students (FG1 and FG2); one FG was conducted with a mixed group of male and female students (FG3), and another one included a mixed group of male and female students and professionals altogether (FG4). Finally, the last two FGs were conducted with all-male students (FG5) and all-male professionals (FG6), (see Appendix C). FGs gathering participants by same gender and employment status aimed to highlight people's similar gendered life experiences and perspectives, while the mixed group setting aimed to highlight differences by juxtaposing people's experiences across gender and employment status. FGs discussions were divided into two sections, each with a specific research objective (see Appendix H). The first section examined the social construction of dominant models of masculinity and femininity by exploring participants' socialisation of gender from childhood to adulthood. This allowed us to understand the role of different socialisation agents through life stages. The second section investigated young people's conceptualisation of womanhood and manhood and, to less extent, motherhood and fatherhood, in contrast to the hegemonic discourses promoted by agents of socialisation. This allowed us to uncover young Jordanians' most desired gendered selves and relations through the new meanings (or co-optation of dominant ones) assigned to education, career, friendship, love, marriage, and conjugality.

Family observations (FOs) were conducted in six household units across generations, including two older generation households (FO1 and FO5) and four younger ones (FO2-3-4-6). The oldest households consisted of a first couple who had been married for 35 years (FO1) and a second who had been married for 13 years (FO5). The remaining households consisted of young couples who had been married from a time span of a few months (FO2-6) to five years (FO3-4), (see Appendix D). In the oldest generation household (FO1), I conducted a one-month observation, which allowed me to follow the family dynamics between parents and their children who met the selection criteria for my sample of young participants. The household consisted of a nuclear Transjordanian family with a strong tribal affiliation and military background. The mother and father, already retired, were formerly employed, the first as a major in the Jordanian army and the second as a school teacher. They have been married for 35 years and have six children, five daughters, and one son. Of these, only three were living with their parents at the time of the observation, the eldest son and the two younger daughters, while the remaining two older daughters were married and living in separate households. The eldest son was enrolled in a PhD programme abroad but was currently working in Jordan, while of the two youngest sisters, one was in the army, and the other one was an undergraduate law student. The eldest son was 32 years old, and the youngest daughter 21. The observation of this household allowed me to dig into the dynamics occurring within a family with strong tribal affiliation. Tribalism has often been used as a strong predictor of conservative gender values and hierarchical (patriarchal) family relations. In the Jordanian case, discourses on gender often intertwine with those on tribalism, and the negative implications of tribal norms on gender equality are often taken for granted (e.g., Sonbol, 2003). Hence, this activity aimed to observe tribal family dynamics as they unfold between husband and wife, parents and young people, to confirm or disregard assumptions. My observation was active and included participation in daily family life activities and special social occasions such as large family gatherings ('*azaim*) and family trips in Jordan's northern rural areas. In addition, five further one-day family observations were conducted in households of newly married couples, two of whom were expecting their first child (FO2-6), two others each had a young child (FO3-4), one aged three and another aged one, and another couple had two children (FO5), one aged six and one aged 12. Specifically, FO5 and FO6 were conducted on the same day, during an extended family gathering

to which I had been invited. During these observations, I investigated young married couples' evolution of love stories, from dating to marriage, and extended-family dynamics – mainly if they lived in a family building – gender roles, childcare arrangements, and household duties. This allowed me to shift the perspective from attitudes to practice, connecting young people's egalitarian perspectives on gender relations with the complexity of actual family dynamics.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data collected, I have applied a thematic approach to an intersectional framework of analysis. I also drew on the support of quantitative and qualitative data analysis tools, namely the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Nvivo. Specifically, I summarised participants' sociodemographic information by drawing on descriptive statistics using SPSS, as the production of frequency tables helped me visualise the characteristics of my research sample. The sociodemographic variables were evaluated in triangulation with data from qualitative methods, i.e., semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and family observations; thus, their relevance was considered significant only to the people interviewed. The inductive approach of the research allowed the data to speak by highlighting recurring themes and exploring patterns of behaviour. An initial attempt to code the data involved the support of Nvivo software, which proved insufficient when intersectionality was later applied to the analysis. Intersectionality concepts were incorporated into the data analysis to contextualise young people's practices of agency. However, the process of coding themes and nodes in Nvivo determined a progressive objectification of the participants, whose experiences and actions were de-contextualised, and the multiple dynamics shaping their personal stories were obscured. To overcome this – very challenging – stage of my research, I re-coded the data at hand by breaking down the main themes that emerged from each personal narrative; I then analysed family dynamics by theorising the main factors shaping parent-youth relationships based on an analysis of young people's agentive capabilities and the strategic choices they commonly deployed to negotiate desired life choices. In describing individuals' strategies to gain agency in life decisions, I classified young people's agentive strategies as direct or indirect, according to one's family context and individual characteristics of specific life stages. Finally, as this thesis relied on multiple qualitative methods, I applied methodological data

triangulation to test the validity of the data analysis and to ensure its reliability. This method proved helpful not only in cross-validating the data, but also in uncovering multiple perspectives and deepening my understanding of the lives of the young women and men I met. Indeed, this research does not attempt to reach generalised conclusions, but aims to stress the heterogeneous nature of relational subjectivities and the dynamic feature of their agency. To conclude this methodology section, I would like to mention how much I enjoyed the process of data collection, which was incredibly enriching on a personal level. I was surprised to see how motivated and strong-willed these young women and men were in challenging undesired realities and shaping more desired ones. These young people seemed confident and mostly at ease in narrating subjective experiences and disclosing private, and sometimes very intimate, accounts of their lives and family dynamics. This may have been due to our similar ages, my familiarity with the context, and my knowledge of the local language. However, some moments of embarrassment did occur, particularly during first family observations in young couples' households, as some wives or husbands felt uncomfortable disclosing personal matters in front of one another if that concerned specific husband-wife or extended family dynamics. This problem was later avoided by asking potentially inconvenient questions to each partner separately, whenever it was convenient.

The research is committed to protecting the privacy of its participants. Anonymisation of data was ensured by removing participants' direct identifiers, i.e., assigning pseudonyms and limiting the potential identifiability of indirect sociodemographic information. Although sociodemographic data were collected to reflect the intersectional focus of the research, these are not sufficient to retrace the participants' identities. The choice of anonymisation proved helpful in making participants feel safe in disclosing private matters and sharing sensitive information. Surprisingly, before the interview began, while I was assuring participants that their identity would be kept secret, most of them interrupted me by saying aloud, "you can use my name, I don't care if they recognise me!". This made me realise their strong character and determination in being agents of their own life. Giving participants a name, rather than referring to them as "participant A or 1", was especially important to me in order to avoid de-humanising the research participants. For in-text citations, I directly cited the given name, type of interview (e.g., SSI, FG, or FO) and interview

date (specifically, year). This choice helped to improve the narrative flow that would otherwise be burdened with repetitive reference information, which is avoidable considering that all fieldwork activities took place in Amman – either on the UJ campus (for students) or cafés off-campus (for professionals) – between March and April 2019.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. The organisation of the thesis follows the linear progression of the overarching research argument and the unfolding of its underlying themes and standalone arguments. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the thesis are empirical chapters in which the data are presented, interpreted, and discussed altogether. The chapters attend to the youth continual process of becoming agents through their life stages leading to adulthood, showing how they creatively shape their desired selves to fulfil shifting dreams, aspirations, and expectations. Being the subject of a *relational self* entangled in a complex web of relationships, in exploring its formation, I dwell on the agent's relation with family and society and its lived experience as a member of both. In this way, *society, family,* and *relational self* are the three underlying themes of the research. Therefore, recurring topics (e.g., gender roles, femininity and masculinity models) are examined from different angles as to juxtapose the perspectives of society, the family, and the individual. Chapter 2 is divided into two sections. The first identifies the socialising agents crucial for the reproduction of hegemonic gender discourses and the formation of gender identity from childhood to adolescence. The second focuses on young people's level of internalisation of prevailing gender norms and the co-existence of multiple understandings of gender identities. Lastly, it emphasises the heterogeneity of people's experiences of gender oppression, stressing similarities between women's and men's experiences and differences between groups of women and men separately. Chapter 3 explores relational dynamics in Arab families in which subjective selves and their agentive capabilities are shaped. It then outlines parents' gendered expectations of their daughters and sons transitioning into adulthood and further assesses young people's levels of disagreement with these expectations. Finally, it identifies an intergenerational conflict that denotes a value misalignment between the older and younger generations. Chapter 4 theorises how young people negotiate desired life

choices in different family contexts and life stages. It categorises the use of different creative strategies by young people in family contexts characterised by varying degrees of constraint. Lastly, it examines the possible outcomes of applying different strategies and identifies young people's most sought-after outcome of agency. Chapter 5 explores the new opportunities that entering higher education spaces provides young people with, particularly in shifting notions of gender relations. It does so by identifying young people's everyday life practices of crossing gendered boundaries on the UJ campus, mirroring their desire to establish alternative gender relations. It then discusses how these practices, which are transported in their adult life outside the campus, mirror young people's new value system. Chapter 6 presents concluding remarks on young people's gender self-making reflecting new desired trajectories of womanhood(s) and manhood(s). Chapter 7 provides the research conclusion and raises further questions about the significance of young people's embodying non-dominant models of femininities and masculinities and enacting more egalitarian gender relations for disrupting Jordan's gendered status quo.

CHAPTER 2

Retracing Gender Identity Formation

Introduction

This chapter highlights the socially constructed nature of gender by retracing participants' early experiences of gender socialisation and assesses people's internalisation of, and identification with, dominant gender ideologies in adult life. Thereby, it identifies the main agents responsible for fixing hegemonic femininity and masculinity through formal and informal practices. These include parents, school, and same-sex peer socialisation. Additionally, it captures, through the words of participants, Jordanian society's expectations of gender, including gender roles and stereotypes, as well as young people's understandings of gender identity shaped by their own experiences as members of society. This chapter forwards my argument that individuals do not simply internalise hegemonic discourses, but they actively engage in the process of gender self-making from early childhood. The findings I present here lay the groundwork for further investigation of young people's agency in redefining (undesired) gender ideologies.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first one highlights the role of the family in the gender socialisation of children by focusing on the responsibilities parents assign to children. It then describes the impact of same-sex peer socialisation and the role of the schooling system in reproducing dominant gendered behaviour and reinforcing its practices. Finally, the controversial impact of the gender segregation system in undermining positive attitudes towards gender relations is discussed. The second section examines the extent to which young people have internalised normative gender discourses through accounts of social meanings of womanhood and manhood and perceptions of gendered advantages and disadvantages. This challenges the homogeneity of lived gender experiences and assesses other relevant variables shaping women's and men's experiences of oppression.

The findings show that young people's gender identity is influenced by, but not limited to, prevailing gender narratives. Moreover, social norms defining feminine and masculine traits are understood differently, as perceptions of what a woman or

man is or should be, act and behave, vary and do not always correspond to social norms. This is further reflected in people's actual experiences of gendered advantages and disadvantages, as these are not uniform and standardised for each individual. Furthermore, gender intersects with personal and family factors to create unique gender experiences that shape subjective attitudes and understandings of gender in a given context. My findings explicitly convey the distinct reality of a proportion of women and men who are either UJ students or professional young adults (up to 36 years old) who have completed higher education and started a career. The data presented here draw on several research methods, specifically semi-structured interviews (SSIs), focus groups (FGs), and family observations (FOs). The data are presented and discussed together through a triangulation approach that captures the multiple nuances of societal phenomena. Specifically, this chapter analyses data from six focus groups, namely two groups of all-females students (FG1-2), one mixed group of female and male students (FG3), one mixed group of female and male either students or professionals (FG4), and two groups of all-males professionals (FG5-6). These were supplemented by 44 in-depth interviews on participants' personal experiences and six family observations in households with children aged two to 32 years.

Parents' Socialisation of Gender

Late one afternoon in the summer of 2018, having been overwhelmed by trying to finalise the enquiry process of my fieldwork in Jordan, due to begin in the next few months, I decided to take advantage of the fine weather to take a break and meet up with a Jordanian friend, Fares, in a park near the University of Leeds where we were both studying. The park was filled with strolling people enjoying an evening walk. We sat in a quiet area of the park overlooking a playground crowded with children whose happy shouts resounded through the park. As we talked, I suddenly noticed my friend lost in his thoughts, with a hint of sadness and longing in his gaze. After a while he said, "you know, Ivana, I do not remember ever living my childhood. As a little boy I was always with my father, attending social gatherings and Friday prayers, weddings, and funerals. But…running happily in the playground, playing with other children and chasing each other, I never did that". My friend's words saddened me and made me wonder how severe the effects of parents' socialisation of gender in children can be and its continuing effects on adult life. While the

parental role in children's gender development is widely recognised in developmental psychology studies in Western contexts, more research of this kind is needed in Middle Eastern societies. This section aims to contribute – although in a limited manner – to a better understanding of the role of different socialisation agents, specifically family, peers, and school, in modelling children's gender identity. Specifically, it dwells on the parents' role by exploring how the differential treatment of girls and boys and the responsibilities assigned to them within the family serve to forge socially functioning future women and men. It then examines the role of other agents important to adolescents, such as peer groups and school, in fostering gender normative behaviours, body types, and dress codes and ensuring adolescents' adherence to them.

From all FGs discussions, it emerged that most women and men were assigned gender-specific tasks by their parents from an early age and that they were treated – more or less – differently as daughters and sons, in ways that reflected their parents' gendered expectations. Most research participants recounted being assigned gender-stereotyped tasks from the age of six or seven, but they overwhelmingly associated their childhood memories with lots of play and fun. Remarkably, most FGs participants stated that their first responsibility as young girls and boys was to play and study, and their second one was to perform tasks assigned by their parents. For the young boys, these responsibilities consisted of accompanying their father to social and family gatherings, weddings, funerals, or attending religious festivities and participating in Friday prayers with their fathers when they were very young and later on their own. For the young girls, these responsibilities meant helping their mother in the household by performing chores such as cleaning, tying up their rooms, making beds, dusting furniture, and sometimes washing dishes and cooking. Divergent opinions emerged on the actual age at which these activities were assigned to young girls. While most men recalled being introduced to men's social activities at a fairly early age, women differed instead on the actual age at which they were socialised into the stereotypical role of women of caregiver. During all-female focus groups discussions (FG1-2, 2019), some women recalled that they had started cooking and washing dishes at the age of 12-13, while others mentioned an earlier age. Lina (FG1, 2019), a female student who participated in one of the mentioned focus groups, noted that her youngest sister helps her mother washing dishes and

"she is only four years old". Rahaf (SSI, 2019) instead revealed that dusting furniture has been her "job" since she was 12 years old. Other female participants (FG1-2-3-4, 2019) admitted that they were not assigned any specific tasks, but that they somehow helped their mothers with household chores. Whereas, fewer male participants (FG3-4-5-6, 2019) recalled being assigned household chores at a young age, specifically setting the table and cleaning, while some admitted to having done so later. For instance, one male student, Ismael (FG5, 2019), recalled, "I have three sisters, but cleaning the bathroom was my responsibility"; similarly, Fahed (FG5, 2019), commented, "I like to do my own laundry, instead of my mother". Children indeed receive their first (different) gender lessons from their parents (Leaper, 2014). Thus, children can learn gender roles by parents directly assigning them gender-stereotyped tasks, and\or, in a context where no direct instructions are given, they learn gendered behaviour by observation and imitation of same-sex parent's role (Bandura, 2008). However, these findings showing divergences in the tasks that are assigned or not and differences in the age at which these tasks are assigned, suggest that people's experiences of gender socialisation are not homogeneous, confirming various aspects of social learning theories that highlight the complexity of the process. FGs participants attributed their divergent – and sometimes contrasting – experiences of gender socialisation to family understandings of gender. The varied experiences of participants who shared the same socio-economic status, ethnic background, and settlement patterns prompt us to look beyond, even though by no means to diminish, generalisations about class and ethnicity differences, and to acknowledge the complexity of factors involved in the process of gender socialisation, as well as an individual's agency in it. Further evidence, which I present below, points to the importance of families' specific circumstances in assigning children gender roles.

Farah (FG3, 2019), a female professional, noted that her role as a young girl in the household was influenced by her status of eldest child, which guaranteed her to play a double gender role. She said that she was "a second mother" to her siblings and the chosen one to represent the family – a choice that prioritised age rather than gender – as she was favoured over her younger brother. Farah accompanied her father to social gatherings while also being responsible for teaching her younger siblings, cooking, and taking care of the household until her parents returned from work.

Farah's story suggests that the variable of gender alone is not always sufficient to assign gendered tasks, and that roles can be adjusted differently depending on specific family circumstances. This was largely confirmed in most FGs by participants' accounts of their subjective experiences. In Farah's case, this meant that her as eldest daughter, was best suited to take on a perceived feminine or masculine role, depending on the need. The coexistence of divergent attitudes and patterns of behaviour towards girls' and boys' across households highlights how the process of gender is not straightforward but relies on many intersecting factors.

Further findings on early socialisation processes open up new avenues for exploring gender socialisation in the family beyond the perspective of Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Specifically, cognitive-development theory emphasises the active role of children in the socialisation process. Both female and male participants emphasised on many occasions that they "chose" to adhere to some feminine or masculine expected behaviours or to disregard them, partially or totally, in a process involving progressive development of understanding and selection. Most of the men participating in FGs discussions (FG3-4-5-6, 2019) admitted that they had to attend social gatherings and Friday prayers with their fathers until the end of their adolescence, "not because they are religious, but because it is a social thing", while as they grew older they could decide independently whether or not to continue to participate. My data from SSIs showing fathers' influence on sons confirmed somewhat social learning theories about the process of identification of children with same-sex individuals (Siann, 2013). This was particularly true for the male respondents in my sample who had a military background, as during SSIs, they frequently mentioned their fathers as role models. However, it must be specified that this role model only functioned in relation to the father's social status, his respectability within society, his perseverance and hard work, and not in relation to other, more intimate aspects of the father's manhood. I will return to this point later. Mothers instead were mentioned as role models for their daughters and sons in a few cases, primarily for qualities such as discipline, education, and moral standards.

Most FGs participants highlighted how gendered responsibilities assigned by parents evolve and are determined by one's personality, mostly during adolescence and afterwards, rather than being assumed solely on the basis of gender. Men explained

that the gender role of "social representative of the family" is usually assigned to the son who is most willing to take it on, or to the one whose personality best suits this role, or depending on one's relation with relatives, friends, or guests. Similarly, for females, the role of caregiver does not seem to be assigned a-priori, at least in a household with more than one daughter. In explaining this process, cognitive and gender schema theories (Bem, 1981; Liben and Bigler, 2002; Miller, 2016) appear more appropriate than others, as individuals' active role in gender socialisation comes to the fore. The one-month family observation I conducted in a family belonging to an influential Bedouin tribe in Jordan further confirmed the FGs' insights regarding one's ultimate decision to adopt a most preferred gender role or not. Mahmoud's parents have been married for about 35 years and have six children. All of them have university degrees and are already employed, except for the youngest daughter, Asma'a, who is still in higher education. The family's gender dynamics looked traditional, with the mother (already retired, but previously working as a school teacher) taking care of the house and children and cooking meals, and the father (retired, formerly General Major in the Jordanian army) with a hectic social life who always came home late at night. Apart from the mother, all family members depended heavily on the work of the youngest daughter, Asma, a law student, who constantly served all family members (including the mother, who often asked her to carry out chores), and who was always asked to do something by other family members. In contrast, another sister, Maram – the only one still living at home – never engaged in any domestic activity, and when asked by her mother, she appeared reluctant, preferring to hand over her responsibilities to her younger sister. Asma also served her father, mostly without him asking her to. She seems to have earned the respect and appreciation of all family members by taking on the role of caregiver. She was also regularly active and engaged in social life. She was away at the university most days and often hung out with friends and her sisters during some days of the week. What impressed me most about Asma's status in her family was the fact that she was held in high esteem by her family for her strong character and temperament that made her well-respected by everyone in the family. Mainly, Asma's status resembled that of her Bedouin grandmother, of whom – her family members constantly and proudly admitted that – "she inherited her quality and also her appearance" (FO1, 2019). Asma's respect within her family seems to be rooted in her devotion to the family and her reliability as a family member; she seemed

highly aware of the role she has exceptionally taken on and the degree of empowerment this guarantees her with. Asma's caregiver role provided her with accountability, empowerment, and independence rather than submission and control. Maram, instead, worked in the army and was completely different from her sister. She never engaged in household duties, and other family members refrain from asking her as she would refuse, and most of the time, she was busy with online media, posting selfies and pictures. Each girl seems to have developed her own character and to be free to decide what role to take on, if, when, and how. Asma's fascinating status appeared to be related to her own family's understanding of Bedouin women as strong-willed and independent, whose gender-stereotypical role, when implemented, only allows them to exert more power and control over the family and closer community members.

The findings of this section illustrate how girls and boys acquire socially appropriate gender roles and identity traits primarily through parental role modelling and gendered tasks assigned to them in childhood. The data also pointed to the complexity of gender learning processes and the fluid nature of gender roles that cannot simply be assigned a-priori. Overall, focus group discussions revealed that gender role formation not only depends on parents' gender role attitudes and role modelling, but also on the psychological traits, interests, and desires of the children. Furthermore, specific household circumstances – e.g., parents' divorce, father's death, husband's migration – were also found to affect daughters' and sons' agency in gender roles. For instance, as emerged in SSIs with some young men who had lost their father, they felt morally obliged to take on the role of breadwinner by taking care of their mother and younger siblings financially. In these cases, – as I will show in the following chapters – whenever playing the expected male gender role felt like an unavoidable burden, this burden was never synonymous with resignation, but instead it was a driving force for further developing agentive strategies. The process of learning gender is not uniform and linear. Gender formation is unpredictable and changeable, it evolves over and through time, and it is influenced by all kinds of material and psychological circumstances in one's living context.

"The Street": Children's Heterotopia

Another important feature of parents' socialisation of gender concerns the type of toys parents purchase for their children. In the Jordanian urban context where I conducted my fieldwork, while mentions of stereotypical toys such as dolls, Barbies, and kitchen utensils for girls, and trucks, cars, and Lego for boys have not been lacking, most women and men admitted to not having had many toys, but to have instead engaged in outdoor activities. In FGs discussions (FG3-4-5-6, 2019), men have mentioned "playing football, riding bikes, fighting with each other, climbing trees, throwing stones at each other, playing hide and seek" as the most common activities, while women similarly stated, "we played in the street, rode bicycles, ran around, chased each other, and played hide and seek!". There were no significant differences between girls and boys in the choice of games, while the selection of toys to play with seemed to be secondary and – for girls only – not limited to girls' stereotypical toys. Girls' ability to choose toys to play with seemed to be very flexible. Most girls reported playing with boys' toys and engaging in outdoor games also mentioned by boys, particularly football, without restrictions. However, while women recalled playing with both gender-stereotyped toys, men did say the same and widely mentioned outdoor activities instead of indoor ones. Only some men said they had played video games at an early age. In contrast, many said they had played online games from adolescence onwards, when children's outdoor activities were over. In some cases, the type of outdoor activities depended on family background and settlement patterns; as Yaser (FG5, 2019) admitted, "I used to walk a goat. I did not have any toys, but goats!". However, for most of my urban, educated, middle-class participants outdoor activities were the norm. FGs male participants (FG5-6, 2019) repeatedly admitted, "we don't remember toys, we played in the street males and females together since we were five years old", and similarly female participants (FG1-2, 2019) said, "we played football with boys. It was a mixed environment because we were young and we all played together". My findings illustrate that it was common for the young people I met to play together from a young age – usually from five or six years old – until puberty (seventh grade, 12-13 years old); however, an indication of the exact age at which girls and boys stopped mixing on the street varied between 10 and 15 years old.

The mention of time spent playing in the streets brought back many exciting and joyful memories for women and men alike. It seems that there were no clear gendered boundaries or restrictions when playing in the street, at least in my participants' experience. Moreover, playing in the street seems to have temporarily interrupted family gender indoctrination, allowing children to freely experience different behaviours. Although the actual dynamics of children's interaction on the street need further research, it is clear from the FGs findings that young people regard this phase of their lives as particularly exciting. Specifically, they emphasised how happy they were in playing all together, boys and girls, interacting and learning from each other without the burden of gender boundaries.

In the manuscript entitled "Of other spaces",[24] Michel Foucault introduces a new concept of spaces in our time by distinguishing between utopias and heterotopias. For Foucault (1986, p.24), utopias "are sites with no real place" that have "a relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society" but fundamentally represent "society in a perfected form". Alongside these unreal places, there are others called *heterotopias,* basically "enacted utopias" that relate to all other sites "in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Foucault's heterotopia denotes a counter-site that inverts conventional spaces, pauses norms, and alters normative gender relations. In analysing the gender socialisation of young women and men through life stages, the concept of heterotopias provides a framework for understanding how, in the process of learning social ideologies, people concurrently find ways to unlearn them. In the case of children, the street symbolises a temporal heterotopia only them can inhabit, a sort of time window, a place "outside of all places" (Foucault, 1986, p.24) that exists juxtaposed to others, such as family and school, where boundaries can be reinforced. This romanticised perception of the street is exacerbated by young people perceived contrast between their childhood's ideal time and the future reality of gender segregation and gender hierarchies that characterised their lives later on. The street instead offered children the opportunity to experience cross-gender relationships relatively far from family supervision. However, it is a temporal and in-between space whose access is strictly regulated by

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[24] The manuscript, published by a French journal in 1984, was based on a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967.

adults. The role of the family as the primary socialisation agent of children reappears firmly as children grow older and are readdressed back to their most appropriate gender role and behaviour. The following conversation is an excerpt from an all-male student FG, revealing how young boys were made aware of gender differences and spark further insights into their different perceptions and experiences of this process:

> **Ameer:** When I was 16, my brother gave me the "talk". He came to me and said, "you can't play with girls anymore; you're 16 now".
> **Fadi:** Yes, that's right, it's because of sex segregation… after a certain age you should only hang out with guys.
> **Ismael:** we stop playing together in grade 7 or 8, but it depends on the person. When we were young, it didn't matter if you were a boy or a girl, we played together.
> **Yaser:** but after a certain age, you are no longer considered friends; there must be something between you!
> **Fadel:** but that doesn't make sense to me! Nowadays, at university, you don't have girl friends?
> **Yaser:** yes, but we are talking about when you reach a certain age, and someone in your family tells you no to play with girls anymore!
> **Fadel:** but today families accept friendship between girls and boys. I don't understand your point (FG5, 2019).

The above conversation not only underlines the normality of mixed children's activities, but also conveys the common sense behind the statement that girls and boys do not mix after a certain age. The family appears here as a central agent, alerting children of the existence of gender differences that can no longer be neglected. Furthermore, the conversation highlights the misalignment between families' and peers' gender attitudes, as divergent meanings are assigned to aspects of gender relations, such as male-female friendship. Thus, separating girls and boys when they grow older does not make sense as nowadays male-female friendship is possible and goes beyond childhood. Overall, participants converged on this point, but also understood that their views differ from those of society and (sometimes) families, whose opinions are not uniform.

The process of family's readdressing young people to gender norms pinpoints the role of the family as the primary socialising agent and its influence on gender socialisation. Specifically, in this process, girls and boys become aware of the

incompatibility of relations between genders, making it impossible to imagine a world in which principles of fairness and equality may prevail. This task seems to have been entrusted to a family member of the same sex (a brother\sister, an uncle or a cousin) who must warn the children that, as grown-ups, male-female relations are driven by sexuality and not by other feelings. Children's retreat from the street marks a steer towards implementing same-sex peer socialisation, which is reinforced in Jordan by the implementation of gender segregation in school. From then on, girls and boys switch towards same-sex peer socialisation, which in the Jordanian case usually, but not always, lasts until enrolment at university, as described in the subsequent chapter. As Laila, an MA student who also worked at UJ's Queen Rania Teacher Academy – a non-profit organisation committed to raising the quality of education in Jordan and the Arab region – noted, "in Jordan, most public schools are segregated by gender, some apply segregation from the sixth grade onwards, but these are rare as the majority are segregated from the first grade" (SSI, 2019). From this point on, secondary agents such as school and same-sex peer groups (and mass media) can be expected to replace the primary socialisation agent of family and become the most influential socialisation agents of gender in the lives of adolescents.

The School: Making Hegemonic Femininity and Masculinity

Socialisation into same-sex peer groups is institutionalised as schools apply gender segregation, shaping girls and boys as gendered subjects and encouraging the reproduction of gender hierarchies. Research in the field of psychology and child development studies (e.g., Fabes et al., 2013; 2014) has shown that gender segregation increases stereotyping and that children living in completely segregated environments gain different gendered behaviours and learn and develop unique skills and interests (Hanish and Fabes, 2014). Peers who spend time together influence each other and tend to homologate their behaviour to same-sex peers; thus, "the more times boys spend playing with other boys, the more boy-like they become" (Hanish and Fabes, 2014, p.2). Gender segregation reinforces girls' and boys' preferences for same-sex relationships and strengthens their interaction preferences (Fabes et al., 2013). The idea that same-sex peer groups socialisation supersedes family influence was mentioned on a few occasions in semi-structured interviews. For instance, Laila (SSI, 20,19), a mother of two, recalled her struggle to raise her eight-year-old son in a male-dominated society with a "different mindset", referring to the contrast

between her family's values and what her son absorbs from the outside, particularly on TV and social media. Laila raises her son and daughter with gender-neutral toys. Similarly, Aaliyah, a female student, spoke about the pressure she faces from her teenage brother who is influenced by other peers in his understanding of what a woman should be like:

> My brother is now entering puberty and he is influenced by the mentality of some other men. We (the family) are trying to prevent this and make him think differently. My father allows me to wear a top in the summer, but the last time I wore it, my brother came to me and told me that it was not allowed because then people would see me in a sexual way! I told him to stop this behaviour and not to control a woman (Aaliyah, SSI, 2019).

Gender segregation reinforces gender norms and contributes to gender inequality as young people internalise gendered behaviours and enact hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity. Connell (1996, p.209) points out that "the gender structure of a society defines particular patterns of conduct as "masculine" and others as "feminine"". That form of masculinity, which is culturally dominant in a given setting, is called hegemonic masculinity, where "hegemonic signifies a position of authority and leadership, not total dominance" (Connell, 1996, p.209). Alongside hegemonic masculinity, other forms of masculinity coexist interacting with one another in contested ways, but the hegemonic form "need not to be the most common form of masculinity", however that is the most "highly visible" one (Connell, 1996, p.209). There is no single pattern or fixed form of masculinity, but masculinities are products of different cultures and historical epochs (Connell, 1996, p.210). Connell (1996, p.209) further states that "masculinities are defined and sustained in institutions such as corporations, armies, governments, and schools". In discussing the role of the school as pertaining to my research participants' experiences, I build on Connell's (1996) argument on the formation of masculinity, which identifies schools as one of the major sites of gender identity-making. As masculinity formation is a dynamic process involving various agents throughout the life cycle of an individual, and as the individual itself is a major agent in shaping its own identity, the school should be seen in Connells' words (1996, p.212) both as an "institutional agent of the process and the setting where pupils' agencies are in place". In school, girls and boys are disciplined differently and a suitable masculinity and femininity model is taught, promoted, and enforced through the school's institutional practices.

The discipline, the dress code, the emphasis on physical strength, the standard school texts promoting stereotypical gender roles are all considered "set of masculinising practices governed by the gender regime of the school" (Connell, 1996, p.215). Although Connell's arguments are based on research in Western contexts, I suggest that the similarities of practices implemented in both contexts allow similar conclusions to be drawn for Jordan. From all FGs, it emerged that girls and boys were treated differently in segregated schools where practices were highly gendered and discourses about how girls or boys should behave, dress, walk, and talk were enforced on a daily basis. Participants recalled how they were asked to line up in the school yard every morning, sing the Jordanian national anthem and Ibrahim Tuqan's poem *Mawtini* (My homeland), and then engage in physical exercise. The amount and type of exercise performed by girls and boys seemed to be quite similar, as both reported doing some stretching exercises. Furthermore, participants admitted that they had to follow more or less rigid rules, such as wearing a uniform, conform to a gendered dress code, and maintaining certain standards of personal hygiene. The teachers and the school principal carefully scrutinised girls' and boys' compliance with these rules before classes began, and forms of punishment were applied if they did not follow the rules. Particularly, boys were asked not to keep their hair too long, which was judged too girly, and to keep their nails short and clean. Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a male student, recalls his school's memories as follows, "every morning my teacher would go by each desk and check that our nails were not dirty or too long, and if he found someone like that, he would hit their hands". Various interviews revealed that teachers had the authority to hit pupils and use other forms of corporal punishment if someone disrupted the class. Another male student, Abbas (SSI, 2019), admitted in relation to disciplinary methods, "if you are late, you have to do exercises, hard ones, before you enter the class, so that when you arrive at class you are dead tired and the next day you will avoid being late". Other forms of punishment mentioned as disciplinary methods included leaning the student against the wall and lifting one leg. On the one hand, SSIs confirmed this trend, as many participants had experienced physical punishment and disciplinary methods themselves. However, on the other hand, participants recalled how they had witnessed a change in attitudes towards physical punishment during their school years. Particularly, some spoke of this trend easing somewhat in private schools – where parents could raise concerns if their daughters and sons were beaten by teachers – as opposed to public ones,

which were considered more "strict", "conservative" and "religious", and where parents had little authority to raise complaints. This difference in the strictness of rules between private and public school was widely acknowledged by my participants. Some male professionals spoke positively about the public school system because of the strict implementation of the rules, as public school teaches you to be a man, i.e., to take full responsibility while accepting corporal punishment such as caning. The main benefit of disciplinary methods is to encourage boys' responsibility. Indeed, responsibility appears as one of the prerequisites of masculinity for which discipline becomes necessary and violence is justified. While the Ministry of Education officially bans teacher's corporal punishment, the practice is still widespread and justified by the wider discourse on "boys being wild" thus, in need of disciplining (Shirazi, 2016, p.96). On the contrary, concerns have been raised about the moral standards of private schools, judged, sometimes, too open-minded in their attempt to imitate the West. The accepted practices of violence reinforce male authority and power hierarchies between older and younger males and normalise men violence (Sonbol, 2003), while underpinning the gender binary and flattening gender identity heterogeneity (Shirazi, 2016, p.104).

While boys are seen as wild and unruly, girls are seen as quiet and respectful, so disciplinary practices between the two may diverge (Shirazi, 2016, p.96). Although my findings largely confirm those of Shirazi (2016), my female participants' accounts of their school experiences highlighted another aspect of female-segregated schools. Like the boys, the girls also appeared to be subjected to similar disciplinary practices and strict rules. However, while the boys overwhelmingly mentioned disciplinary methods as practices aimed at strengthening stereotypical masculinity traits such as strength and toughness, discipline and rigour, the girls mentioned practices that focused on their adherence to modesty behaviour, which was particularly reflected in the control of dress codes. Overall, the boys' disciplinary school practices promote men's assertiveness and leadership in society by emphasising men's future social position, which requires discipline and responsible action. In contrast, girls' modesty, decency, and polite behaviour reflect that women are expected to play a more docile role in society. Sonbol (2003) summarises the impact of the education system on girls as follows:

> The education system in Jordan, the curricula, and the administration of classrooms and schools in general, and the philosophy presented by teachers in the classroom and by-government assigned textbooks all create gender difference and outline functions for women that help keep them in a position of dependency and obedience to fathers, brother, family, and clan (p.119).

Constructing gender is based on discourses of morality, duty, pride, and fear, and it is no different with Jordanian women (Sonbol, 2003, p.119). Participants of mixed FGs discussions (FG3-4, 2019) emphasised that girls in schools must always have their *hijab* in place and their hair not too long. Early-morning inspections are conducted to check that girls have not put on any make-up and nail polish. In some public schools, wearing the *hijab* is compulsory, and as part of a modest dress code, this should only be white. Bright colours are not considered acceptable; girls are encouraged to choose plain colours to be modest and not draw attention to their bodies. Although wearing a *hijab* is not compulsory in all public schools, some women in SSIs and mixed FGs discussions pointed out that girls can be under pressure to follow what is considered the most appropriate female dress code. FG participants (FG4, 2019) agreed that "girls who do not wear white *hijab*, can hear bad words". Laila, a female student, recalled an episode conveying the role of authorities in enforcing norms by publicly sanctioning non-compliant, but total legitimate behaviour:

> One morning, in front of my eyes, in the presence of all students, a school principal slapped a girl who was not wearing the *hijab* because all of her students were going through puberty and getting their periods, so they were all wearing the veil, and she had to do the same (Laila, SSI, 2019).

The principal's powerful act of publicly slapping a girl who did not conform to the normative dress code served as a moral lesson to every schoolgirl, pointing out the consequences of not conforming to the rules, namely public humiliation and rejection. At school, staff and teachers reinforce the message that girls need to keep their respectability within society by balancing the discourse of education and modernity with traditions and culture (Adely, 2004). These findings reveal the school's "regulatory and reproductive role", stressing that school is the primary venue exposing young people to state ideology, an ideology in which gender plays a central role (Adely, 2004, p.373). To teach girls and boys to fit into gender normative, formal institutionalised disciplinary practices such as those described

above are applied, along with informal ones performed by peers, a point to which I will return later.

Same-Sex Peer Socialisation: Bullying and Hegemonic Masculinity

In talking about schools, it is crucial to recognise the role of same-sex peer group practices in encouraging peer conformity to normative gender behaviour. However, displaying conformity to hegemonic gender models in school is a matter of being accepted and allowed to be part of a group; therefore, this conformity can be temporary. Conformity is fostered by the repetition of violent and non-violent practices. As Bishr (FG6, 2019), a male professional, explained, "if a guy has a weak personality, we talk to him and try to change his character to make him stronger…and with time, he will be stronger". However, mostly a deviation from normative gendered behaviour or a lack of identification with hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity can lead to bullying or other forms of physical or emotional violence. Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a male student, confided in me that he was bullied in high school by older classmates for "not being masculine enough" and particularly for being of gracile physical structure and keeping his hair long. Because of the bullying, Moutaz joined the gym and trained hard his muscles until he became the "biggest boy in the classroom" and no one dared touch him. Accounts of severe physical violence occurring in all-boys schools emerged in other conversations with young men, as some admitted to having been bullied themselves or knowing someone who had been bullied. Accounts of sexual abuse of young men also appeared to be a widespread reality in all-male schools. On this topic, a member of UJ's Queen Rania Teacher Academy, stated:

> We have a problem in the local public schools, as older boys harass and bully younger ones, also sexually, and this is a big taboo in Jordan. Schools are segregated and this is why this happens. Unfortunately, these problems are not on the government's table, but we are pushing for reforms as these are the basics (Laila, SSI, 2019).

Schools' violent practices carried out by teachers and students punishing those who do not successfully embody the hegemonic form of femininity and especially masculinity reinforce normative gender and shape gender differences and hierarchies. Bullying has been shown to reinforce hegemonic masculinity, which

includes displaying strictly heteronormative behaviours and traits of physical dominance (Rosen and Nofziger, 2019). Although school and peer socialisation play a role in reinforcing gender norms in adolescents, it is essential to acknowledge that disciplinary practices are then further codified at the level of the law, fixing hegemonic femininity and masculinity and guaranteeing the systemic application of gender norms.[25] However, schools are never as controlled to limit forms of resistance (Adely, 2004). McNay (2000) warns against using a negative paradigm that reduces the subject to a mere recipient of external determination and, by paraphrasing Hans Joas, stresses that practices of violence and exclusion may serve to stabilise identities, but on their own are not basis for identity formation (Joas, 1998, p.15 cited in McNay, 2000, p.77). Although adolescent girls and boys are constantly challenged to comply with dominant masculine and feminine models at school, my findings indicate that their adherence to norms should not be taken for granted. As Adely (2004) notes, schools are sites of gender struggle rather than simply sites of social reproduction. As gender scholars widely recognise, multiple forms of femininities and masculinities co-exist (Connell, 1996; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Rosen and Nofziger, 2019). Alternatives to hegemonic gender models exist, and those find their place to emerge within institutional settings; this renders the school a place of gender struggle. Moutaz (SSI, 2019), the male participant mentioned earlier who was bullied for keeping his hair long, never cut it and resisted pressure to do so from both classmates and teachers. When I asked him why he resisted the social pressure of homologation, he replied that his "age" played an essential role in this, as he was getting older and no longer cared so much about "society's opinion". While his statement may suggest the defiant attitude of a teenager, it also sheds light on the evolving process of young people's subjectivity and agency, which slowly but inexorably finds its way to emerge, shaping individuals' position in relation to dominant discourses.

To conclude, the findings presented in this section show how parents, schools, and same-sex peers socialise gender through different practices. Overall, parents are the first agents of gender socialisation in children, as they can assign them gender-stereotyped tasks and responsibilities. Then, as children grow older and enter

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[25] To further explore how normative femininity in Jordan is fixed at the level of law see Afaf Jabiri's book *Gendered Politics and Law in Jordan: Guardianship over Women* (2016).

elementary school, the school system and same-sex peers complement the family as socialising agents. Here, formal and informal school practices such as gender segregation, teachers' disciplinary methods, and bullying by peers take place, fixing hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Preliminary results show that gender socialisation in households with similar backgrounds is not homogenous. The differences appeared to be due to parental attitudes towards gender roles, the family's own understanding of gender norms, and the material circumstances pertaining to each household. Additionally, young people emphasised their active role in the process of gender identity formation, as they can adopt the role that most suits their personality traits and preferences. Informal spaces functioning as enacted utopias – where gender indoctrination seemed to be paused – emerged parallel to official ones. Moreover, the school proved to be a site of gender struggle as hegemonic gender models were constantly resisted, contravened, and rejected. At the end of this section, a question arises: How have discourses of hegemonic masculinity and femininity and their practices shaped young people's understanding of gender identity? The second part of this chapter explores this query, allowing us to understand how the social influences the personal and how the personal is not entirely defined or constrained by the social.

Exploring Perceptions of Gender Identity, Roles, and Stereotypes

This section investigates young people's perceptions of gender identity, gender roles, and societal expectations, and reflects on the impact of gender socialisation in shaping gendered subjectivities. Drawing on data triangulation from FGs and SSIs, the first part of the following section uncovers gender discourses that circulate predominantly at the societal level, such as gendered traits, body type and shape, and consequently the degree to which young people internalise these discourses. Understanding how hegemonic discourses at the level of society have shaped young people's gender imaginary, helps us to position gender as a lived social relation. The second part examines the responses provided to the two SSIs kick-off questions, namely, "What does it mean to be a man\woman in your society?" and "What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a man or a woman in Jordan?". By analysing responses to these questions, we can capture individual understandings of femininity and masculinity and traditional gender roles. This is further assessed against people's

own experiences of gendered privileges and oppression to uncover other power structures that affect people's lives.

Dominant Femininity and Masculinity Traits, Dress Code, and Body Type

When describing femininity traits, encompassing personality characteristics, dress code, body type and shape, women and men who participated in FGs discussions agreed that society, here intended as mostly men, requires a woman to be: "financially and emotionally dependent on a man", "with no or limited aspirations", and "having as ultimate goal that of pleasing her husband" (FG1-3-4, 2019). All FGs participants (FG1-2-3-4-5-6, 2019) confirmed that society considered women as weaker – intended as more emotional, thus less rational – than men, shy, gentle, and sensitive, and that they should be submissive to men. Most of the young people were aware that these were just societal expectations of women, dictating how a "proper woman" should be to find social acceptance, while these traits did not correspond to the reality of how women are. While all female participants seemed to be aware that women are not, and should not be, weak and submissive, but strong, independent, and not afraid to speak their mind (FG1-2, 2019), some males remarked that "not all girls are cute and sweet, as well as not all guys are tough" (FG5, 2019). Khadija (FG4, 2019), a professional woman who participated in a mixed FG, pointed out that "those discourses are stereotypical! Things are changing and have already changed!", thus, emphasising that we need to pay more attention to shifting notions, rather than keep dwelling on prevailing norms. Regarding dress code and body shape, male and female FG participants agreed that society requires a woman to wear suitable clothes, and overall "look decent", wear a *"hijab* accompanied by long dresses in plain colours" (FG1, 2019). Modesty has not always been defined in religious terms, as a woman's proper clothes should primarily reflect the context she is going to or how religious she and her family are. A prevailing beauty model includes women's body shape being "not too thin or too fat, tall and with white skin" (FG1-4, 2019). Particularly, during a mixed FG discussion (FG4, 2019), both female and male participants agreed that men prefer a girl with white skin and that a girl with dark skin "will be left out".

When describing masculinity traits, participants stressed the importance for a man to be and look strong. The pressure on young Jordanian men to strive for a certain

physique and appearance exceeds that of women. Kandiyoti's (1987) assertion that masculinity is not given (as femininity), but it is a status to be achieved, conquered, and continuously proven, finds confirmation in my research, suggesting that men should prove their potential masculinity through physical appearance. In the words of the young women (FG4, 2019) I met, a man "should be well build and have a beard, and must be very masculine and should not look like a child". The idea that a man should be strong, broad-shouldered, and muscular resonated very often, along with the idea that he should look mature and rational, and that his dress code should reflect these qualities. As a woman's dress code reflects her moral decency, a man's reflects his rationality. Hence, men cannot wear what they want, particularly shorts, and, in the same contexts, especially in rural areas, T-shirts are not well-liked either, because, as some participants (FG6, 2019) admitted, these "are not respectful of the local culture and our society". Other bodily features that men should have include avoiding any femininity attitudes, as this entails the danger of being classified as homosexual, thus the danger of losing the masculinity status. Professional men in a FG discussion (FG6, 2019) emphasised this latter masculinity trait much more than younger male students. Expressly, the former agreed that "a man must walk like a man, his haircut should not be girly, and he should not have long or dyed hair", otherwise, "we judge them as gay". Considering that the predominant feature of masculinity is heterosexuality, gender non-conformists lose their masculinity status if their appearance resembles that of a woman. FGs participants emphasised that there are significant differences between women's and men's dress codes in Amman and the rest of the country, where the male dress code is stricter, not allowing T-shirts and shorts. In a FG discussion (FG4, 2019), male professionals confirmed that "in Amman, the dress code is not so important anymore, as young people adopt all the styles and trends they prefer, like the man bun". Findings confirm that Jordanian men's dress code is as strict as that of women. It follows similar rules, reflecting concepts of appropriateness, modesty, and respectability and varies according to place and circumstances.

Overall, young people agreed that traditional patterns of female and male dress codes and body type are shifting, especially in the urban context of Amman, while dominant gendered personality traits associating women with weakness and men with power persist. A shared understanding of femininity and masculinity implies a

gender hierarchy in which men are seen as dominant and women as subservient. In summary, the findings of this section first prove that women and men are equally exposed to societal pressures to conform to gender norms, and secondly that both are profoundly aware of societal expectations of gender and remarkably highlight the difference between societal expectations and their own. Thereby, young people underline the socially constructed and thus changeable feature of gender identity, and by openly distinguishing themselves from this, they enable us to acknowledge and further explore their re-definition of gender identity. The following section confirms this preliminary finding by triangulating the FGs discussions results presented above with the responses provided to the SSI kick-off question: "What does it mean to be a man\woman in your society?". This, while portraying Jordanian young women's and men's degrees of pressure to conform to gender norms, helps us to clarify to the extent to which gender norms have been internalised to shape one's perception of gendered self.

What Does it Mean to Be a Woman in Jordan?

Abeer, a 21-year-old student, describes how she feels as a woman in Jordan as follows:

> Society makes you feel a certain way and pressures you to conform to a certain model. This pressure comes from the media, your colleagues, or your tutor. They all say things like, "if you are a woman, you can't do this". Some women say in public, "close your legs, don't sit like that", or they fix your clothes for you. You feel watched all the time by everyone. When you walk down the street, you know that someone is ready to tell you how you should behave as a woman, what you should do and what you should not do (Abeer, SSI, 2019).

What stands out most in Abeer's words is the emphasis on the role of society as significant source of pressure on women to conform to gender norms. Society can be defined as a group of individuals who live by a set of norms and rules, who are bounded by a general degree of conformity to these rules, and whose adherence to these rules is reinforced by other actors, including peer community members and ideological state apparatuses (ISA), such as schools, teachers, religion and the media. As theorised by the French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser, ISA are soft-powers implicated in the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies at societal level ensuring the

status quo, which in Marxists ideology entails the dominance of the bourgeoisie and the subordination of the proletarians. Interestingly, in the words of my participants, it is not the family, defined in scholarly debates as the basic unit of Arab societies (Krauss, 1987; Barakat, 1993), that is considered as the primary source of pressure, but society and its related '*adat* (habits) *w taqalid* (traditions, practices, the way things are done). Society functions as a vigilant guardian against non-normative gendered behaviour, constantly correcting the perceived misbehaviour of its members. In this way, social order is maintained and the status quo is preserved. In *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison,* first published by Michel Foucault in 1975, the French philosopher examines the evolution of power through centuries. Drawing on the history of the evolution of the prison system, Foucault analyses mechanisms of social control enforced by power structures. Specifically, Foucault's conceptualisation of how the surveillance system in prisons ensures discipline among inmates and keeps them under control without enforcing physical punishment appears useful in analysing Abeer's statement of feeling "watched all the time by everyone". Being watched works as a deterrent effect and influences people's conformity to social norms out of fear of being judged. Female respondents claimed that conformity to prevailing models of femininity is driven by the need to avoid being judged by negative labels, such as being labelled as a "bad girl", a label that consequently affects the family's reputation throughout the community. Rula Quawas (2017) examines the meaning of "badness" and how some women who disrupt norms to bring about social justice and change are often labelled as "bad". According to Quawas (2017, p.27), many women continue to accept socio-cultural gender conditions to avoid the stigma of being judged negatively by society and thus being categorised as "bad". Quawas (2017, p.27) defines badness as "a moral and cultural category to impugn a woman's reputation and call into question her sense of propriety and fitness as a member of the community". Society enforces and reinforces gender norms by exerting pressure through various means, such as labelling women who adopt unconventional, non-normative behaviour, as this could jeopardise the accepted social order. In the words of my female respondents, the most recurrent verbs describing social pressures to adhere to gendered values and norms are respectively to "judge" and to "blame". Ruba (SSI, 2019), a 31-year-old successful woman, said, "a woman is often blamed for her mistakes, even by her close friends and mostly if she is a staying-at-home mother. Society decides what

she can or can't do". Lama (SSI, 2019), a first-year BA student, further confirmed, "whatever wrong a woman does, she is blamed for it. If a sister and a brother do the same thing, the sister is blamed more just because she is a woman". Yara (SSI, 2019), a 19-year-old student, added further nuance to this topic by highlighting how women, who are seen by society as primarily responsible for raising their children, are blamed for their children's mistakes; moreover, she also stated, "society judges women negatively when they demand their right to work and study".

When society sets gender boundaries, young women and men determine the most appropriate strategies to navigate through them. These strategies are often situated within the framework of socially acceptable norms and values, and by complying with them, people ensure not to face the negative repercussions of standing against the dominant culture. For example, Amal, a sophisticated upper-class Jordanian student from a Bedouin background, said:

> A woman is a person who should respect rules. She should keep in mind that culture is very dominant in our society. She must follow norms and obey rules to express herself without offending anyone or certain traditions; she has, somehow, to figure things out. Women in Jordan are always on the radar, this can be a disadvantage because we are watched and controlled, but at the same time it is for our own safety. Life is not easy, and it can be threatening at times (Amal, SSI, 2019).

For Amal, being a woman in Jordan means respecting the gendered rules that society put forward. By understanding and abiding by these rules, women can express themselves and safely exert influence within legitimate, socially circumscribed spaces from where their voice and power are not perceived, at least directly, as a threat. The statement that women need to "figure things out" reflects the importance of following gender norms, but also the danger of directly defying those norms. This requires women to find alternative and safer spaces to develop forms of resistance that make them less visible and slip under society's radar. A radar that is not necessarily bad for women, but can function positively. Aaliyah, a 21-year-old student, similarly stated:

> As a woman, I feel like I can do whatever I want. I am a feminist, but not the kind of feminist that says you must take your clothes off or whatever. I

support equality. Nowadays, many girls are feminists, but they don't show themselves because if you speak for your rights, you will never achieve anything. You just have to do things differently. For example, I talk to other girls and try to inspire them (Aaliyah, SSI, 2019).

Aaliyah's argument of "doing things differently" echoes Amal's, as both young women pointed out the importance of resisting, fighting, or advocating for women's rights from a safe and appropriate position where it is possible to generate a real impact. So, in a given society, different strategies are implemented to achieve the greatest possible outcome. Furthermore, Aaliyah's quote highlights the issue of using the highly controversial term "feminism" in a context where it is primarily seen in a negative light. Aaliyah also advocates for women's rights, being careful to disentangle the demands for equality of young women like her from the controversial ones associated with Western feminism.

For most of the women I met, being a woman meant feeling the burden of living up to gendered expectations about women's most appropriate role. For example, Maryam, a 23-year-old MA student, defines gender roles as follows:

> The gender roles associated with you are the burden you carry, along with the societal norms that see women only as a body, as the person who should only take care of the house and the children. Yet, your main goal in this life is to get married, have children, raise them, and take care of your husband. I disagree with this, and I want to be something else (Maryam, SSI, 2019).

Maryam was one of the few students enrolled in the MA programme in Women's Studies at UJ. Shortly after receiving her BA degree in geology, she had to face the harsh reality of Jordan's hiring discrimination. As a woman, she was not eligible to apply for a job in the field of geology. According to Maryam (SSI, 2019), "when it comes to geologists in the job position, they only require men; "It is only about tradition and culture the reason why women are not allowed to enter the field", as she said, "there is no specific law that says that". This discrimination prompted Maryam to deepen her interest in women's studies by enrolling in the MA programme at UJ. Now Maryam dreams of continuing her studies and earning a PhD in Gender Studies abroad. By refusing to be trapped in the conventional gender role

ascribed to women and striving to be different, she found a way to reframe an unwanted gender identity.

Riham, a 32-year-old woman with a well-established career as a project manager, brought different nuances to her experience as a woman in Jordan. In her perception of womanhood, she combines the privilege of feeling protected with the feeling of living in a "big prison":

> As a woman, I feel, in a way, protected. For example, if I have a problem on the street, I know that all the men will gather to protect me. Otherwise, because of the Arab culture and the restrictions on women's freedom and pressures on them, I feel like I am in a big prison. They don't think of a woman as a human being, but only as a female, in a sexual way. Even, in the job, they think, "she is just a woman", so you need to be more aggressive. We cannot live our femininity; we need a man's personality to achieve what we want (Riham, SSI, 2019).

Riham's meaning of womanhood is circumscribed by societal constraints that see women primarily as sexual beings rather than human beings. The former expression stresses the burden of limiting women's role in the family and society to their reproductive role and how widespread this idea is that continue to affect the way society thinks about women and the way women perceive themselves within society. Women need to constantly prove that they are more than just mothers and wives, but to do so, they need to perform masculine traits to gain societal recognition. In Riham's understanding, the need to show supposedly masculine traits is a violation of her right to express her feminine self in the public realm, where feminine often means being weak, unfit for the position, or even not allowed to be there.

Overall, the Jordanian women I met found themselves confined within a gender script ascribing them a specific role, precisely that of caregivers. They overwhelmingly expressed their feeling of being women in their society in highly negative terms. For them, being a woman in Jordan means being constantly on the radar of society, which threatens their own and their family's respectability by labelling them as bad, constantly judging their decisions, and reprimanding their actions when they do not conform to wider expectations. Although social changes have shifted women's role within the public as well as the private domain, society

still perceives women primarily as caregivers. Women feel burdened by these expectations and feel constrained in their ability to be more than that. All the women in my sample felt the pressure of a dominant gender ideology, yet resisted it strongly by rejecting the idea that being a woman means being naturally born to be a mother and a wife.

Although these quotes paint a bleak portrayal of the heavy societal pressure on women in Jordanian society, what about being a man within the same context? Do men feel the pressure of societal expectations as much as women? The following section dwells on how societal expectations affect men's perceptions of manhood, stressing the similarities rather than the differences with women's experiences as gender is a category that affects women and men negatively.

What Does it Mean to Be a Man in Jordan?

Yaser, a 19-year-old man of Bedouin background who was temporarily studying English literature at UJ, said:

> A man has to live up to many expectations. He is supposed to support his family, be manly, and not show his emotions. He must study and work in something acceptable, like medicine, engineering, while anything else is just not okay. He is supposed to become someone; he simply has to. To be considered a man, he must be masculine and show his masculinity. People have expectations of us (men) since we are children. We experience things and they comment on it, by saying, "man, don't do that, they do this" (Yaser, SSI, 2019).

Yaser's words draw attention to the high social expectations men are exposed to from an early age, carrying the dual and interdependent roles of breadwinner in the family and successful man in society. If these roles mirror each other in that a man's ability to provide well for his family largely depends on his academic and professional success, the high social pressure to achieve ideal standards of masculinity is crucial to how men feel and behave in society. The idea of "becoming someone" means that most young men are not free to choose a preferred programme of study without being conditioned by what is considered a socially acceptable profession that promotes a family's upward mobility. In Yaser's case, for example, studying English literature was not acceptable to his family – as a degree in the humanities could not provide

him with the remunerative and prestigious job they expected, so they urged him to enrol in the Jordanian army. Yaser (SSI, 2019) further pointed out the importance for men to "be masculine" and "show their masculinity". For Yaser, young men must conform to a model of masculinity whose characteristics, from body shape to social behaviour, reflect the standard traits of masculinity, such as physical strength, dominance, assertiveness, and lack of emotion. Seif, a 32-year-old dentist, confirmed that the expectation to marry and have children as soon as possible affects men as much as women:

> You are expected to get married and have children as soon as possible, around the age of 25. I completely disagree, because you are too young to make such a decision. Society expects you to be the breadwinner and support your family (Seif, SSI, 2019).

Besides being differently declined into each gender role of either breadwinner or caregiver, this expectation is felt equally heavy by the men of my sample. Although, my male participants would generally admit being privileged in society, the idea that being a man in a predominantly patriarchal society means being largely privileged did not overwhelmingly transpire from my participants' accounts, who instead pointed to the heavy burden of duties and responsibilities they have in family and society. However, contrasting views of men's privileged position in society appeared in some men's narratives. For instance, Raed, a 32-year-old engineer in the Jordanian army, admitted:

> It is hard to be a man in our society. If you think that you have more privileges because you are a man, like to study or travel, that is not true. As men, we have many duties and more obligations, like educating our children, giving them a good life and providing for our wife. Besides, we also have duties for our country, to make it better and modern (Raed, SSI, 2019).

Raed's understanding of masculinity is influenced by his role in the military and reflects a double burden of duties towards family and society, which he perceived as an extension of his own family. He further stressed that his experiences as a man are by no means more privileged than those of women. In fact, as discussed later in Chapter 6, he perceives some of the alleged men's privileges, e.g., freedom of movement, travelling abroad, or even the possibility to marry a foreign partner,

differently due to the restrictions imposed on him as a member of the army. Hence, he considered his sisters more privileged than he is. By contrast, Hatem, a 33-year-old lawyer and former member of the Jordanian military, described his understanding of being a man in Jordan as follows:

> I think that in our society men are more powerful. This is a male society. We live as my grandfather and father taught us how to be a man. I look at my father and see what he did, what he was, how he treated people and how he is like a superman to me, the boss of the family, and I want to be like him (Hatem, SSI, 2019).

As opposed to Raed's understanding, Hatem's words mirror his perception of Jordanian society as a "man's society", as he acknowledges that men are more powerful and privileged than women. His statement sheds preliminary light on the existence of a type of manhood model's legacy passed down through generations of men, encompassing social habits and behaviours that are highly regarded among young men, especially those in the military. This idealised model of inherited manhood, which will be tackled in-depth later, is related to men's perception of social power, social respectability, and reliability within society. To conclude, men in Jordan feel the pressure of societal expectations just as women do. Furthermore, they have to fulfil the role of breadwinner and be successful members of society. Overall, they are aware of being somehow more privileged in society than women, but this put further pressure on men, who often do not feel free to choose who they want to be. Men and women alike struggle for social recognition of being themselves within society and family.

The Flexibility of Gendered Boundaries: Considerations Beyond Norms

The above selection of quotes on young Jordanian women's and men's perceptions of womanhood and manhood are just some of the most significant and striking extrapolated from the data set. The selection of these quotes over many others was dictated by a desire to convey the intense, and sometimes exhausting, level of social pressure that women and men alike face on a daily basis, as evidenced by the choice of similar words and images to describe their feelings towards gender role expectations. Gender roles seemed to be a heavy burden for women and men alike, as social norms seemed to limit everyone's choices, behaviours, and liberties.

Participants' recurring statements such as "men have to *provide* for their wife and children" and "women have to *take care of* their husband and children" reflected societal expectations and society's key role in reproducing them. However, if society pushes for people's homologations by setting value standards for personal and societal success or failure, a tension is created between society and individuals who are aware of being social products and are caught in the struggle between who *they must be* and who *they want to be*. Furthermore, when confronted with the realities of young people's lives, traditional gender roles appeared to be largely fictitious, raising questions about the opportunity of using the controversial term *traditional gender roles* consistently, who is implementing it, under what circumstances and why. It is crucial to recognise that traditional gender roles are understood, negotiated, and enacted according to a person's unique intrapersonal and interpersonal circumstances, and that the reality of gender roles differs significantly from the general way it is portrayed. Indeed, men are not the sole or sometimes even the primary breadwinners, just as women are not the sole caregivers, and keeping reproducing discourses on a traditionality of gender roles does not allow us to read people's multiple, diverse, and constantly evolving gender experiences.

Most of the young people I interviewed and spent time with had working parents who actively contributed to the family income. Some participants' households were headed by women, being those daughters and sons of a Jordanian middle-class who had built their wealth through remittances from their fathers, who had been expatriates in the Arab states of the Gulf, also known as GCC countries,[26] for many decades. These households, besides being characterised by the absence of a male figure, whose dominance and presence are incredibly important for a patriarchal society to function – were headed, guided, and financially and morally supported by a female figure. In these households, gender roles did not find their traditional place but were significantly altered to adjust to an economic reality that is quite common in the Jordanian context, that of migrant workers. Most research participants had well-educated mothers who had worked and contributed to the family income always, or at least at some point in their lives. They had also provided for household

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[26] Gulf Cooperation Council or GCC term denotes a political-economic alliance between six Arab countries bording the Gulf, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

expenses either partially or fully, shared economic burdens in times of hardship, and helped husbands cover household expenses and financially support their children. Regarding the significance of the role of the breadwinner as traditionally attributed only to men, it is crucial to stress the underestimated, unvalued, and unrecognised role of women as breadwinners, which occurs in different contexts and times. Many of the young women interviewed, for instance, were actively involved in providing financial support to their elderly parents and younger siblings while contributing to their own family's expenditures at the same time. As Dina (SSI, 2019), former lawyer in her early thirties and mother of one, said, "my parents rely on me a lot as I help them financially". Economic responsibility towards family members should not only be acceptable when performed by a man, as women often referred to themselves as responsible for subsidising their family and unmarried siblings. In the context of socially constructed gender roles, financial responsibilities are primarily perceived as a male duty, but de facto these responsibilities do not only concern the male gender, as in reality, women also perform them. Laila (SSI, 2019), another woman in my sample, admitted that her parents were "financially, psychologically, and physically dependent on her". She also lived for five years apart from her husband, who went to work in Saudi Arabia shortly after the birth of their first child. She admitted, "I raised my child alone while I worked; I refused to move in with my in-laws and stayed in my apartment, even though it was not acceptable for a woman to live alone". Considerations on women's contribution to family income should not be merely understood in terms of women's shifting role within society. Even though the number of women entering the labour force in the last decades has increased, women's financial responsibilities within their community and the boundaries of so-called traditional gender roles have always been more flexible than is often assumed or even imagined. This consideration should also be made for the role of men in the family and society, which depends on several variables as well as personal and material circumstances.

My findings prove, on the one hand, how society shapes the understanding of traditional gender roles. However, on the other hand, they also show that predetermined categories do not define people and that notions of traditional gender roles are not always applicable to people's lived experiences. This assesses the importance of discussing young people's engagement with gender ideologies rather

than focusing on what role is ascribed to whom. Indeed, both women and men have widely defined gender roles as "burdens", "duties", "societal pressure", and "rules" they struggle to conform to and constantly reconstruct, negotiate, and bargain over. Thus, despite reflecting strict societal expectations of gender roles, this section's quotes are not intended to portray an image of young Jordanians as mere hostages of societal gender norms. On the contrary, they reflect the deep sense of conflict and struggle that these norms evoke in young people, who are always navigating and circumnavigating them according to their desires, dreams, and life purposes.

Overall, the above voices confirm that women and men are equally affected by societal pressure to conform to gender norms. Moreover, gender identity is also shaped by one's private and personal dimensions of experience. This explains why gender traits are not homogenously understood and often exist in parallel with dominant conceptualisations. The following section explores the wider impact that social gender norms have on people's lives by investigating perceptions of privilege, or advantages, and disadvantages of being a man or a woman in Jordanian society. Dwelling on people's different experiences of gendered privilege or oppression, provides the framework for an in-depth discussion of people's agency in relation to the hegemonic structures operating upon them. These, do affect people's lives differently, according to the intersection of gender with other variables that collectively determine the degree of privilege from which one can benefit in a society. McNay (2000; 2004) argues that a phenomenological enquiry of gender oppression serves to deepen our understanding of power relations, making visible the multiple economic, cultural, and political constraints impinging on the daily lives of individuals. For McNay (2004, p.184), "to explain agency, it is not possible to bypass an analysis of experience. But, the understanding of social experience does not offer us a complete perspective in itself". To properly understand the unique complexity of people's actions and interactions, we need to "uncover immanent structures contained in the contingent" (McNay, 2004, pp.184-185). The following section aims to uncover structures of oppression by starting from a phenomenological dimension and then transcending it to provide a general perspective on the implication of power on people's lives.

Unfolding Lived Experiences of Gendered Privilege and Lack Thereof

This section explores participants' perceptions of gendered advantages and disadvantages in Jordanian society, as informed by dominant gender narratives and their own lived experience of privilege or lack thereof. This section draws on participants' responses to my second SSI question exploring advantages and disadvantages of being a woman or a man in Jordan that in triangulation with other relevant SSIs questions and FGs discussions concerning parent-youth issues of conflict verify the validity of the findings. My decision to present the data by narrating men's advantages and women's disadvantages and vice versa simultaneously suits the need to provide an overview of Jordan's gender stratification from the perspective of its young citizens. Furthermore, most of the time, what men mentioned as an advantage was simultaneously mentioned by women as a disadvantage. However, this choice was not intended to homogenise people's experiences on the basis of gender, as preliminary findings reveal contrasting lived experiences of privilege and oppression across gender. If exploring shared notions of male and female advantages and disadvantages provides insight into what gendered rights and freedoms might look like, anchoring these shared perspectives in subjective experiences allows me to assess the heterogeneity of gender experiences. The findings of this section go as far as to argue that people's experiences of oppression or privilege depend on several interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that intersect with, or cross the category of gender, revealing the complex interplay of lived experiences with power structures. These factors include financial independence, class, household arrangements, but most importantly the parent-youth dynamics, material circumstances, and family's understanding of morals, beliefs, culture, or religion. This further allows us to recognise the blurred margins, or fragility, of women's and men's supposed advantages and disadvantages by re-instating people's similarities in experiencing gender oppression and their agency over gender narratives affecting their lives.

The data presented so far indicate the importance of a family's own understanding of morals, beliefs, and traditions, which, among many other aspects, influences women's reputation and determines how gendered, the experiences of my female and male participants will be. I investigated this point further by analysing the clear

contradiction that appeared in women's accounts of their families not minding them coming home late at night, or even living on their own, mostly when abroad.

For some families, concerns about protecting girls' reputation take a back seat to the high social esteem that a daughter who graduate abroad is held in. For instance, Amal (SSI, 2019), the female language student quoted above, who represented a quite unique example among my female participants for the strict rules her father imposes on her, including a curfew at 5 pm, said, "my father wants me to be a professor, and surprisingly, he agrees on me pursuing my education abroad, either in Europe or the US. He wants me to make him proud". Unlike Amal, Farah (SSI, 2019), one of my female student participants, told me the story of her sister, who had to give up her PhD offer in the US, so, she said, "my sister was very disappointed when my mother forbade her to travel to pursue her education dream and felt like not doing her PhD anymore". In Amal's case, the decision as to whether she was allowed to move abroad to study was up to her father, while in Farah's sister's case it was up to her mother. This sheds light on the role of both parents, not exclusively the father, in preventing the daughter's (or sons') freedom. Furthermore, in Farah's sister's case, her mother had the final say in not allowing her older sister to move to the US where she had been offered a PhD scholarship, even though her father agreed to her going abroad. Farah's mother's decision about her daughter's future education was based on the assumption that her daughter – as a woman – could not cope with the responsibility of living on her own. As Farah further revealed with a heavy heart:

> After two months, my mother let my brother travel to the US for work. He didn't even have a degree, and he stayed there for three months, then he came back home. When I asked her why she let my brother go and not my sister, she said because he is a man and can handle responsibility. Maybe your sister can go when she gets married (Farah, SSI, 2019).

The idea that Farah's sister's inability to study abroad could be circumvented once she marries denotes how the issue of freedom of movement is related to one's family's own understandings of moral behaviour and female respectability, along with beliefs regarding the circumstances under which this might be compromised. Furthermore, Amal's and Farah's contrasting experiences of freedom of movement illustrate how a family's moral understanding may transcend considerations of

religion or religiosity, ethnicity, or class. In fact, Amal can go abroad even though her father is very religious and restricts her freedom of movement on a daily basis, while Farah's sister cannot, even though her freedom in Jordan is not restricted and she does not have very religious parents. These girls' stories also confirm the inadequacy of drawing conclusions based on social class, as both girls come from a middle-class background and their fathers work abroad. Similarly, considerations concerning ethnicity can be discarded, as Amal has a Bedouin background while Farah has Palestinian rural origins. What could shed more light on both families opposite decisions is instead each family's aspirations for social mobility and the parents' specific expectations of their daughters, which in Amal's case meant becoming a professor.

Men's Advantages, Women's Disadvantages

When asked about the advantages of being a man, some male professionals stated, "being a man gives you more freedom" (Abdallah, SSI, 2019); "people, generally, trust men more than women" (Anas, SSI, 2019); "as a man you have a bit more of freedom, in travelling, studying, and making personal decisions (Seif, SSI, 2019); "as a man, you have an easier life, you can stay out late or have a girlfriend. As a man, you are not judged" (Kareem, SSI, 2019). Similar and more nuanced perspectives emerged from male students, some of whom asserted, "men have more freedom and job opportunities. It is easier for us to build a career as we have more options" (Abbas, SSI, 2019); "one advantage of being a man is that people respect you because you work, you are a provider, you are responsible, so society respects you. People don't talk down to you, they consider you an equal, even if you are younger" (Ameer, SSI, 2019). Words such as "trustworthy", "respectable", "reliable", and "free" are often used to refer to a man's most perceived advantage in Jordanian society. A man's respectability derives from his ability to successfully fulfil the role of breadwinner. Men are respected because they take responsibility for their family, both extended and nuclear, because they are able to provide a decent life for their wife and children and, if needed, to in-laws and unmarried siblings, and to help a network of friends and co-workers. A man's reliability establishes his power and reputation within society. The more responsibility a man can take on, the more his influence in society increases. This was particularly true for men who hailed from tribal backgrounds and military men, who considered helping as many people as

possible an actual social duty. As relevant literature on the Arab family (e.g., Barakat, 1985; Joseph, 1999; Droeber, 2005) suggests, maintaining close family relations is crucial to the social, political, economic, emotional support and survival of individuals within their society. Indeed, male participants described their social role as defined by an interweaving of duties and responsibilities between family members, friends and colleagues, that create social interdependences, status, and hierarchies. Overall, most men in my sample acknowledged that their lives are somehow easier than women's, given the greater levels of freedom they enjoy. Specifically, men mentioned freedom of movement, behaviour, choice, and greater job opportunities as male privileges. In contrast, women affirmed lacking the same degree of freedom and rights enjoyed by most men. The following sections provide an overview of the gendered dimension of privilege and oppression, but also address the significant contradictions and limitations in the narrative of gendered advantages and disadvantages. Overall, this sheds light on the value of other variables in determining the degree of freedom individuals can enjoy.

Freedom of movement. Most men interviewed defined as a men's advantage that of being able to move freely during the day and the night and, to some extent, also having greater freedom to travel, stay overnight, and sometimes, even to move out.[27] Despite this due consideration, male respondents described it as an advantage that they could leave the house at any time without being asked by their parents where they were heading and with whom, or spend long nights playing cards with friends or driving through the busiest neighbourhoods of Amman. However, these perceived advantages should not be intended as absolute male privilege, as almost all men interviewed who are either financially independent (professionals) or still dependent on their parents (students) admitted that they are subject to forms of limitations to their freedom of movement by their families. The overwhelming majority of male students and professionals stated that they had to obtain their parents' permission for

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[27] In this thesis, when I mention the issue of moving out, I refer exclusively to young women or men who were able to move out of their parental home on their own choice of living independently. This is to be distinguished from the growing number of Jordanian young women and men who move to Amman to work or study. In my sample of participants, a total of four people have moved out either from other parts of Jordan or from abroad to study or work. Mousab, a male professional, moved to Amman from Zarqa to work, and three female students, Laila, Rania, and Zeina, moved to Amman to study at UJ, one from northern Jordan, and the other two from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

a day trip in Jordan and for travelling a few days outside Jordan. Men appeared to have complete freedom of movement only if they had moved out of their parents' home, but this was rarely the case in my sample of participants. Instead, it is possible to suggest that men perceived freedom of movement as a male privilege, as their freedom to be anywhere at any time was not questioned, unlike that of women. This highlights the privileged position of men in the public sphere – and women's exclusion from it – marking the public sphere as a man's sphere and the private sphere as a woman's sphere. As a Business student clearly said:

> As a man, I have much more freedom than a woman. We [men] can go anywhere, anytime, while women cannot. Girls who come from a traditional family like mine have to be home after 6 o'clock. Some families don't care about this, but they are few. In my family no girl is outside the house after 6 pm (Ahmad, SSI, 2019).

Ahmad's words reflect the understanding of most male participants about how gendered freedom of movement can be. An understanding that is also shared by female participants, regardless of age, class, and employment status, as most of them see not being allowed to move freely or as much as men as a female disadvantage. Specifically, most female participants, both professionals and students, either in their early twenties and mid-thirties, stated being subject to more or less strict, night curfews, while few spoke of movement restrictions during daylight hours. Amal, a 22-year-old language student, was the only woman I met who was subjected to strict movement rules by her father. She hailed from a tribal background and had highly-educated parents. Amal (SSI, 2019) described her father as "a rigorous and religious man who has the word in the house", however, she pointed to her father's mentality, rather than his religiosity, as the primary determinant of the rules he imposes on her:

> I should be home by 5 pm, no matter if I have something to do or what the situation is at university. I can't go out or socialise with people. When I am in my house, I can't leave it unless I go out with my family or my mother, or I go to my other relatives. That is a restriction; my brother can go out and come back late at night without being yelled at, and that is the main problem (Amal, SSI, 2019).

Alongside Amal's specific case, most women said to have a curfew set between 8 pm and 9 pm in winter and 10 pm and 11 pm in summer. While many complained

about the night curfew imposed on them – particularly older, professional women – a few, younger ones, said they did not mind it, as they did not feel safe coming home late at night. The perceived danger in staying out when it is dark for a girl – certainly not specific to this part of the world – is the most common reason given by women when explaining why it is better not to go out at night. Similarly, most female and male participants justified women's nights curfews by saying that people do not respect a woman who comes home late at night and judge her as "bad". In considering danger as one of the main reasons for restricting women's movement at night, it is crucial to assert the role of the variables of class and place of residence in easing restrictions on women's movement. The women I met who lived in upper- and middle-class neighbourhoods in West Amman seemed to have more freedom of movement than those who lived in the poorer neighbourhoods of East Amman, not to mention those who lived outside Amman. For the women of West Amman, owning a car[28] was crucial for granting them more freedom of movement at night, as it allowed them to avoid dangerous situations and feel safer when reaching home. For instance, Maryam (SSI, 2019), a 23-year-old student living in a wealthy neighbourhood of West Amman, unlike other young female students, explained, "I don't have a curfew, I can even come home at midnight as long as I tell my parents not to worry". Considerations of protecting women's safety at night are often linked to narratives about women's reputation. Apart from the actual risk of harassment a woman may encounter at night, the importance of avoiding the negative social judgement that often surrounds women who come home late at night appeared to inform most families' decision to impose a curfew on their daughters. Furthermore, this may somehow disregard the importance of class and place of residence for granting women complete freedom of movement. Indeed, women's behaviour in Jordanian society appeared to be subject to heavy social scrutiny. Its consideration matters to families'– more than it does to individuals – as it reflects a woman's reputation, thus, her family's respectability. The following quote from a female student clearly expresses this concept:

> I have a curfew from 10.30-11.00. If I am not home by then, I will have a problem because people think I am a bad girl, a prostitute or whatever if I stay out late. So they do wonder why this girl is coming back at 2 am? What has she been doing (Aaliyah, SSI, 2019)?

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[28] Public transport is not used by women at night because is often considered unreliable and unsafe.

Aaliyah's rationale for her family's imposing a night curfew resonated in many other women's accounts. This pointed to the importance for families to avoid negative judgements about their daughters' behaviour that could compromise their social reputation. Indeed, the importance of keeping women under control so as not to endanger the girl's and the family's reputation was at the forefront of the explanations used to prohibit women from travelling and staying overnight with mixed groups of friends. However, while concerns for women's safety and reputation were the main justifications for preventing women's free movement, for men the only reasons provided for imposing restrictions were family's lack of financial support – when it came to travel – and some perceptions of danger, including abuse of alcohol, drugs, or street violence – when it came to night movements. These preliminary findings were further confirmed in the data triangulation with SSIs discussing intergenerational conflict issues (see Chapter 3) and then practices of creative agency (see Chapter 4).

In Amal's and Farah's sister's stories, parental consent appeared to be crucial in enabling young women to travel abroad for study purposes. However, other narratives, such as those of Rasha and Hala presented below, allow us to shift our attention from parental consent to the role of other variables, particularly employment status and financial independence, in nuancing experiences of gendered privilege and lack thereof, or, more importantly, in examining what enhances young peoples' access to privilege and rights. Some female participants admitted that they would simply inform their parents about their future travel plans without discussing their choices. For example, Rasha, a 24-year-old professional, said:

> I decided to apply for a scholarship to study in Italy. I arranged everything on my own, I got the passport, I applied for the scholarship and then I told my parents that I was going to Italy to study because I had a scholarship. I make my own decisions, and I don't want them to be questioned (Rasha, SSI, 2019).

Similarly, Hala, 23, previously a language student who recently found a job at the Italian embassy, said:

> My dream has always been to go to Italy. And I made it come true. I went there as a solo traveller and nobody could believe it. Society criticised my parents a lot, by saying how they could agree to send their daughter alone to another country. In Italy, I met some friends who were studying there and then I travelled alone to many cities. I speak Italian, and I wasn't afraid. It was fun. I think everyone should have this experience once. When I was still studying, I often asked my mother if I could travel, and she always told me that I couldn't. But then, when I finished university and found a job, I came home one day and told her: mum, I am going to Italy (Hala, SSI, 2019).

Rasha and Hala are both of Palestinian urban origins and share a middle-class background. Rasha is a pious Muslim, while Hala is no longer a believer and has been fighting with her mother to take off her *hijab*. The only relevant characteristics they appeared to share were determination, strong agency,[29] and financial independence status. In many accounts of middle-class Jordanian women and men, it appeared that their actual ability to travel abroad for educational purposes was, primarily, though not exclusively, dependent on receiving some form of financial support, such as a scholarship or grant. For instance, Hala could rely on her salary to travel to Italy, while Rasha had secured a scholarship. The issue of financial independence is much more nuanced than it appears. For instance, in Farah's sister's case, receiving a PhD scholarship did not deter her mother's position to allow her to move abroad. Based on a mother's biased position towards women's ability to handle responsibilities alone, this decision is profoundly gendered as it only affects women. Thus, it is possible to suggest that financial independence is not always enough to grant greater freedom or rights, especially for women. Nevertheless, financial independence can be a decisive factor in strengthening women's agency in negotiating desired life choices.

The idea that sharing broad categories such as *Arab and\or Muslim culture* creates unique experiences often obscures the heterogeneity of Arab and Muslim people's opinions, realities, lifestyles, or ways of thinking. Overall, the way women and men experience gender is diverse and highly subjective, as this appeared to depend mainly on each family's own understanding of morals and tradition. Furthermore, the presence of contrasting experiences across socio-economic, cultural, and religious

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[29] Young people's agency in negotiating parental consent, which has been found to depend on specific parents-youth dynamics, is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

backgrounds suggests that family's own understandings of culture and tradition may depend on the family members' life experiences and opportunities, along with other specific personal and material circumstances that may influence one perception of the world, rather than being based solely on ethnic or class lines. Hala's words, reported below, perfectly convey the most important finding of this section: family's own understandings of morals and beliefs play a crucial role in determining one's multiple experiences of social privileges or discriminations that encompass, but also transcend, the category of gender.

> I do not have many difficulties living my life as a woman in Jordan. The challenges you face as a woman depend on your family. If your family is not very open-minded, you will face many difficulties. My family is open-minded, so I do not have any problems. People will always say something bad about you, society judges a lot, but I don't care (Hala, SSI, 2019).

Freedom of behaviour. Another perceived advantage of men was their ability to deploy a desired lifestyle that did not entirely conform to gender norms. Precisely, this encompassed men's greater freedom to adopt controversial behaviours in public contexts, such as smoking on the street, having a girlfriend, or simply talking to girls in certain environments. Conversely, women considered it as a women's disadvantage to have to hide or change personal habits, such as keeping their voices down or not laughing aloud, due to social perceptions about what constitutes women's appropriate behaviour in public spaces. However, a closer look at the lived experiences of male participants proved that this supposed male privilege of adopting a desired behaviour in public is not unequivocally true for all men. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that men's perception of having more freedom of behaviour than women stemmed from men not being subject to heavy social judgement on the appropriateness of their public behaviour, rather than on men being exempt from behaving appropriately.

Freedom of Choice. Another perceived male privilege included the ability of men to make life choices against parental consent, such as moving out of their parents' home, marrying a chosen partner, or openly dating someone. Seif (SSI, 2019), a male professional who had moved out of his parents' home, admitted, "I moved out of my parental home. For a guy making such a decision is hard, but still possible". A closer

look at men's lived experiences points to the fragility of this perceived men's advantage, as making important life choices, such as the one mentioned above, without parental consent, even if deemed easier for a man, could have consistent repercussions on a man's social, economic, and emotional stability, alienating him from his own community. In this case, however, women complained about not being able to make the same choices as men. Data triangulation with relevant SSI questions exploring women's and men's willingness to contravene family authority in choosing a spouse sheds further light on the actual male privilege to make important life decisions independently. In my sample of participants, the number of men who admitted they would not marry without consent was equally split with those who admitted they would, while among the women, the vast majority said they would not marry without their family's consent. In analysing people's responses more in-depth with the support of further data triangulation, it appeared that women's and men's choice whether or not to disregard the family's authority in matters of marriage largely depends on parent-youth relations and unique family dynamics. The data confirming that women would not marry against their family's consent regardless of being financially independent suggest that financial independence is not the most relevant variable in one's ability to negotiate life choices. Disregarding the family authority can compromise the familial support network, and this could potentially put a woman's life at significant risk of emotional exploitation, as she would be banished from her main emotional support network, the family. This may explain why women are less likely than men to step beyond recognised social boundaries and why women are determined to behave in socially appropriate ways and make the right life choices. It is crucial to note that men who choose to go against family approval may suffer the same consequences, mainly as they may lose links to the community's economic network, social recognition, and respectability. Additionally, further data triangulation confirms this finding, as those who admitted that they would marry without their family's consent were also those who believed that their family would never abandon them, no matter their choices. While the social impact of individual choices and the factors that might influence them will be tackled more in-depth in the following chapter, I intend to emphasise now that confident personal choices, even if difficult, are still perceived as easier and possible for men, albeit relatively, than for women.

Job Opportunities. Many of my male respondents pointed out their advantage of having more job opportunities and easier access to leadership positions than women. The idea that the public sphere is where a man belongs was not only confirmed by men's greater freedom of movement, behaviour, and decision-making, but also made remarkably clear by men's perception that they are favoured over women in most professions. Most men I met identified it as a male advantage that they are trusted more than women in the workplace. For instance, Anas (SSI, 2019) admitted that he is more valued in his profession as a dentist than his female colleagues as "people think a woman cannot work as a dentist because she can concentrate, so many do not allow women to treat them". Although Jordanian women have successfully entered science university programmes since decades, negative views about women not performing well at traditional male jobs persist. Indeed, most male participants admitted that people still believe that men perform better than women in certain professions.

Women's access to STEM fields of study (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in the Arab world has proven to be extremely successful (e.g., UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, the percentage of female graduates in STEM fields in the Arab world is higher than in other parts of the world. In Jordan, women make up 64 per cent of students in the fields of natural science, medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy (Dajani, 2018). To explain this phenomenon, called the STEM Paradox, several reasons should be considerate. Specifically, my findings show that students, both female and male, tend to enrol in science programmes at university to meet their family's expectations of the perceived higher status of the sciences over the humanities, which could guarantee social mobility. This expectation is also related to the perception of better employability in science-related professions in Jordan, along with the idea that these professions could offer their sons and daughters the opportunity to find more prestigious and financially rewarding employment. Adely's (2012a) remarkable work has already demonstrated the importance of education in enhancing women's "marriageability" prospects, which is strictly related to a family's social mobility and the economic power ensured by a daughter's marriage to a better-off partner. The meaning of education has taken on a new significance in relation to patterns of social values, family status longings and concerns. In this regard, my research argues that if a specific use of education patterns has been established to

maintain and reinforce gender hierarchies and power relations, this should not diminish the power of its re-appropriation by both young women and men who want to use it to step beyond conventional narratives and generate new opportunities for themselves. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates (O'Neill, 2019), youth unemployment rate in Jordan in 2019 (when fieldwork was conducted) has risen to 36.7 per cent, while according to the DoS, among graduates, the unemployment rate is 78 per cent for women and 26 per cent for men with a bachelor's degree (BA) or higher (Turnbull, 2019). The perception that graduates within science-related fields are more likely to find a job, and better-paid ones than their counterparts in the humanities who struggle to find a low-paid job in a saturated market, is at the forefront of what drives many girls towards this choice of university programmes. Young women are aware that economic power is crucial for their empowerment, and a STEM degree can enhance their chances of success in the job market.

While men pointed to their advantage of having a social reputation for performing better in a job than women or holding greater accountability in decision-making positions, women, instead, pointed to their disadvantage of being constantly undermined, disrespected or not trusted – by society generally and male colleagues specifically – in the workplace. Notwithstanding the country's significant achievements in narrowing the gender gap in education, most women interviewed mentioned gender discrimination in hiring decisions as a significant disadvantage for women. As previous studies on Jordanian women's participation in the labour force highlight (Sonbol, 2003; Peebles et al., 2005), gender-based discrimination is inherent in the language of labour law and social policies reflecting traditional understandings of gender roles. Moreover, gender stereotypes based on supposed gendered skills, including higher job performance predictions for males' employees, have been a significant concern when analysing the reasons for gender discrimination in the workplace. As previously mentioned, Maryam (SSI, 2019), after she earned a BA degree in geology faced gender discrimination in entering the workforce, as her field of studies job advert stated "man-only". Dina (SSI, 2019), 31, former lawyer, complained about her male colleagues' lack of consideration for her ability to perform well while working at the Jordanian Civil Court. Her job experience as a lawyer was negative, as she admitted that she did not feel free to

express her opinion or "defend anything or anyone", and not even in her choice of clothes, which could only be "long and white". Dina's disappointment as a female lawyer was so great that she decided to leave the Jordanian court, as she said, "as a woman, I didn't see myself there". At the time of the interview, Dina, was working hard for landing her dream job as a TV presenter, a job that would have empowered, rather than limited, her radiant personality.

Another female participant previously mentioned, Laila (SSI, 2019), confided in me the tough time she had in the workplace and the stereotypes she faced when proposing ideas and voicing her opinions among fellow staff. Furthermore, Laila opened up a conversation about harassment in the workplace and the struggle to be heard and to deal with men who see female colleagues as merely sexual beings, too weak to be taken into consideration. Laila proudly confided in me how she had managed to circumvent unequal gender hierarchies by setting boundaries and powerfully enforcing her decision. It is, she said, "when you tell them, in front of their eyes, that you are not a sexual being, but a person with a budget and a plan to be implemented", that men might start listening. Similarly, other female professionals in my sample admitted that women face discrimination first in entering the workplace and then in showing and, somehow, proving that they deserve to be there, as they have the skills and abilities to perform as well as men. The words of Rula, a 33-year-old graphic designer, reported below, perfectly convey this common feeling among Jordanian female professionals:

> Sometimes I feel sad because there are many disadvantages of being a woman in Jordan. You still hear some men saying, "we are better", "whatever you do, you are still a woman". Men have an ego and think they can work, while you must stay at home with your children, cook and clean. In business, politics, governmental jobs, men are usually considered better than women. And we, women, don't have the power to prove them wrong. Even if you have achieved a lot, they try to do something to disappoint you and make you feel that you are not good enough. Sometimes they start teasing you, telling you that they know better and you can't get it. Men don't listen and think they know better (Rula, SSI, 2019).

In analysing how gender bias affects hiring decisions and employment performance, it emerged that these biases were sometimes perpetuated by women who had themselves experienced discrimination in the workplace. Dina (SSI, 2019), the

former lawyer mentioned above who had experienced discrimination at court, admitted that she did not trust female judges, "because they are very emotional". In Dina's opinion, female judges cannot be trusted as they follow their emotions rather than the law. What is interesting here is that so-called feminine traits such as sensitivity, and masculine ones such as assertiveness, could be further perpetuated by women working in unconventional female professions such as law. Thus, people might perceive masculinity and femininity traits, in Bourdieu's doxic mode, as inherent to human nature and not as cultural constructs.

A similar view of women in law appeared in another woman in whose house I conducted observations. Zeina (FO4, 2019), an engineer in her early 30s, contrary to her husband who wished her daughter to become a lawyer, like him, strongly opposed this expectation towards their daughter as she said that "women lawyers are practically men in females' clothes. They talk and act like men and lose their femininity". Zeina further justified her opinion by saying that she wanted to protect her daughter's psychological wellbeing, as women are more emotional and therefore cannot handle the emotional strain of this profession.

The stories described above represent women's struggle for recognition in job positions, where strong personalities and firm opinions, essential for career success, are often associated only with the male gender and, if displayed by women are perceived distortedly, as Yara (SSI, 2019), a young female student noted, "women are not considered assertive, but rude".

Other stories, however, reflect different opinions and show how multiple interpretations coexist on a specific issue. For instance, some male participants admitted that they had experienced hiring discrimination themselves in regard to particular job positions. Ahmad (SSI, 2019), a student in the Business faculty, believed that his female colleagues could easily find a job "because they are pretty", and that many companies prefer to hire women as they value physical appearance. A similar point was made by Rasha (SSI, 2019), a female participant mentioned above. Her story is quite striking as her gender discrimination intersects with her faith. Rasha was a Muslim girl who wore a nice coloured *hijab* matching her loose, Western-like clothes. As a Muslim believer, she decided not to shake hands with

men as this made her uncomfortable. Rasha had a strong character and had travelled and lived alone abroad. During her interview, she first raised the worldwide issue of the gender pay gap when she admitted that, at her first job experience, she was paid less than her male colleagues. "When I discovered that the men were getting 500JD per month, while I was only getting 360JD, I realised that I was treated differently in society just because I am a woman", while at home, she continued, "my parents never told me you can't do this because you are a girl". In addition to that episode, she recalled other experiences of discrimination she had experienced, this time as a Muslim woman in a Muslim-majority country:

> I wear the veil and don't shake hands with men; this can cause problems in some jobs. For instance, my previous manager brought only beautiful girls to hotel meetings and conferences, girls who couldn't speak English, and he never chose me. In the French embassy, they don't hire veiled girls, and in the past, also in the Italian one. I don't want to be chosen or seen just for my appearance and beauty, but for my qualities and skills. I am Muslim and I don't shake hands; however, this does not prevent me from interacting with men and doing my job well (Rasha, SSI, 2019).

Rasha's story goes beyond the issue of the impact of appearance in hiring decisions, as it shows how some companies, but also institutions and political organisations with high public visibility, committed to conveying a distorted concept of "modern", "successful", "open-minded" country, only hire women who have a supposedly Western-like appearance and display supposedly Western behaviours. Thus, Islamic-related attitudes, such as not shaking hands with men or adhering to an Islamic dress code, can be problematic and bring about discrimination against Muslim women in Muslim countries.

The discourse on men's advantages illustrates how men's perceived advantages in society are conversely perceived by women as their disadvantages. It is interesting to note how constraints on women's freedom of movement, behaviour, and choice are justified by recurring to narratives such as that of danger, which seems intrinsically inherent to such experiences. The impending danger that awaits women who wish to step beyond the boundaries of the normative functions as a warning, a vital caveat to maintain the social gendered order intact. In the next section, I consider the reverse case highlighting how gender narratives imposed on women

reverberate in their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in Jordan.

Women's Advantages, Men's Disadvantages

Feeling protected. Nada (SSI, 2019), a female professional, when asked to name an advantage of being a woman in Jordan, simply stated, "men treat you well because you are a woman". Like Nada, many of the young women interviewed identified as a woman's advantage that of feeling protected or somehow pampered by men. As life could be threatening, women seek protection from men, and men offer protection to women because they are perceived as physically weak and therefore in need of protection. This form of protection is not only offered and sought by male relatives who will protect a female family member if something happens to her, but also by other men on the street or in the neighbourhood who might come to assist her if she needs help. Women perceived the idea of being protected by men as an advantage, although this concept could suggest and perpetuate women's dependence on men. The apparent contradiction is that women seek help from men to protect themselves from the danger posed by other men. This discourse perpetuates the narrative of men as saviours, rescuers of women who are too weak to protect themselves and in perpetual need of help. Men protect and save women and therefore they can claim rights over them. This would explain, for instance, how women who are harassed on the street and rescued by other men around them can be harassed again, as those who defended them expect something in return. Besides being glad that someone protected them, some female participants in SSIs expressed concerns about how genuine some men's behaviour could be, as they explained, "some men would ask your phone number or offer to drive you home". Similarly, when a female relative is harassed, the male relative who comes to help her does not appear to be primarily concerned about her wellbeing, but about protecting his own respectability from other men from whom, his honour has been diminished. This issue sheds light on the perception of men as a threat in gender-mixed environments, as they can cause tensions; moreover, this is often the reason why some public places prohibit access to groups of single men, such as shopping malls or the UJ campus, where male students can enter only after being checked by guards at the university gates. Indeed, some of the male students interviewed considered it as a clear men's disadvantage that of not being able to freely access some public places, contrary to women, who

saw it as an advantage. One man raised the issue that sexual harassment affecting men is not taken seriously by the police. The fact that women are more likely to be harassed can lead to discrimination against men who are being abused. Anas (SSI, 2019), a professional man, complained that police officers often ignore and dismiss complaints of sexual harassment from men by simply saying, "how come you are a man and come to complain about a woman?". The idea is that women cannot, due to their weak nature, pose a threat to men.

Financial responsibilities. One of the most mentioned advantages of being a woman in Jordan was that of not having financial obligations towards the family. Many women I spoke to admitted that they felt privileged because, unlike men, they could keep their salary and did not have to contribute to the family expenses unless they wanted to. Mais, a 27-year-old, recently married, said:

> A woman's advantage is that of being able to rely on a husband for financial support, if the husband is good enough. If you work, you can keep your money, and you do not have to buy anything for the house or the children unless you want to. Sometimes I do buy things, why not? Thank God, my husband is very good. So, I can do as I like (Mais, SSI, 2019).

The idea that a woman can rely on her husband for financial support, which draws from an understanding of a man's primary role as breadwinner, has been enormously challenged by the social and economic changes of the last decades. The new social and economic realities forged by women's increasing education opportunities and subsequent access to the labour market brought about changes in the performance of traditional gender roles but did not do much in changing the perceptions of traditional gender roles. In Mais' understanding, a woman can rely financially on her husband, and for a woman contributing to the family expenses is an "option", "if the husband is good enough". The quote reflects young people' shifting gender role expectations as a result of the country's economic hardship and a possible misalignment between women's and men's expectations. Many of the young men interviewed defined a wife who is willing to help them financially as a good wife. In contrast, women often defined a husband who allows them not to contribute to family expenses as a good husband. While women bragged about being able to rely on a man for their livelihood, men instead complained about the burden of having to carry alone most of the family's financial responsibilities. Men most cited disadvantage concerned the

social responsibilities laying over their shoulders, from being solely financially responsible for the cost of marriage to the pressure to succeed on a personal and social level at all costs, even at the expense of their own ambition, as well as the pressure to find a good job, buy a car and a house, and financially support their new family, parents, and younger siblings. All this in a country in economic stagnation with high living costs and high unemployment rates, shortage of jobs and resources. Jordan's current economic crisis has helped to change gender role expectations among young couples. Indeed, many men confirmed that they would prefer to marry a woman who works and is willing to contribute to the family's expenses. Overall, the above quote from Mais highlights that gender roles, while still clearly demarcated, can also be dismantled or re-arranged when needed, either by the man, the decision-maker, or, if not otherwise requested, by the woman, if she is willing to acknowledge the struggle men go through. All these issues will be further discussed in Chapter 5 and 6.

Job benefits. Women's flexible working hours and generous vacations, holidays, and time-off are other elements deemed as women's advantages, often associated with women having the opportunity to balance their job with their private and family life. However, this tendency for women to benefit from an amenable work system, which mainly pertains to the Jordanian public sector, may reveal a somewhat grim reality. Women are helped to prioritise their primary role as mothers and wives as opposed to men, and this reflects how women are treated as guests in the public realm, whose role and importance is not as necessary as that of men. This element, which explains why women have fewer professional responsibilities, perpetuates and reinforces normative gender roles. For their part, some men in leadership positions, although the overwhelming majority acknowledged being privileged in the workplace, pointed to the disadvantage of not being completely free of societal expectations when they are hired. In this regard, a male professional, Anas (SSI, 2019), said: "I cannot hire a male assistant or secretary, as people will not consider me professional enough if I don't hire a woman for this kind of work".

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that half of my female participants struggled to name an advantage of being a woman in Jordan, firmly asserting that there are no advantages of being a woman in Jordan. In contrast, only one man had

a similar perception. Contrary to the previous section, the impact of variables in shaping women's and men's multiple experiences of either advantage or disadvantage did not emerge clearly. However, by no means it can be suggested that the women I met, let alone all Jordanian, educated women, benefit from all the advantages mentioned above. What, instead, these narratives convey is that perceptions of women's advantages and men's disadvantages largely reflect the benefits and downsides of gender roles. Ultimately, these findings provide a snapshot of Jordan's gender stratification system with its entrenched inequalities and contradictions at play.

The Blurred Margins of Gendered Rights and Freedoms

Although the gendered stratification of Jordanian society cannot be questioned – as most male participants stressed "men have an easier life, while women struggle more" – the analysis of gendered advantages and disadvantages through people' lived experiences allows us to say that most of the privileges mentioned have rather blurred margins. The findings on people's experiences of privilege and\or oppression revealed that freedoms and responsibilities vary from person to person according to the intersection of different elements. This allows us not to homogenising people's experiences based only on the category of gender. Women's and men's experiences of oppression go beyond the category of gender and are shaped by their families' own understandings of culture, tradition, and morals. This variable indeed appeared to outweigh in importance other variables such as ethnicity, class, and place of residence. Furthermore, variables such as employment status and economic independence seemed to be crucial for determining young people's agentive capabilities. Perceptions of gendered privilege, as well as perceptions of womanhood and manhood, are driven by a combination of external forces such as gender-role socialisation, internalised dominant narratives of gender circulated by the media or promoted by formal education institutions, and personal experiences that reflect people's heterogeneity (Settles et al., 2008). If framing the debate about women's and men's advantages and disadvantages in terms of their own perceptions helps to recognise the blurred boundaries of gendered privilege, which differ from person to person and change according to the intersection of various elements, they also reflect important realities, such as women's discrimination in the workplace and men's greater consideration in the public sphere. Also, for both genders, perceived

disadvantages reflect the burden of complying with fixed gender roles and the pressure to balance society's and family's expectations with their own. Advantages, instead, if related to young adults' personal freedom, often reflect economic realities and specifically – as I prove in the following chapters – financial dependence or independence from parents and, sometimes, young adults' access to independent housing. Above all, the family emerged as the most crucial factor influencing gendered experiences, as each family's understanding of culture, morals, and beliefs determines the extent of constraints the *gendered self* may experience.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter have revealed the role of various social agents in producing normative notions of masculinity and femininity and fixing the gendered status quo dogma. The social construction of gender identity has been retraced by focusing on the role of each agent in the life trajectory of the individual, from early childhood to adolescence. The role of the family in early children's socialisation of gender appeared to be crucial, as parents introduce children to gender roles through differentiated gendered assignments, shaping individuals' future understanding of their role within family and society. A significant finding illustrated that participants' childhood was primarily characterised by outdoor play. However, the overall influence of gendered toys on children should be further investigated as, in this research, it did not emerge clearly. The street was identified as a heterotopia, where boys and girls interacted joyfully, relatively free from gendered power relations and parental supervision. For young girls and boys, the street represented a fraction of time when gender indoctrination, carried out first at home and then at school, was temporarily interrupted. After parents, young people's main socialising agents were same-sex peers and the school system. The school emerges as a space where adolescents are guided towards gender normative. Here, deviant behaviour is not tolerated and is institutionally punished, both by the institution itself and by peers, whose practices of physical and emotional violence against peers who do not conform to hegemonic gender traits are, if not officially allowed, at least, not completely discouraged. Schools disciplinary practices serve as a warning for girls and boys not to drift from the gendered script that posits hegemonic femininity and masculinity as idealised models to which everyone should aspire to find ultimate social acceptance and personal fulfilment. Particularly, school and peer groups

reinforce features of hegemonic masculinity, i.e., strength, toughness, responsibility, and demanding work, and femininity ones, i.e., weakness, empathy, and emotion.

Further analysis of the meanings assigned to womanhood and manhood established how dominant discourses shape young people's gender identity. Society's pressure to conform to traditional gender roles is defined as a "burden" acting equally heavy on women and men alike. Many of the people I interviewed clearly stated that they disagree with traditional gender roles and distance themselves from them. Moreover, people's experiences of performing non-normative gender roles revealed the actual non-applicability of traditional and essentialist notions of gender roles in people's real lives. This supports my argument that traditional gender roles and normative femininity and masculinity are merely constructed notions that function as ideals that people are taught they need to aspire to in order to achieve personal and social fulfilment.

The discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of having been assigned to gender normative, on the one hand, confirmed men's privileged status over women. Nevertheless, on the other hand, it highlighted how diverse, deeply personal, and unexpected gendered experiences can be. The blurred margins of advantages and disadvantages leave room to uncover other forms of power relations, contextualising the variegated nuances of social inequality and systemic oppression that affect one's experience of oppression or privilege beyond the homogenising categories of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, or place of residence. An intersectionality lens confirm that individuals face different degrees of constraint depending on personal and material circumstances which encompass but also go beyond gender. Indeed, as people's heterogeneity of experiences goes beyond the category of gender, women's and men's experiences of oppression are by no means unified. Specifically, participants identified families' unique understandings of culture, traditions, morals, and beliefs as critical in determining their gendered experiences. Recognising the relevance of one's family's ideological constraints allows me to contextualise my participants' agency, situating it, rather than limiting it, within its relevant context, namely the family one, where young people's process of becoming agents begins. Ultimately, this allows us to understand agency, and experience, in relational terms, rather than in an ontological sense as the grounds of social being (McNay, 2004, p.175). In this

sense, agency is not merely individualistic, fixed, or dichotomist. Rather, it is unique, as unique are the contextual and relational dynamics in which it is formed; it is never fixed, as never fixed are people's reasons behind making certain choices or taking certain actions; it is changeable, as changeable are the degrees of power operating upon them during a life course. Agentive dynamics are heterogeneous and escape generalisations, but to understand them, contextualisation is crucial. The next chapter explores the unique dynamics of Arab families within which the relational self is born, constructed, and enmeshed through its lifetime. This allows us to understand desiring subjectivities and their actions beyond the boundaries set by ideological, structural, or systemic constraints.

CHAPTER 3

Forging the Self: Relational Dynamics within Family Contexts

Introduction

This chapter sheds light on the engaged, active, and complicated work of *forging the self* in the context of the "intimate relationality" of Arab families, where families become sites of personal and political struggle (Stack, 2003). It draws on Joseph's notion of the relational self, enmeshed in complex family relationships, to understand young people's emerging subjectivities and agency as relational and context-specific. Joseph's work aligns with my research approach, as she challenges the applicability of Western models of the self in the study of Arab families and theorises a "relational self" that is formed in the context of intimate family relationships and is culturally and historically grounded (Joseph, 1999, p.2). The notion of "relational connectivity" or "relationality" conceptualises the unique sense of "self" of Arab family members, characterised by "fluid boundaries" rather than "bounded" ones, in which the individual's quest for connectedness with the family takes precedence over the continuous search for independence and autonomy typical of some Western contexts (Joseph, 1993a, p.468). Here I argue that the relational self of the individual is embedded in a unique family dynamic that is diverse, fluid, and changing throughout the life cycle. Unlike Joseph, however, I do not view these relationships as limited to the reproduction of patriarchy. Indeed, as she states in her latest work (2018), patriarchy may or may not enter Arab families. In this research, family dynamics are viewed as dependent on a variety of personal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors that shape parent-youth unique relationships and may support or constrain young people's agentive capabilities. Paying attention to the intimate dynamics between family members contributes to overturn entrenched understandings of kinship relationships as characterised by strict hierarchies and one-sided top-down power relations. Therefore, familial relationships are not necessarily patriarchal in the sense that they tend to reproduce gendered and age-based hierarchies. Moreover, the fluidity of the self indicates a great deal of struggle within family contexts due to the continuous endeavour to find and maintain connections between family members.

Drawing on my questions from SSIs exploring parent-youth relationships, this chapter is structured to first identify the factors that shape young people's unique

relationships with their parents in order to understand the possibilities for either support or limitations of their actions. It then examines parental expectations of daughters and sons as they transition into adulthood to establish how gendered, fluid, and changeable parents' expectations can be. This serves to preliminary assess the convergence or divergence of parental and youth expectations helping me to gauge the possible existence of a value conflict, as divergent expectations can inform us of more significant, ongoing, ideological shifts between older and younger members of society. The contrast between young people's expected and desired life trajectories serves to identify intergenerational conflict issues – or IGCI – that arise between young people and their parents as the former attempt to redefine the meaning of dominant gendered ideologies. In this sense, I interpret IGCI as the main battlefield where hegemonic notions of gender collide with subjective and emerging identities, highlighting young people's redefinition of existing gendered boundaries and new sets of values. Value conflict expresses the constant and silent friction between the family and the individual and presents families as sites of disruption of gendered status quo ideologies. In this sense, families become interesting sites to explore that function not only to re-produce but also to disrupt society. Finally, this chapter presents the *meanings co-optation* as the most efficient creative aspect of agency that enables individuals to effect broader change.

Exploring Family Dynamics: Parent(s)-Youth Complex Bond

This section investigates the complexity of family dynamics by identifying three factors that influence young people's relationship with one or both parents. In this way I can first establish the heterogeneity of family dynamics by breaking through the prevailing notions of the hierarchical relationship between mothers and fathers with daughters and sons, and then assess the family dynamics that tend to support or constrain young people's agency. This sets the stage for an in-depth analysis of the agency dynamics of young Jordanian women and men.

A study on adolescent-parent dynamics conducted by Sahar Al-Tawila, Barbara Ibrahim, and Hind Wassef (2003) in the context of economic and social change in Egypt, identifies parents' different experiences and education as important determinants of a generational gap. Conflictuality between parents and adolescents – determined by agents of change such as schooling, mass media, vicinity to urban

realities – have exposed the youth to different experiences to those of their parents, leading them to question traditional patterns of gender roles and models (Al-Tawila et al., 2003, pp.215-216). Similar conclusions can be drawn for the Jordanian context, but I argue that while societal changes provide a better understanding of generational attitudes change, they certainly do not provide us with all the answers. For instance, although one cannot deny the significance of education in widening the ideological gap between generations, my data show that this element in itself is not an indicator of change. Instead, this must be considered in conjunction with other factors. Moreover, most of my participants clearly distance themselves from the views of their parents, even when the latter have reached the highest level of education. In this research, the factor of higher education was not a significant indicator of higher affinity between young people and their parents. On the contrary, three other factors were identified that define the affinity of an individual with either both parents or one of them: *alignment and affinity of views and attitudes*, *socialisation style,* and *parents' support of individuals' personal development*. It is suggested here that these three factors together determine the nature of young people's *type of relationship with parents* (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) and overall determine their agentive capabilities. Indeed, these capabilities develop in specific family contexts – characterised by various dynamics that shape different levels of constraint but also lack thereof – in which the agentive self is born.

Alignment and affinity of views and attitudes. In considering parent-youth alignment and affinity of views and attitudes, my findings pointed to the significance of similarities and differences in parents' upbringing and shared experiences across social identities such as class, ethnicity, settlement patterns, and place of residence. These and other factors are likely to have exposed parents to a somewhat different world from that inhabited by their children, marked by different socio-cultural and religious values and norms arising from a distinct political, economic, and historical context. This, in fact, means that parents associate with a diverging set of values and norms that may divert them from the views of their children. This is particularly true for families where the parents either have different ethnic backgrounds (e.g., father of Bedouin background and mother of Palestinian or Syrian one) or, more commonly, have grown up in different environments (e.g., rural, urban or Bedouin one). Many participants emphasised the unbridgeable gap between them and one or

both of their parents, who had been born and raised in the countryside and then moved to the city. Their emphasis on their fathers or mothers being "*fallahi*" (peasant/rural), aimed at highlighting their contrasting – if not opposing – values, yet implying the inherent inability of a *fallahi* (rural) mother or father to understand a *madani* (urban) daughter or son. Indeed, for many of my respondents, *fallahi* signifies a narrow-minded person who clings to traditional values that are – no longer relevant – while *madani* signifies openness and the ability to understand diverse and alternative ways of life. Another frequently mentioned factor that influences youth-parent attitude affinity was the degree of religiosity. Differences in levels of religiosity have been found to be indicators of distance, especially when young family members did not comply with expected religious obligations, such as praying, fasting during Ramadan, and attending Friday prayers. Sometimes, divergent religious expectations led to major family conflicts, especially when parents did not approve of their daughters' or sons' controversial choices, who then distanced themselves from their parents. Yaser (SSI, 2019), a 19-year-old male student, defined his *otherness* from his parents based on his opposing religious views, by saying, "they pray five times a day and are very religious, but I am not. They don't always respect me for not being as religious as I should be". Yaser went on to explain that his parents' lack of understanding of his religious attitude has affected his relationship with them to the point that he said, "I don't talk to them much, so they don't get to know me better and became disappointed". Seif (SSI, 2019), a male professional in his early thirties, also recalled how he became an atheist as for him, "living a religious life means living in a cage, which is very isolating because you are afraid to do anything new and live a life based on guilt and shame". Seif's choice negatively affected his relationship with his "super-religious" mother, while it positively affected the one with his father, who he felt was "a bit more open-minded". In Seif's words, his father is open-minded because he is more receptive to his unconventional choices that may disrupt the respectability of the family. He also claimed that his father's open-mindedness is due to the fact that he "travelled a lot and studied abroad". This suggests how meaningful parents' individual experiences can be in shaping attitudes affinity with their children. As shown in the study of adolescent-parent dynamics in the Egyptian context (Al-Tawila et al., 2003, p.216), parent-youth different experiences can lead to a potential divergence of attitudes and preferences. Overall, my findings demonstrate that young people often have a

positive relationship with a parent, usually a father living abroad, who has been exposed to alternative ideas, lifestyles, and codes of conduct.

The significance of shared experiences in determining parent-youth attitudes affinity nuances the scholarly figure of the "absent father", which in the Jordanian context, as in many others, describes as such fathers who spend extended periods abroad to support their families back home. Sometimes, these fathers are described as physically and emotionally distant (Abdalla, 2003; Joseph, 1994; Droeber, 2005). Interestingly, it emerged from my interviews that young people had a close relationship with their father who worked or lived abroad, and that they often considered him to be more open-minded than their mother. My participants used the attribute of "open-minded" to refer to someone who is sympathetic and more inclined to accept decisions not utterly appropriate to the socio-cultural and moral societal script, where mothers – at least for my female participants – often acted as ultimate guardians, especially in relation to the behaviour of their young daughters. For instance, Farah (SSI, 2019), a female student, admitted how close she is to her father who, she said, "works in China, and is more open-minded than my mother, as he accepts my sister and I different thoughts and he can be easily persuaded, whereas my mother cannot". Similarly, Rula (SSI, 2019), a female professional, admitted, "I get along better with my father. He lived in Italy, so I have learned the language. Italian is our secret language; we use it whenever we want to say something we do not want others to understand. My father trusts me a lot, while I always argue with my mother about everything, marriage, travelling, and work". Different perspectives simultaneously appeared from women and men whose fathers embodied an authoritative figure in the household. In this case, fathers spending prolonged periods of time abroad represented a relief, as it provided daughters\sons with the space for practising more freedom. Amal (SSI, 2019), the female student whose father significantly limited her freedom, explained that she waited for him to travel abroad to do "any normal activity that everybody practises, but I am not allowed to when he is here. Like going to a friend's house, or any place that encourages freedom, or just living my life outside the house as much as I can". These findings reveal how unique the bonds between young people and their parent(s) are, shaped by a complex mix of personal factors, and how parents' exposure to global ideas and worldviews can sometimes bring parental attitudes closer to those of younger generations, as their

experiences of a globalised world are reciprocated and enhance the family's socialisation style.

Socialisation style. In psychology, the term socialisation style refers to various parenting styles and how they influence children's behaviour. In this analysis, I understand the term socialisation style in line with the definition of Al-Tawila et al. (2003, p.234) who define it as "the degree and quality of interaction between adults and the younger generation, whether it involves listening, dialogue, and considering young people's views, or is more unidirectional, distant, and authoritarian by the parents". This definition largely reflects my findings on parent-youth attitudes affinity, as it elucidates how relationships between family members depend on the level and quality of communication, particularly the ability or willingness of parents to create a positive environment where young people can voice their opinions, feel valued and respected, especially when these differ from prevailing social norms and discourses embodied by older generations. For instance, Samah (SSI, 2019), a 22-year-old female student, by saying, "my parents are like friends to me, they know everything about me", clearly remarked how comfortable she feels in expressing her opinions to her parents, even when they disagree. Like Samah, also for other female and male students and professionals, a positive socialisation style did not mean that young people share attitudes and views with their parents, but that they actually have the opportunity for their dissenting opinions to be heard and valued. Further data will be presented in the next chapter in support of this argument, as the positive socialisation style factor proved to be successful in determining one's ability to enact desired change by staying within the system. Additionally, a supportive family environment leads to the third and final factor that positively relates young people to their parents. I shall present this below.

Parents' support of individuals' personal development. This is undoubtedly the key factor in shaping young people's positive relationship with their parents and, overall, in determining young people's choices of agentive practices to apply in the family context. It is the parents' ability, not only to listen but also to support their own decisions and choices of life trajectories, that shapes the parent-youth bond and loyalty, rather than a hierarchy of authority based on gender and age. The most significant finding about parent-youth relationships is that young women and men

get along well with the parent(s) who value(s) and support(s) their journey towards empowerment. Although this finding is rather self-evident, it was not sufficiently acknowledged alongside other factors (sometimes considered more important) such as gender or education. Among the few participants I met who admitted to having a good relationship with their parents – largely characterised by lack of conflict – this seemed to be mainly related to the degree of parental support and mutual trust that characterised their relationship with parents, rather than a lack of contrasting values. However, conflict, albeit to varying degrees, characterised most young people's relationships with their parents across all my cohorts of participants.

To conclude, preliminary findings indicate that the existence of intergenerational conflict may largely depend on parent-youth diverging affinity of views and attitudes, whereas the way in which this conflict unfolds in the family and young people tackle it through their choice of agentive strategies to deploy, is more likely to depend on the last two factors I have identified above, namely socialisation style and parents' support of individuals' personal development. At the end of this section, it can also be suggested that relationships between family members are personal and, thus, highly variable. As Droeber (2005, p. 115) notes, the networks of relationships between families vary and the intensity of connective relationship depends on intersecting structures of power such gender, education, or class, with unique family dynamics and personal experiences of family members. The following section sheds further light on the factors that shape young people's connectedness with their parents, challenging an understanding of Arab families based on gendered power hierarchies. This contributes to the literature on parents-youth relationships in Jordan and on Arab families at large.

Arab Families: Beyond Fixed Hierarchies of Power

The Arab family is often described as a predominant patriarchal structure characterised by power hierarchies based on age and sex (Barakat, 1993; Joseph, 1999; 2000). In this structure, the father is the authoritative figure who must be respected and obeyed by all female and male members, older and younger. Labelled by some scholars as emotionally and, often physically, distant, the authoritative father guards and monitors children but delegates power to the mother in everyday life matters, while retaining the final decision over important decisions (Sharabi,

1977). Mothers are, instead, often caught up in narratives of self-sacrifice for the sake of family and children, to whom they should show absolute devotion by prioritising their needs above their own. Such narratives underscore hegemonic discourses of ideal motherhood (Droeber, 2005). For Joseph (1993b, p.480), patriarchy and connectivity craft relationally oriented selves, socialising to negotiate gendered and age-based hierarchies. This hierarchical structure has an imprint on shaping the bond between family members, reproducing power relations through socialisation. In much of the literature on the Arab family, relationships between mothers and sons\daughter tend to be described as characterised by proximity, love, and affection, while relationships with the father, although sometimes varying, are often distant and hierarchical (Joseph, 1993a). Regarding the Jordanian context, Droeber (2005, p.120) claims that mother-daughter relationships are closer than those with the father, but in general, they are complex and depend on personal backgrounds. My findings somehow contradict Droeber's (2005) on the emotionally distant figure of the father who lacks connection with his children and interacts with them through the mother, who is often depicted as a mediator. I have found that parent-youth closeness and contrast of opinions are evenly split and transcend gender. In fact, I argue that the degree of authority that mothers and fathers exercise over their children depends on the husband-wife personal bond and on the particular circumstances of the family. In considering participants' accounts of parental consent of their life choices, it became clear that the assertion that authority in most family contexts resides exclusively with the father downplays the multiple nuances that emerge when analysing relationships between family members. Interestingly, most parents delegated decision-making to each other, depending on the particular circumstances, such as parents' personality or character, and one's suitability in guiding sons or daughters towards a specific choice. In most cases (as mentioned in Chapter 2), young people complained about the exclusive authority of either the mother or the father and (as discussed further in Chapter 5) wished for a married life in which parents made decisions together.

Furthermore, FOs and SSIs findings disregard the stereotypical images of distant fatherhood and nurturing motherhood. Examples of solid father-daughter relationships have emerged from my research, challenging the prevailing image of the patriarchal father who only deals with children in critical situations, leaving to

the mother the task of managing everyday life situations (e.g., Droeber, p.129). This alternative model of fatherhood, which first appeared in my SSIs, was further confirmed in the FOs (FO3-4-5, 2019). For instance, Rula (SSI, 2019), a female professional, talks about her close relationship with her late father, whom she had confided in having a boyfriend. In many other conversations, young women mentioned that their fathers were incredibly supportive of their dreams and independence, encouraging them to study abroad or prioritise career over marriage. Aaliyah (SSI, 2019), a young female student, admitted that she could not talk to her father about marriage, "not even for fun" as "whenever I mention it, he tells me that I have to study, be an educated and independent woman and only then, if I want, I should consider marriage". Rasha (SSI, 2019), a young woman, recalled how happy her father was when he knew that she had won a scholarship to do her MA in Europe. "He could not say no because he saw how excited I was! My mother was instead reticent on me going abroad". As highlighted in the previous chapter, many stories questioned the authoritative figure of the father having the final say in the household. In fact, some female students stated that their mothers played a decisive role in preventing them (or their sisters) from doing something even if their fathers agreed. However, several accounts also depict an opposite trend, where the mother is the confidant and main ally in the daughter's quest for more independence and freedom. Thus, Rahaf (SSI, 2019), a female student, recalled how her mother gives her permission to go out with friends without her father knowing, and Aaliyah (SSI, 2019) confided in her mother only to have a boyfriend. In some female students' accounts of being closer to their mothers, the time mother and daughter spent together was mentioned as key to fostering their ties, as it allowed for a higher level of communication, interaction, and confidentiality.

Similar dynamics emerged in the relationship between sons and their fathers and mothers. In father-son relationships, the father is sometimes a friend, sometimes an enemy, sometimes an idealised role model, especially in the context of military masculinities as described below, where feelings of deference, authority, affection, and hatred can be deeply interwoven. Abbas (SSI, 2019), a male student, admitted how happy he is to be able to drink alcohol on a night out with his father, who treats him like a friend; Abdallah (SSI, 2019) admired the way his father treats other people and wished to be like him, fair and just; Hatem (SSI, 2019) describes his father as a

hero and he aspires to be like him. Among military men, sons' desire to emulate their fathers stems from the latter's high social standing. However, for some male participants, the relationship with their fathers was negatively affected by what appeared to be a profound lack of mutual understanding. Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a male student, emphasises this lack of understanding with his father by saying that he does not get along with his father "in personal matters". Moutaz's words seem to underline a value misalignment between father and son, that was further confirmed in other SSIs, as some young men wished to distance themselves from their fathers' views and opinions when these were too conservative. Similarly, mother and son relationships also seemed to be characterised by conflict or closeness. Kareem (SSI, 2019), a male professional, described his conflictual relationship with his mother, who kept reminding him that she wants "to see his children", while he was not interested in marriage. Ismael's (SSI, 2019) described how harsh her mother is with him, as she criticises his decisions and "argues about everything emotionally and aggressively". Furthermore, mother-son conflicts often involved daily activities, as mothers seemed to control and restrict not only daughters but also sons movements (as discussed further in Chapter 4). However, there were also opposite accounts of positive mother-son relationships, in which mothers were described as kind, and mostly understanding. For instance, Anas (SSI, 2019), a male professional, admitted that he is close to his mother as "it is easier to talk to her"; similarly, Abbas (SSI, 2019) stated that he loves talking to his mother as "she is calm", and Moutaz (SSI, 2019) noted that his mother is loving and sympathetic, as she understands him very well because they share similar, "open-minded", views.

As Joseph (1993b, p.467) notes, family relationships are connective, and as such they can be "loving or hostile, compatible or competitive, fragile or firm, or simultaneously each of the above". The above findings suggest that parent-youth conflictuality or closeness is not gender-driven but is constituted in the interplay of the factors shaping connectedness outlined above. The significance of context situated dynamics of family relations indicates that essentialist narratives derived from Western physiological constructs need to be set aside. Another important finding suggests that connectedness and contrasts of opinions are not strictly related, as parent-youth level of connectedness seemed to be independent of the presence of conflict. Conflict here does not merely signify young people's act of rebellion

towards parents, but underlines the existence of a generation gap that can but does not have to, lead to an actual conflict.[30] Thus, a positive relationship with parents does not imply a lack of contrasting views. Indeed, some participants felt closer to parents with whom they did not share their opinions, like Abdallah (SSI, 2019) who said, "I am closer to my mother, but I do not agree with her views". As explained above, tales of loving connectedness are also based on affinity of traits or qualities, shared experiences and time spent together, and not merely affinity of views.

Overall, my findings indicate that conflictuality exists with either one or both parent(s) who leave(s) little room for independence and, most importantly, who is\are less inclined to support and encourage young people's desire for agency and to understand and eventually accept their different opinions and shifting expectations. This conflictuality overall determines young people's agentive capabilities. As discussed in the next chapter, in family contexts characterised by parents' lack of understanding and support, the desiring self, trapped in constraints that limit its autonomy and agentive possibilities, deploys creative strategies to negotiate its desired, yet conflictual, position with family and society. This further proves that a relational self has the potential for autonomy and that the feature of relationality of the self is not antithetical to that of autonomy. However, being a relational self means being constituted within a web of relations where each member has clear expectations of the other. In the context of Arab families, these expectations have often been analysed in terms of loyalty to family institutions, driven by individuals' socio-economic and political benefits. This deprives individuals of their autonomy and agency, especially women and children, determining their victimisation. In this research, focusing on parents' expectations of sons and daughters is crucial to understanding the gendered script young people are expected to perform as they transition into adulthood and the extent to which they conform to it. In the next section, I examine how young people perceive their parents' expectations of them, and explore a possible divergence between their expected and desired life trajectories. This allows me to individualise a value misalignment or an ideological

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[30] The term "generation gap" was introduced in the Western context in the 1960s. It refers to the intergenerational differences pertaining values, attitudes, and beliefs, between older and young people, i.e., between parents and their adolescent children, due to opposing life experiences, behaviours, and habits (Mendez, 2008).

divide, thus, the existence of an intergenerational conflict between older and younger generations of family members.

Expected Life Trajectories of Daughters and Sons in Transition to Adulthood

This section explores young people's expected life trajectories as reflected in parents' gendered expectations of sons and daughters transitioning into adulthood and assesses their overall level of agreement\disagreement with these expectations. This serves to determine whether young people are shifting values, bringing to the fore intergenerational conflict issues, which lay the groundwork for discussing the new set of values young people identify with. Highlighting tensions or conflicts that arise in the process of people acquiring gender identities allows us to define gender norms as unstable rather than constant and given at all times (McNay, 2000).

Young people's compliance with family's expectations signifies obedience to parental authority. The people I met paired obedience to parents with concepts of respect and reverence for parental authority, often justified by broader religious discourses. As emerged from several SSIs, this understanding of obedience at times resonated in young people's confidence that parents *know* and *want* what is best for them, a conviction often marked by statements such as "my parents know what is best for me" or "parents often see what you are unable to see". However, if these premises describe a generalised attitude towards parents' judgements, such statements mostly prevail in family contexts where parents support individuality. Whereas the opposite attitude towards family's authority emerges in family contexts characterised by a high degree of intergenerational conflict and where support towards young people's agency is considerably lacking. In this regard, considerations about parents being "too selfish" or acting according to "what is best for them" have been mentioned. In considering parents' expectations of their children, it goes without saying that the outcomes of my enquiry should not be understood as expectations unique or typical of this part of the world; on the contrary, those – with due caution – align with quite common parental expectations towards their offspring pretty much everywhere else. Instead, I aim to reveal how gendered, yet fluid and changeable, these expectations are and what they tell us about the dominant gender script young people are expected to comply with and yet wish to deviate from. Highlighting how gendered expectations shift in transition to adulthood prove that

people experience different degrees of expected autonomy and subordination as they move across social fields, such as the labour market, domestic life, and the intimate (McLeod, 2005, p.22). McNay argues that the process of change and continuity, or stability and instability, in gender relations, is a complex process that happens in ambiguous and uneven ways that reiterate traditional gendered power relations but also sets "new yet familiar figuration of gender" (McNay, 1999; 2000, cited in McLeod, 2005, p.24). By outlining parents-youth divergent expectations, this section offers the possibility to delve into a possible intergenerational conflict arising from a parent-youth value misalignment. Ultimately, this allows us to develop a theory of creative agency, as tension is generative of agency, highlighting the "internally complex nature of subjectivity and how this is worked through at the level of motivation and self-understanding (McNay, 2000, p.72).

Expectations for Daughters

This section examines participants' responses to the following SSI question, "what are your family expectations about yourself and to what extent do you agree with them? The responses were grouped to reflect women's and men's perceptions of parental expectations of themselves as they transition into adulthood, from student to professional life, and from singlehood to marriage. Meanwhile, the significance young people assigned to these expectations was also highlighted. Overall, findings revealed a distinctive life-course trajectory of parental expectations concerning all participants across cohorts. This trajectory included: graduation, career, and marriage.

Female students. When asked about their parents' expectations of themselves, the most common statements from young women were: "My parents want me to finish my BA, and then get an MA, but I want to work after I get my BA" (Yasmin, SSI, 2019); "They want me to graduate and get a job, and I agree with them" (Farah, SSI, 2019); "My expectations are theirs. I would like to study further and get a PhD, and my parents support me" (Samah, SSI, 2019). The great majority of the women I met revealed their parents' high expectations of them getting a university degree. Similarly, for the daughters of middle-class families, the importance of education appeared unquestionable so that their level of agreement with this expectation was very high. At times, expectations of education intersected with expectations of

marriage. Women's accounts pointing at parents (especially mothers) expecting them to marry "either a doctor or an engineer" – and similar ones referring to men marrying a girl with "good education" – may suggest that parents' educational expectations may be motivated, at least to some extent, by narratives of social mobility. In this regard, Amal (SSI, 2019) said, "my mother expects me to marry a doctor, and I think in Jordan it is common for a mother to want her daughter to marry either an engineer or a doctor because they earn money". In analysing shifting meanings of education for young women in Jordan, Adely (2012a) observes that education as a potentially highly valuable resource for empowerment has been inscribed into narratives of marriageability, class, and respectability. "Many families seek the status education confers on their children as well as the family" (Adely, 2012a p.35). Adely's work has proved valuable in challenging the supposed universal understanding of education and the inaccuracy of reports based only on quantitative data without proper contextualisation, thus highlighting the limitations of most World Bank and UN narratives of progress linearity. Although a narrative linking education with marriageability and social mobility is widespread in Jordan, neither the women nor the men I met inscribed the ultimate scope of their education in the above categories. On the contrary, when asked why and how higher education matters to them, young women make me question possible contradictions and gender implications regarding the significance of education for parents and young people. Indeed, young daughters were far from exclusively associating education with marriageability discourses. On the contrary, and as I will discuss later, education was a means to empowerment, freedom, and thus agency. In analysing discourses on women' education in Jordan, I move beyond Adely's argument by unravelling the meaning of education for daughters without re-inscribing it in local narratives, thus, avoiding regurgitating well-trodden discourses on women's education and motherhood. In mentioning such narratives, I would rather highlight their collective benefits for young women, as they served to "normalise" girls' access to education – as Jordan's high literacy rate demonstrates (GGGR, 2019) – and enabled women to co-opt normative education meanings for their own benefit.

Most women interviewed mentioned marriage as another expectation of their parents, although this expectation as a form of pressure was mentioned only occasionally. While the expectation of marriage remained widely in place, what

seemed to differ considerably was the opinion of individual families on when their daughters should get married. Sometimes parents held opposing views on what should be prioritised the most, either their daughter's education or marriage. In this case, it was the opinion of the family decision-maker, be it the mother or the father, that determined the daughter's life trajectory. In the case of Amal (SSI, 2019), for example, her parents hold divergent opinions on whether she should prioritise marriage or education. While her father prioritised her education, her mother was more concerned with her daughter's marriage proposals. In the quote below, Amal describes how her father had turned away her last traditional marriage proposal as follows:

> I remember my father telling him, "no, I am sorry, she wants to get an education, and my mother got upset because she thought he might be good for me. We got into an argument, and I told her I don't want to get married now. She will not push me into marriage; she just expresses her concerns about my future stability. She is harmless, she just wants me to be protected (Amal, SSI, 2019).

Amal's father prioritises her daughters' education because for him education is a means of gaining social respectability, as she said elsewhere, "he wants me to be a professor to make him proud". Conversely, Amal's mother is more concerned with her getting married to "ensure her future stability", justifying her pressure on her daughter as follows, "you need to get married before 25, what if something happens to us?". Amal further stressed the importance of the opinion of the decision-maker in the family, who in Amal's case is her father. Thus, she said, "If my father had that mentality, I would already be married as many other girls who have strict fathers get married even younger than 20". When it comes to marriage at a young age, my research participants commonly agreed that girls in higher education are expected to marry from their mid-twenties, while some girls admitted that their parents expect them to marry before they turn 25. Overall, girls were expected to marry only after completing their education. Regarding female students' expectations of marriage, the girls I met aged 19 to 25 were not interested in marriage at all. Many considered themselves too young to even think about marriage, and half of them admitted to not wanting to get married at all. As will be shown further in this chapter, besides young females' desires for marriage being highly individualised, marriage carried another significance for daughters that goes beyond "securing future stability" to embrace

considerations of marriage exclusively as a personal choice of companionship and a profound connection between partners who share life goals.

It is worth noting that these considerations on marriage expectations are specific to middle- and upper-class urban families, while my research participants agreed that things are different for girls living in rural areas, or in general, outside Amman. As Muhanna (2013, p.134) asserted in relation to the context of Gaza, marriage is the only institution that provides women, especially the unemployed and less educated, with a sense of long-term social and personal security. This assertion can be applied to the Jordanian context, particularly in some family's contexts where mothers prioritise their daughters' marriage over education to ensure their protection. Parents' significance of marriage for their daughters is deeply entangled with discourses on security, protection, and future stability as marriage in contexts of precarity is often the only lifelong economic and emotional support network a woman can rely upon once her parents have grown older or died and other siblings have married. As elaborated further, marriage, in addition to education, also carries a different significance for the younger and older women in my sample.

Prioritising marriage over education is not merely a matter of parents' opinion. Thus, in assessing the circumstances under which parents prioritise young women's marriage expectations over education, further considerations concern the importance of a marriage proposal to the bride and her family. This confirms the relevance of the social mobility narratives mentioned earlier, underpinning the link between education and marriageability. For instance, Fahed (SSI, 2019), a male student, recalled his sister's story, recounting how she felt torn between the decision to marry a rich man or accept a scholarship offer to continue her studies abroad, but ultimately decided to accept the marriage proposal as it was "a once in a lifetime opportunity". Fahed's sister gave up her education to marry an upper-class man, enhancing her family and herself upward mobility. In this case, Fahed's parents' expectations of education were perhaps put aside, as their daughter's marriageability prospect were already assured. It is worth stressing, however, that the fact that parents prioritise their daughters' marriage over education does not mean that the prospective bride will abandon her studies. This point is often negotiated before the signing of the marriage contract, as the couple agreement on this point is crucial when considering

a future engagement. Similar considerations concern the husband's consent to his wife's will to work after marriage.

Another parental expectation of young daughters included them starting a career after graduating. The stories of some women provided earlier (e.g., Amal, Rasha, and Aaliyah) show that fathers may be particularly supportive of their daughters' future career path, more so than some mothers. Many fathers seemed to be particularly supportive of their daughters' independence, as many female students recalled that their fathers wished for their daughters not to depend on anyone in the future (e.g., Aaliyah, SSI, 2019). This finding was further confirmed by triangulating data from SSIs and FOs. When I asked young fathers what they wished for their daughters (as discussed in Chapter 6), all expressed a desire for their daughters to be strong and independent, to study and work, and to achieve their dreams. A certain level of expectation was also found in father's expecting their daughters to pursue further education – usually an MA degree and sometimes even a doctorate – in Jordan or abroad.

Finally, another prominent expectation of daughters was to adhere to a decent and morally acceptable code of behaviour. Notably, when young women enter university, leaving their immediate (safer) inner community and expanding their circles of friends in a non-segregated environment, moral behaviour becomes a major concern for their mothers. Hence, mothers often expect their daughters to come home, preferably right after classes, and if they hang out with peers, to be home before sunset. Concern for daughters' adherence to socio-cultural norms reflects mothers' preoccupation with negative community judgements that could jeopardise both their daughters' future and her nuclear and extended family's reputation. Adherence to larger religious expectations is closely monitored by mothers, particularly when it comes to observing a modest dress code, such as wearing the *hijab*. Mothers mostly expected their daughters to maintain a modest appearance, while the fathers and brothers' expectations mainly concerned the daughters' behaviour towards male peers. Some young females, aware of the challenges they face in being exposed to a non-segregated environment, have mentioned their fathers and brothers' opposition to them having male friends. For instance, Yasmin (SSI, 2019) described how she argues with her father and brother as they strongly expect her not to have male

friends. In contrast, mothers sometimes knew about their daughters' male friends (as in the case of Yasmin) or their boyfriends (as in the case of Aaliyah), but were confident that they would maintain respectful relationships with their male peers within the boundaries of religion.

Overall, this section revealed that most parents expect their young daughters to get a university degree, start a career, get married, and respect moral values. For their part, as discussed in more detail in this chapter, the young daughters agreed somewhat with these expectations, yet on their own terms. The next section looks at how parents and older daughters' expectations change as the latter transition into adulthood.

Female professionals. In the transition to adulthood, parents' expectations of their daughters change little, yet become more specific. Expectations of marriage intensify for women who have completed their studies and entered the workplace but are not yet married. Unlike the female student respondents, few of whom mentioned marriage as an imminent parents' expectation, most female professionals in SSIs mentioned marriage as their family's first concerns. In the perception of many families, the next expected step for a young woman after she has received an education and started a career is to find a suitable man and get married. As they get older, families become concerned and put considerable pressure on women, especially if they choose not to marry after the age of thirty. Family pressure comes in various forms and often involves the family traditionally arranging meetings of their daughters with potential suitors. Expectations of marriage for women in transition to adulthood appear to be less nuanced than the same expectation for younger female students. Therefore, considerations of the suitability of a husband become less specific as families' concerns about having an unmarried daughter force them to compromise. Given the relevance of this issue as a creative strategy, I will return to it in Chapter 4.

Judging by the frequency with which it was mentioned during SSIs, it is fair to say that parental expectations of marriage seemed to be particularly intense for both women and men. This strict expectation was often the cause of anxiety, as participants often felt that their success was undermined or somehow insignificant

compared to the satisfaction that marriage would give their parents. Riham (SSI, 2019), a 32-year-old woman with a successful career in a bank, for instance, describes her sense of failure as she could not meet her parents' expectations of marriage, as she said, "even though my father always denies that he expects us to get married, I know that he prays for the two girls in his house to get married and have children". Riham is aware of where this expectation comes from, as she went on to explain, "that's what they think a woman should do", and she sympathises with her father's sadness, especially at weddings, where, she admitted, he probably thinks: "why is not it my daughters'?". Unlike Riham's father, who does not appear to push his daughters to get married, some parents arrange meetings with suitable partners, as another successful woman, Rula (SSI, 2019), 31-year-old, recounted, "they think I have to get married now, so they tried to arrange so many marriages for me, but I did not want any". Both Rula and Riham generally agree with their parents' expectations of marriage, but emphasise the need to "find the right partner", without whom, unlike their parents, they do not mind not getting married at all.

Apart from marriage, adult daughters face expectations about their choice of career, the nature of their employment, and their salary. As adult women become financially independent, they begin to break away from the family's control over their expenses and their desire to make independent decisions increases dramatically. However, most families expect their daughters to live in the same household, that they can leave after marriage. Thus, family expectations of lifestyle, freedom of movement, and adherence to socio-cultural norms remain largely in place as women transition into adulthood, although their level of independence in making choices has improved considerably compared to younger female students. The next section examines how family expectations change during their daughters' transition from singlehood to married life.

Married daughters. Laila (SSI, 2019), a 36-year-old mother of two, describes how her responsibilities have grown over time and how accurate her parents' expectations have become as time passed by. She affirms how difficult it is for her to balance their expectations with her wishes, as her parents expect her to visit them every day with the children, but she said, "I like to do community service, go out with my children, do things alone, or with my husband or friends. But I have to manage my life between

all these things". She further stated that her parents make her feel that she can do more and better for them and that she feels underappreciated. Parents' expectations of married daughters shift as they grow older and are expected to take care of their ageing parents, emotionally and, if possible, financially. Expectations of responsibility towards the family increase notably when daughters marry. Whereas for unmarried women, staying with family members and attending family gatherings was not a significant expectation, it already was for married daughters and also intensified as this included visits to the husband's in-laws and extended family. Other expectations of married daughters concern career choices, primarily as these should now consider the woman's greater responsibility for the household and children. Family expectations of married daughters to adhere to morally accepted behaviour and broader socio-cultural norms seem to be shifting from being a significant family's responsibility, particularly that of the mother (as discussed earlier in this chapter), to that of male relatives and husbands. Indeed, the pressure of complying with societal norms and values increases for a married daughter, as her behaviour now reflects not only on her family and herself, but also on the husband and his entire family. As Laila (SSI, 2019) stated, "now that I am an adult, I have three people on whom my behaviour reflects: my father, my husband, and my father-in-law". Laila's words about how a woman's behaviour affects her male relatives, both her own and her husbands, seem to be consistent with broader cultural discourses on "honour", as her male family members' honour also depends on her behaviour. Overall, these findings illustrate how adult married daughters must balance parental expectations with the need of their own family and their desire for a more independent life in which they are free to choose how to behave and how to spend their time. In the next section, I turn my attention to parents' expectations of sons transitioning into adulthood, and examine whether and to what extent these expectations differ from those of the women discussed above.

Expectations for Sons

Parents' expectations of their sons, either students or professionals, do not appeared to differ considerably from those of their daughters. In analysing responses from SSIs, it emerged that sons were largely expected to: *Be successful in their studies, to find a successful job and to have a loving wife and children.* Although men's expected life trajectory quite resembles that of women's, a closer look reveals a significant

difference; this is reflected in the choice of one word that men repeatedly used when describing *how* their expected life trajectory should unfold: *successfully*. So, while parents have similar expectations of their sons and daughters, parents firmly expect sons to perform "successfully". Far from claiming that parents do not expect daughters to be successful, men stressing this expectation much more than women signifies family and society's heavier expectations for men to succeed in society.

Male students. In general, expectations of male students seem higher than those of women, as a much tremendous pressure features in young men's lives from an early age. The expected success of a man features in his ability to be responsible for himself, his nuclear, and extended family. A family's high expectation of a son's success is reflected in the family's choice of a son's education from an early age. The common perception among some Jordanians that private schools are better valued than public schools was confirmed in some participants' accounts of their family's choice to send them to private institutions as to provide them with a better education. For instance, Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a male student, recounted how his father sent him to a private school and his sister to a public one, prioritising his son's quality of education over that of his daughter, as he could not afford private education for both of them. Although such considerations need further research, they seem to show that expectations of education are strongly gendered. Moreover, these exacerbate when men transition into higher education, as the choice of field of study becomes a significant source of conflict between parents and sons, as I will discuss later. Sons are expected to enter degree programmes that offer prospects for social mobility by landing a high-paying job. Many male students admitted that their parents expected them to become doctors or engineers. Regardless of which field of study they chose, they were expected to achieve high grades and graduate successfully. Expectations of success were often perceived as unbearable by young students who developed anxiety and fear of failure. As Fahed (SSI, 2019), a 22-year-old student in the Faculty of Economics, said, "my parents have a lot of expectations of me. Mostly that I will be successful and brilliant. This put a lot of pressure on me and I am afraid of failing". Ameer (SSI, 2019), a 20-year-old Mechatronics Engineering student, provides a somewhat bitter and grim image of how his family's high expectations affect himself and his perception of life, and so he said:

> My family expects me to find a successful job with an income to support them, myself, and the family they hope for me to build. I agree with them about finding a good job, but I don't know if that's possible, because nowadays it's not about finding the job you want, but a job that pays. And as for the all providing thing, I don't know if I can provide and how much. I can't tell the future and have a dark look of its outcome, so I am always afraid of failing. That's the thing: they keep talking about the future and when I'll get a job, but I still worry if I'll pass university because I am not doing well. If I don't do well here, how can I be expected to do well in the future? So now I am looking for a job, but I don't want to live wealthy or have money, I want to live free, with anything to pull me down, without stress, just live contentedly (Ameer, SSI, 2019).

Ameer's words mirror the negative impact that society's and family's high expectations can have on young men's mental health, especially in a context of economic insecurity where young graduates have high unemployment rates.

Parents' expectation of male students to find a job while studying seems to vary according to family opinion. I argue that it largely depends on the family economic situation, according to which young students are pushed to or choose to look for a job to help the family finance their studies. For others, it is about proving to be *responsible*, thus, to be a man. As Yaser (SSI, 2019), 19, recounted, "after university, I work in construction, not because I need to support my family, but because I need to show that I am responsible." Yaser's parents' expectations of masculinity require him to work while studying to prove that he is not "spoilt". Work offers young men the opportunity to prove their masculinity, learn responsibility, and grow into a man. In this sense, masculinity, as well as femininity, is a status to be achieved. Other male students stated in SSIs that they had chosen to work during their studies against their parents' wishes in order to gain more economic independence and thus be able to make their own decisions in matters of expenses. For instance, Hatem (SSI, 2019) recalled how he chose to work while studying against his father's will, who wanted him to focus entirely on his studies. The expectations a family has of its sons reflect gender roles expectations that are often formed at a young age. The higher expectations parents have of their sons in terms of education and occupation reflect the role of breadwinner that a man is expected to play in the future. For men, the expected trajectory of graduation, career, and marriage appears to be much more fixed than for women. In fact, in contrast to women's accounts, there is no evidence

that parents prioritise marriage over education for young men. It may be suggested that expecting daughters to graduate and marry, sometimes simultaneously, and sons to graduate and find a job, reflects how gendered expectations of daughters and sons can be. Thus, while female students can marry while studying as, unlike men, they are not expected to provide for the family, male students are instead expected to find a job before marriage. Moreover, most male students admitted in SSIs that their parents expected them to work, but never while they were studying. The only exception concerned Yaser's story reported earlier, where his parents' motivation to have him work involved a discourse on masculinity. However, this finding speaks to my sample, that primarily included sons and daughters from middle-class families, rather than upper- or lower-class ones, where there might be different expectations.

Another parents' expectation frequently mentioned by male students concerned boys being called upon to perform social duties similar to those of their fathers. This process, already discussed in Chapter 2 and mirroring the gendered socialisation of men, entails young men taking on men's typical social responsibility, such as attending family gatherings, marriages and funerals, and participating in Friday prayers. In religious matters, while young women were expected to be modest, young men, sometimes, mentioned the importance of attending Friday prayers, with or without their fathers. Similar to young women who were expected to adhere to gendered socio-cultural norms and morally accepted codes of behaviour, men also mentioned that they were required to behave in a decent moral manner, respectful of local culture, traditions, and beliefs. Hence, younger men described that their parents strongly expected them to avoid engaging in potentially dangerous and immoral situations, such as going to parties, drinking, or travelling alone with peers.

Many mentioned their parents' expectations in terms of attending extended family feasts, known in Arabic as *'azume.* Usually, men are expected to attend *'azaim (*pl. of *'azume),* while women are not; however, this depends on the type of *'azume,* which is sometimes open to all family members, sometimes not. As discussed previously, boys usually engage in these activities when they are young accompanied by their father, an older brother, or an uncle, and when they get older, on their own as representatives of the family. For many young men interviewed, participating in family activities was perceived as a burden, as one of my Jordanian respondents from

a Bedouin background, Mahmoud (SSI, 2019), told me, "when I was young, I was always with my father doing something". Furthermore, some young men mentioned that they are expected to display masculine behaviour. Thus, Yousef, a male student participating in a FG discussion with a passion for baking, recalled:

> Two days ago I was baking a cake, and my mother came to me and said: It's shameful for you to bake a cake! So I baked it anyway, but I probably will not do it again because I don't like being under pressure (Yousef, FG5, 2019).

Young men's pressure to follow a supposedly masculine behaviour was confirmed in FGs discussions (FG4-5-6, 2019), as family members sometimes seemed to put pressure on young men whose behaviour deviated from the norm. Overall, parental expectations of young sons appeared to be gendered, as gendered as those of women, mirroring their respective expected roles in the family and society. Furthermore, the path trajectory of studying, getting a job, and marrying seems to be less flexible for male students than for female ones, as their role as breadwinners requires them to succeed first in their studies and then in their careers. Men cannot afford to fail, as this could compromise their future stability, and sometimes that of their families. Indeed, young men's accounts of their parents' expectations of them powerfully convey an overwhelming sense of failure and the burden of disappointing themselves and their loved ones.

Male professionals. As men transition into adulthood, parental expectations shift from the field of study to the type of career their sons have chosen, to job suitability, and to salary, while expectations of performing successfully have never ceased. Parental expectations of marriage are as high for male professionals as for females, and single professional men feel as much pressure to marry as women. Anas (SSI, 2019), as most other male professionals in my sample, described the tremendous pressure he constantly experiences from his parents to get married and how he struggles to convince them that he does not want to get married while they continue to make marriage plans for him. Marwan (SSI, 2019), who is now married and has a child, recalled how his parents pressured him as they expected him to get married before he turned 30 and before his youngest brother. Marwan claimed that his parents, like many others, "expect the youngest male sons to marry last"; he further recalled how this led to a major family conflict, as he, the second eldest son, who

was expected to marry first, at that time, did not wish this, while his youngest brother, who was expected to marry last, did. He admitted that he had told his parents that he was not ready and that his youngest brother could go ahead with his marriage, yet not without conflict. Marwan sadly related his experience to that of other men, saying, "everyone in Jordan has this problem, you know, and they keep forcing us". In addition to marriage, the expectations of other working men concerned their careers and their ability to become more successful, even if they already had established careers. Like Anas (SSI, 2019), a dentist, who admitted, "besides marriage, mostly their expectations concern my career, because they want me to become more successful". Sometimes, expectations concerned choosing a particular career, as in the case of Kareem (SSI, 2019), who currently works in a bank, but he said, "I would love to change my career and work in an NGO. My parents do not agree with this because they think it is better to work in a bank". Kareem's further statement, "but if I find this job, I will take it" suggests that as men transition into adulthood, their expectations may overweigh parental ones.

Married sons. Expectations regarding men's social responsibility appeared to be reinforced in the transition from singlehood to married life. This is further reflected in the fact that men have a different outlook towards marriage, particularly as they seem to lose, rather than gain, as is the case with women, more freedom and agency in life. As I mentioned earlier, parents' expectations widely reflect gender roles, thus, married sons are usually expected to provide financially for their parents and younger siblings (if necessary), and sometimes, and if that is the case, for their in-laws as well. However, the increased expectations may also signify a difference between the women's and men's expected degree (and nature) of obedience towards parents, and, sometimes, older brothers and uncles, once they are married, particularly in terms of life choices and freedom. While married women's requirement of obedience appears to shift to the husband, men's ties to the broader family (his own and his wife's) seem to be strengthened.

Overall, parents adhere to traditional gender expectations of their sons and daughters, albeit to varying degrees. Despite the gender differences that define their roles within the family and society, women's and men's expected trajectories are very similar. However, these roles are much more flexible for women than for men. The relevance

of the findings on parent's expectations of their daughters and sons is that they have provided an initial assessment of young people's deviation from parents' expectations reflecting traditional gender roles. Specifically, this section has revealed that while parents-youth expectations trajectories may somehow converge, the meanings young people assign to these expectations certainly do not. This point leads me to theorise the first and most important aspect of creative agency, the meanings co-optation, as young people, in contexts of high family conflict, creatively appropriate conflicting values by co-opting their inner meanings to institute new value systems and forms of identity. Finally, the analysis of parent-youth expectations allowed the identification of an intergeneration conflict reflecting a value misalignment between older (represented by participants' parents) and younger generations. The following section explores in greater detail the identified main domains of intergenerational conflict issues, or IGCI, giving a preliminary overview of the new value system the people I met identify with.

Domains of Intergenerational Conflict Issues (IGCI)

Participants often defined the concept of loyalty towards family through their practices of obedience (*ta'at al-'aila\al-ashira*) to parental expectations. Therefore, they often referred to their failure to meet parental expectations or their total or partial disagreement with these, as an act of disobedience to parental authority. However, findings have shown that the act of disobedience that causes family conflict is not merely related to the failure to meet parental expectations, but instead to parents' lack of understanding and support for young people' different choices. Indeed, while most participants expressed that they did not identify with the prevailing gender discourses and therefore wanted to shape alternative, more desirable, life trajectories, not all of them explicitly mentioned being in conflict with one or both of their parents. The degree of conflict, if any, that a value misalignment can generate depends largely on the parent-youth personal dynamics discussed above. As discussed in the next chapter, this overall shape the existence of conflict, its degrees, and one's agentive strategies applied accordingly. In this section I refer exclusively to intergeneration conflict, which is understood as a discrepancy in values between the young people and their parents that is independent of the existence of an actual family conflict. This makes me further suggest that one's agentive capabilities are tied to distinct types of family dynamics that, by shaping

the degree to which aspirations are supported or constrained, determine young people's ability to enact desired life choices.

Despite its significance in relation to changing social norms and values, the understanding of intergenerational conflict in Arab families remains limited. Indeed, intergenerational family conflict in the Arab region as a whole, let alone in the Jordanian context, has not yet been comprehensively addressed in the academic literature. One of the few studies conducted on intergenerational conflict in Arab families (Rasmi and Daly, 2014; 2016) emphasised the importance of linking the specificity of family dynamics to Arab cultural norms and to distinguish both from existing conflict measures developed from studies on other populations (Rasmi and Daly, 2016, p.42). In this research, which draws on qualitative methods, parent-youth value misalignment was gauged by considering first the convergence of the expectations themselves and then the convergence of the significance attached to these expectations by both parties. Findings reveal that while young people's expectations might converge with those of parents, their significance not only does not, but has mainly been co-opted. IGC therefore arises from a divergence between young people expected and desired life trajectories; this entails an underlying value conflict between older and younger generations, embodied by young people's shifting dreams, aspirations, and expectations of themselves and others.

While research on intergenerational conflict addresses separately two streams, either that of everyday life issues (Yau and Smetana, 2003, cited in Rasmi and Daly, 2016, p.43) or that of cultural values, such as marriage, career, dating and education (Lee et al., 2000, cited in Rasmi and Daly, 2016, p.43), my research combines both streams. Indeed, I emphasise the importance of recognising the value of everyday conflict issues as a broader expression of value conflict, as these not merely signify young people's desire to escape family control and gain temporary freedom but are the practical aspects of value conflict, embodying young people's urge to live more desired lives.

This research has identified four primary domains of intergenerational conflict issues, or IGCI, which include education and career, marriage and dating, lifestyle,

and ultimately life choices. Below I explore these issues along with the various aspects they encompass.

1. *Education and Career.* Both domains are particularly intertwined as they concern parent-youth disagreement about a field of study, thus career choice. Indeed, young people admitted to struggling to balance their own passions with family and societal expectations of career and notions of individual success; in fact, they just wished to enrol in their preferred field of study and then pursue their desired career, challenging broader gender stereotypes and biases.

2. *Marriage and Dating.* Conflict over marriage concerned young people's wish to decide for themselves whether, when, whom, and how to marry (i.e., traditional or non-traditional marriage). Conflict over dating practices also appeared, pointing to young people's desire to choose whether, how, and for how long to date a partner.

3. *Lifestyle.* A domain of considerable conflict that primarily affected young people who were drifting away from socio-cultural and religious norms. Notably, women and men expressed their will to practise a most desired lifestyle by choosing what activities, or hobbies, to practise, e.g. playing an instrument, how to spend their free time, e.g., where to hang out to, or travel, for how long and with whom, choosing an alternative dress code, or adopting a less religious-oriented lifestyle.

4. *Life Choices.* The most impactful domain of conflict issues concerned women's and men's ability to make independent life choices that could affect family ties. These primarily concerned moving abroad to study or work, getting married against family consent, and moving out of parents' house. These conflict issues were the cause of high levels of family conflict and, as discussed in the next chapter, required the use of more creative strategies or tactics to avoid negative consequences.

While value misalignment affects everyone beyond the variables of gender, age, financial independence, religion and religiosity, ethnicity, and family background,

the significance of such variables lies in young people's ability to successfully navigate family conflicts. Furthermore, the relevance of such variables in the negotiation process was also confirmed by the degree of conflict they engender. For instance, Lana (SSI, 2019), while confiding in me how exhausting it is for her to manage her parents' expectations, further stated, "the fact that I am older and more independent now has created more problems between us". Lana's statement underscores the crucial role of the variables of age and financial independence in exacerbating parent-youth conflict. Similarly, Kareem (SSI, 2019) recalled how he used to argue with his mother about his expenditures, as he said, "she wants me to save money to buy a house and get married". Kareem instead wishes to spend his money on travelling around the world. Financial independence further triggers parent-youth conflict over lifestyle choices, such as travelling, as young people gain the ability to choose what to prioritise and what not to. Conflict issues primarily reflect Jordanian urban middle-class youth shifting gender values, hence, their willingness to cross established gendered boundaries and create new ones.

To conclude, if parent-youth expectations might generally converge in the sense that young people also expect to get an education, find a job and start a career, and eventually get married, the tensions underlying these expectations revealed by the IGCI show that beyond the apparent convergence of expectations, there is a clear divergence of meanings. Overall, it is important to remark that most participants indicated that they were concerned with distinct aspects of IGCI domains, but many emphasised that these often caused major conflict with parents who were not interested in understanding, let alone supporting, different values. Therefore, conflict issues underline young people's values renegotiation that may unfold in unexpected ways depending on the varying degrees of constraints young people encounter in their family contexts characterised by the intersection of multiple parent-youth dynamics. Drawing on McNay's theory of agency (2000; 2004), bringing to the fore conflicts that, in this research, have arisen from parent-youth misalignment of traditional life pathways shows how young people actively participate in the self-fashioning of their gender identities. Restating the active and positive role of the agent in the self-making of its identity helps us understand how young people can figure out how to creatively shape more desired realities, even in contexts where their agentive capabilities are limited. This research has identified in the *meanings*

co-optation the first aspect of creative agency that emerges in contexts of high family conflictuality and is capable of affecting broader change. The following section explores the new values that young people identify with and how this can be instituted through the practice of meanings co-optation. In doing so, this section provides a preliminary analysis of the significance of meanings co-optation for youth-led social change.

Meanings Co-optation

Unravelling young women's and men's misalignment with parents' expectations allowed me to reveal their most desired alternative, to traditional, life trajectories reflecting young people's profound yearnings and longings, and thus understand their shifting values. Below, I briefly outline the new meanings that my participants assigned to education, career, and marriage, which are significant in identifying young people's new value system.

Education. The overwhelming majority of my research participants identified education as the key element providing them with better future opportunities, greater freedom and agency in life. Women in SSIs reported not associating education with marriageability discourses, and men, to some extent, with narratives of social respectability. Societal and family's meanings of education appeared to have been co-opted, as young people interpreted education primarily as a passport to freedom, a necessary means to get a job and earn money, increasing their chances of independence.

Career. In women's and men's words, career perspectives sometimes resonated with narratives of self-empowerment and self-fulfilment, especially for women, while for men the meaning of career reflected not only personal ambitions but also practical circumstances that detached careers from narratives of success at any cost.

Marriage. For both women and men, marriage appeared as a safe harbour where their most longed-for, utopian lives could finally be realised. This meaning of marriage encompasses discourses of partners' love, affection, emotional and material support, and work for a shared vision. For both, marriage entails partners' support towards each other's dreams and ambitions rather than self-sacrifice. In this concept

of marriage, love, companionship, and partnership have found a place where to flourish.

Overall, women's and men's desired life trajectories reflect the need to overcome the fixity of gender roles, allowing for more variegated, fluid and, above all, egalitarian gender relations. Furthermore, it seems that young people who faced high degree of conflictuality, hence, those whose agentive capabilities were very limited, found a creative way to bring about change by co-opting gendered life trajectories. In this way, they have actually been able to effect change without breaking ties with the system, but by changing it from within. Change from within can happen either when the individual's agentive capabilities are not constrained, by young people enacting desired selves and realities reflecting their co-opted value system, or in contexts where their agency is constrained, by deploying strategies which entail using parental expectations as a means to achieve the desired expectations. In both cases, I argue that a co-optation of meanings occurs as social expectations of gender have also been co-opted. In this sense, the meanings co-optation is the result of creatively applying agency in a context of constraints that cannot be circumscribed to the private sphere but inevitably encompass also the public one. This shows that negotiation processes are complex and cannot be limited to resistance or compliance with power. The *meanings co-optation* illuminates the creative aspect of agency that allows for a variety of outcomes, which encompass but also go beyond dichotomous narratives, and enables individuals to develop the most suitable *in-context* strategies to confront power and transcend its boundaries to bring about the desired change.

In sum, as McNay argues (1999, p. 187), the symbolic realm is constituted by conflicting values that individuals can creatively appropriate to institute a new value system and new forms of collective identity. In this sense, confronting parent-youth expectations enabled me to position IGCI as conflicting values and to understand meanings co-optation as young people's most effective and creative way of appropriating (through co-optation) conflicting values to institute a new value system in a context shaped by personal and public constraints. In the next chapter, I examine young people's practices of creative agency by analysing the inner dynamics that guide their choices of agentive strategies according to their unique agentive

capabilities. By analysing young people's diverse creative strategies, I uncover the practical implementation of the meanings co-optation discussed above.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the heterogeneous family dynamics that shape the relational self in the context of Arab families. The individualisation of intimate dynamics between family members has contributed to disentangle patriarchy from family and kin relations, which, as Muhanna (2013, p.38) notes, has limited our understanding of Arab women's and men's subjectivity. Specifically, it has identified three factors as constitutive of parent-youth dynamics that determine the extent of constraints individuals face in achieving their desired life pathway: parent-youth alignment and affinity of views and attitudes, socialisation style, and parents' support of individuals' personal development. It is the lived experiences of young people in a family context characterised by specific dynamics that shape their agentive capabilities. Demonstrating this, allowed me to argue that the existence of constraints – in the family environment – is not a given, but depends on highly individualised lived social relations. Preliminary results showed that in egalitarian family contexts, where young people have their opinion valued, rather than merely contested, and where their choices and aspirations are supported, regardless of contrast of opinions over expectations, individuals' agency is enhanced. Furthermore, exploring divergences between expected and desired life trajectories enabled us to uncover Arab families' intergenerational value misalignment, whose issues encompass the domain of education and career, marriage and dating, lifestyle, and life choices. It appeared that shifts in values are very often a cause of family conflict. However, it has also been found that conflicts do not merely depend on youth-parent value misalignment concerning the traditional path of education-career-marriage, but on family relationships characterised by a lack of support for young people's desired life pathway. Additionally, young people show to somehow converge on parents' expectations pathway but to completely diverge on the significance of such pathway milestones, whose meanings they have largely co-opted. Co-opted meanings not only reflect a new value system, but also the most creative way young people have found to enact a reality that mirrors the values they identify with. In fact, young people's co-opted meanings of education, career, and marriage reflect the new role that women and men aspire to play in the family and society, where education

enhances self-empowerment, career realises self-fulfilment, and marriage belongs to the domain of personal choice, which besides being highly individualised, it is fed with expectations of partners' mutual support, love, companionship, and shared goals. Finally, co-opted meanings inform us about the process of negotiating new norms and how this can be carried out successfully in contexts of vulnerability and constraint at family and social levels. This shows that a realm of multiple constraints operating at ideological and structural levels does not necessarily produce compliance or resistance, as vulnerability makes agentive approaches "creative". The next chapter explores young people's unique creative action approaches according to the degree of constraints they experience in specific contexts of lived relations, and how their agentive capabilities shift across life stages according to the power structures and inequalities acting upon them. As constraints are moulded in the family environment, so are individual agentive capabilities. As Judith Butler notes in her essay entitled *Performance acts and gender constitution* (1988), gender is culturally formed, but it is also a domain of everyone's agency and freedom. This allows us to look more closely at how young people are challenging gender norms, reshaping gendered boundaries, and defining new values.

CHAPTER 4

Challenging the Gender Script: Youth Practices of Creative Agency

Introduction

This chapter explores the complex dynamics of young people's agency in family contexts characterised by different levels of constraint. Specifically, it aims to understand the interplay between family dynamics and individual factors in order to unravel how young people negotiate desired life choices in the transition to adulthood. I argue that young people's relational selves find creative ways to enact change without disrupting the relational feature of family dynamics, and that this way seems best suited to driving change by connecting the personal self with its inseparable collective dimension. In doing so, this chapter dislocates images of women as perpetual victims and men as perpetual oppressors, as their creative agency practices reveal how both women and men shape their life trajectories, besides, beyond, and despite gender norms. This ultimately proves the active and engaged role that individuals play in reshaping gendered expectations and their ability to promote wider change.

In this chapter, I first address how young people express conflicting values in the family context, depending on their relationship with parents, levels of misalignment with parental expectations, and conflict issues domains. I then show how the intersection of gender with age, employment status\financial independence, and marital status shapes their unique agentive capabilities. In the interplay of family dynamics with their own contingent personal and material circumstances, young people mould "creative" strategic choices that they deploy according to the forms of dominations that affect them. After outlining creative agency strategies, I identify the outcomes to which these strategies can lead. This approach moves beyond conceptualising agency outcomes as either resistance or compliance with power by showing that young people's relational interests are multiple, complex, and never fixed. Agency, the dynamics that guide it, and its outcomes are always in flux as they are constantly reshaped and challenged by political, socio-economic, and cultural forces impinging on their daily lives (McNay, 2004).

Agentive Practices and Family Dynamics

The findings discussed previously have shown that young people's life expectations and their significance do not always align with parental or societal ones. This tension highlights an ideological divide that is a potential source of intergenerational conflict. This section examines how intergenerational conflict unfolds in the relational context of Jordanian families. Specifically, it looks at the reasons behind one's choice of deploying certain practices to express contrasting desires and to enact more desired selves. In the data analysis, I found three factors that influence such strategic choices, namely *type of relationship with parents*, *level of disagreement with parental expectations*, and *conflict issue domains*. While the three factors identified in the previous chapter assessed the family dynamics that are likely to have an overall impact on young people's agentive capabilities, the factors described below shed light on the unique choices of agentive strategies applied across family contexts characterised by different relational dynamics.

Young people's *type of relationship with parents* determines how they express their conflicting desires to their parents and choose the most appropriate agentive practices to deploy. As mentioned earlier, young people's relationships with their parents can be characterised by either support towards individuals' dreams and aspirations or lack thereof. Both relationship characteristics determine first if, and then how, young people express conflicting desires to their parents, using either direct or indirect agentive practices. Direct practices involve either talking and discussing with parents, thus communicating their expectations and desires to them, or arguing about their decisions; whereas indirect practices involve the choice of deceiving or lying to the parents. Furthermore, the *youth level of disagreement with parental expectations* is another factor that determines how intergenerational conflict unfolds, depending on parent-youth expectations misalignment. Participants were asked to determine the extent to which they agreed with their parental expectations of themselves, which they evaluated as high, medium, or low at times. When levels of disagreement were low, was determined that young people either talked and discussed desired choices with parents. When levels of disagreement were high, they tended to argue with parents about their decisions or deceive and lie to them. Whereas, when levels of disagreement were moderate, young people resorted to a mixture of methods to express their disagreement, such as discussing, arguing, and

lying. Most participants reported being "somewhat in agreement" with parental expectations. A deeper analysis revealed that young people who agreed somewhat with parental expectations were converging on their parents expected life trajectory including education, career, and marriage but they were diverging on the significance parents assigned to these expectations. Overall, high and medium levels of disagreement were found to lead to conflict in the family, especially when parents disagreed with young people's choices. Finally, individuals' choices of agentive practices appeared to be influenced by *conflict issue domains,* which pertained to either the domain of *everyday life activities* or that of *life choices*. Everyday life activities specifically included young people's lifestyle and behaviours, while major life choices involved issues related to studying, working, marriage, or moving abroad. In everyday life activities, young people generally applied either form of direct or indirect agentive practices. In contrast, when it came to life choices, they only used direct agentive practices, as in these cases parent-youth confrontation could not be avoided. As I will show below, parental consent to individual life choices appeared to be incredibly important, thus, it was strategically negotiated. I argue that in both domains of conflict issues, agentive practices aim to push and potentially reshape gendered boundaries, as both domains are about questioning issues related to normative gendered ideologies and gender relations.

Agentive Potential and Intersectionality

Both women and men find themselves in a different position towards power throughout their lives, as personal, family, and material circumstances change, as does their ability, need, or simply desire to negotiate change. In addition to the family dynamics discussed in the previous chapter, young people's agentive potential also appears to be influenced by the confluence of these dynamics with personal factors, particularly gender, age, financial independence, and marital status. The interplay of these factors shapes the unique dynamics of action that determine an individual's response to family conflict situations, depending on one's levels of security or vulnerability. As one's positioning vis-à-vis power changes in the transition to adulthood, so do the dynamics of action and their purposes. My findings have shown that succeeding in affirming agency over parental authority can be problematic at a young age, regardless of gender, as lack of financial independence severely affects both women's and men's ability to make decisions without family approval. In the

transition to adulthood, the intersection of gender with financial independence and marital status proved significant for young people's ability to negotiate choices. As noted earlier, while financial independence can increase decision-making in life, this alone may not be sufficient, particularly for women. Indeed, financial independence appeared to be sufficient to grant women more agency only when family dynamics and understanding of morals, traditions, and beliefs allowed for it. Many professional, unmarried women I spoke with consistently expressed disappointment that they could not become fully independent from their families despite their well-established careers. For instance, some women in their early thirties expressed frustration at not being allowed to move out of their parents' house. As Lana (SSI, 2019) explained, "even though I can afford to live on my own, I have to live in my family's house because I cannot move out". However, this should not undermine the value of economic independence for women's empowerment, as all the women I met highly valued financial independence as it allowed them to make their own decisions more often. The variable of marriage was also among the most influential factors in empowering women. Some of the young married women I met invoked their husbands' newfound authority to resolve unresolved issues they previously had with their parents. For instance, Mais (SSI, 2019) admitted how she struggled with her parents for a long time to switch her career from a bank employee to a schoolteacher. She said, "my father does not agree, but I hope to leave this job soon as my husband agrees with me". Mais' testimony sheds light on the ways in which parental expectations are negotiated by women, younger and older, students or professionals, and – most importantly – on the specific circumstances in which marriage can give women more agency. In this chapter I address these issues by discussing in detail the unique interplay of factors that affect people's dynamics of agency. For now, suffice it to say that family dynamics, intersecting with factors such as gender, education, economic independence, and marriage – "with the right partner" – become resources for further action that young people can use, even if they do not derive immediate benefits, to achieve the desired changes in their own expected life trajectories.

Dynamics of Action Within and Beyond Context Constraints

Most of the women and men I met admitted in SSIs that they express their disagreement with parental expectations by either "talking and discussing" or "arguing" with their parents, while in certain circumstances they refrain from

expressing their disagreement by choosing to "deceive or lie". These results show that the way young people express their conflicting expectations depends on the *type of relationship* they have with their parents, which, as explained in the previous chapter, overall assesses the degree of constraint experienced in the family context. All of the women and men in my sample whose relationships with both parents were characterised by support and understanding reported that they often discussed openly any matter of disagreement, as they felt comfortable doing so and trusted that their parents would listen to their concerns and agree with their decisions. Furthermore, most research participants who seemed to have a great deal of agency in their life recounted discussing with their parents their desired options but eventually making their own choices. Here, parents were especially supportive of young people's autonomous decisions. For instance, Maryam (SSI, 2019), a female student, said, "I always ask for my parents' opinion, but then I do what I want. For example, I just told them that I will move to Germany next summer". Similarly, Ahmad (SSI, 2019), a male student, stated, "when I want to do something, my parents and I talk and discuss about it. But my father eventually tells me to do what I want". The above examples show that people whose parents support their desires tend to make more independent choices. However, it also appears that this group has the highest levels of compliance, as high levels of understanding and trust between young people and their parents can lead them to value their parents' opinions over their own. As Yousef, a 23-year-old male student said:

> When I make up my mind, I analyse the pros and cons. I sit down with my parents and talk to them. They still influence my decisions, and sometimes they open my mind to more reasonable choices. The fact that I make a decision doesn't mean that I will make it for sure (Yousef, SSI, 2019).

Yousef admitted that his parents can influence his decisions to the extent that he ends up conforming to their wishes, regardless of what he had decided before. Although this attitude could be related to him still being young and having doubts about important-life decisions, it seems that parents-youth strong bond can lead individuals to comply with their family's expectations. In the case of young students, their decision to follow parental wishes sometimes seems to reflect their reverence for parental authority or, as mentioned earlier, a deep belief that parents know what is best for their children; therefore, it is better to listen to them to avoid problems. For

instance, Yasmin (SSI, 2019), a 20-year-old female student, said: "I feel like if you don't listen to your parents, something bad will happen. I don't do anything without their approval!". However, deferring to the family's decision does not mean that individuals lack agency. As the case of Samah below shows, young people living in a family environment without clear constraints may or may not choose to follow parental opinion, even if they can obtain parental consent to their own choices. In these cases, parents' relationship with children is based on support, rather than mere conflict:

> I ask my parents' opinion about everything. If we disagree, we talk about it and in the end I find myself agreeing with them. They advise me, and eventually, I become convinced. Usually they convince me by proving that what they say is true. Sometimes, I decide for myself what I want to do; for example, when I decided to quit my teaching job because things weren't going so well, I quit, and my parents stood by me. They could have changed my mind, but since I didn't like my job at all, they stood by me (Samah, SSI, 2019).

If talking and discussing is young people's most preferred way of expressing desires in family contexts with no (or moderate) conflict, in contexts where significant conflict exists with either one or both parents, young people tend to argue, and in this case, they are less likely to comply with the family's will. McNay (2000, p.23) emphasises that any theory of agency must be placed in the context of structural, institutional, or intersubjective constraints. In the context of my research, family constraints are crucial "in explaining the various modalities through which agency is expressed". However, action also transcends its material context to embrace its latent element of creativity (McNay, 2000). "A creative dimension to action is the condition of possibility of certain types of autonomous agency understood as the ability to act in an unexpected fashion or to institute new and unanticipated models of behaviours" (McNay, 2000, p.22). Creative agency is not purely creative or normative, it is an action which requires that the actors devise a new, unfamiliar path of action (Joas, 1996, p.233 cited in McNay, 1999, p.188). Thus, constraints render agentive practices "creative" as individuals becoming more vulnerable are in need to apply an action "which is appropriate to the situation" (Joas, 1996, p.233 cited in McNay, 1999, p.188). In the next section, I outline young people's strategies of creative agency that I have identified in analysing the life stories of the women and

men I met who were living in conflictual environments. Furthermore, I address the specific situations in which creative agentive practices are likely to emerge and which category of people are most likely to deploy them.

Creativity of Action

This section conceptualises creative aspects immanent to agency, explaining how, when faced with complexity and difference, individuals may respond in unanticipated and innovative ways which may hinder, reinforce, or catalyse change (McNay, 2000, p.5). Drawn from thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Ricoeur, and Cornelius Castoriadis, who outlined dynamic models of social reproduction, McNay (2000) developed a theory of creativity that enables a collective dimension of action to appear, overcoming the public-private dichotomy. In this section I address action and its creative aspects by considering how one can make desired choices in family contexts with varying degrees of constraint, and within a general social environment constituted by and through multiple ideological and structural constraints. I argue that creativity of action is guided by desires, yearning, longings, and aspirations which constitute powerful forces of transformation that can change life trajectories and bring about broader social change. I categorise creative agentive strategies as direct or indirect, and contextualise their significance by highlighting their intersecting nature, from which features of unpredictability and dynamism of action depend. Direct practices imply the use of open, thus, direct actions to express conflicting desires that contravene family authority, while indirect practices imply the use of covert actions, aimed at providing the individual with greater agency while in need of avoiding direct confrontation for certain reasons. The use of either strategy seems to depend not only on young people's type of relationship with their parents and the conflict issue domain, but also on the perceived vulnerability an action may trigger. Eventually, I provide an overview of the possible outcomes of creative agency, and their significance in relation to young people's ability to make desired choices. In analysing the different creative strategies that people in my sample used to negotiate change in their lives, four important outcomes of agency emerged, namely *compliance, compromise, independence, and independence with family estrangement.*

My findings show that young people tend to express their preferred choices, in contrast with parental ones, by talking and discussing or arguing; the action of expressing desires is accompanied by the deployment of a specific creative approach that involves the use of agentive strategies such as the *convincing*, *sabotaging*, *deceiving*, and *circumventing* one. Each of these strategies may entail the deployment of further tactics to succeed. The convincing strategy entails persuading parents by recurring to highly-context specific arguments, including concepts of moral values, respectability, religious ethic, or more practical and material arguments related to social mobility. Meanwhile, the sabotaging strategy involves bypassing parental consent by using tactics such as the fake performance one. The deceiving strategy, instead, entails the act of misleading parents about activities for which consent is unlikely to be granted. Lastly, the circumventing strategy involves young people appropriating parental expectations to their own benefit. In this case, circumventing becomes a means to enact the co-opted meanings discussed earlier. Furthermore, convincing is a direct practice, as here young people directly confront their parents by expressing their discontent. In contrast, sabotaging, deceiving, and circumventing are indirect practices, as direct confrontation is avoided for several reasons, which are explained below.

The Convincing Strategy

The significance of the convincing strategy is strictly related to the issue of parental consent, which is, to varying degrees, constantly important during the transition to adulthood. Whenever parental consent cannot be bypassed, women and men, students or professionals, employ this strategy to maximise their agentive chances. The successful implementation of this strategy is influenced by the overlap of conflict issue domains with age, employment, and marital status, which play a crucial role in the possibility of bypassing parental consent. Especially when it comes to life choices, the convincing strategy is applied by both female and male, students and professionals, since family consent can hardly be bypassed without parental agreement. While, regarding everyday life activities, the convincing strategy is applied mostly by female and male students when they either have an excellent relationship with parents and choose not to deceive them, or when deception is not an acceptable option for the individual or the activity cannot be easily deceived. For instance, if students wish to travel and stay overnight with peers in Jordan or abroad,

parental consent cannot be easily bypassed. However, if obtaining consent over freedom of movement equally concerned students and professionals, women and men alike, the relevant intersection of economic independence and age produced a different outcome for the two groups. Indeed, female and male professionals seemed to be able to act more independently in everyday activities, not because consent was not required of them, but because their economic power enabled them to obtain consent more easily. Indeed, while most young students, when failing to convince their parents and unable to mislead them, would simply give up and comply with the family's final decision, professionals would put their parents in front of their decision and force them to accept it. Here, the significance of financial independence in gaining consent makes a significant difference, as young adults would simply book their trip and leave, while youngsters could not. For instance, Kareem (SSI, 2019), a male professional, confirmed the importance of economic independence in empowering him. Thus, he said, "I tell my mother only two days before the trip that I will be going away, Since I cannot cancel the trip then, my mother will agree to it". Several female and male professionals also mentioned resorting to this 'last minute' tactic to obtain consent. In considering the overall importance of financial independence in obtaining parental consent, it is important to note again that other reasons – which crosscut age and financial independence – may undermine the significance of this factor. Indeed, in most cases, the reasons behind parents preventing young people from engaging in certain activities, such as travelling, may lie in the perceived danger of doing something or in discourses of moral respectability (see Chapter 2). Rahaf (SSI, 2019), a female student, explained, "once one of my friends asked me to go to the Dead Sea and spend the night there. My father disagreed because he needs to know the people who come along, so that he can trust me to spend time with them". Reflecting on the already tackled issues of morality, respectability, and perceived danger in engaging in certain activities, it is clear how young people navigate the difficulties of lack of consent by using tactics to convince their parents to allow them more freedom. Fahed, a male student, for example, said:

> I argue a lot with my parents about travelling. Once, I was invited to a friend's farm, my father disagreed with me going because he said people drink and take drugs. But I said that my friends are good and religious. So in the end I went, but he was quite upset (Fahed, SSI, 2019).

Fahed's quote illustrates how young people resort to different arguments as tactics to gain consent. These tactics are as varied as the attitudes of individual families to a particular issue. Therefore, the tactics to gain consent are adapted to respond to the reasons why parents refuse consent to certain activities. In matters of everyday life activities, these tactics may involve reassuring parents that the activities are risk-free by proving the respectability of their friends. As Fahed's case above shows, he was given consent after confirming his friends' adherence to a religious code of conduct. Another tactic is to inform parents of the friends' family background and reassure them that they are safe and approachable. For instance, a 33-year-old male professional, Kareem (SSI, 2019), confessed that he had given his mother some phone numbers of his travelling companions to obtain consent.

In matters of life choices, young people similarly resort to highly individualised arguments to convince their parents. Yasmin (SSI, 2019), a young female student whose family's denial of consent over her choice of moving abroad is related to her family's opinion about herself "not being responsible enough" as a woman, describes how she is working on convincing her parents that she is making the right decision, just as her sister, who successfully faced the same problem before her:

> I try to convince my parents by showing them how right my decision is. Just as my sister did when she decided to leave the country. When she was at university, she was totally forbidden to leave the country without a brother or a spouse, but she proved religiously that she is very responsible. She made her job interview online, got the job and proved to my parents how right she was. Now my sister lives her life alone in Germany. I can go and live with her if I want, but I have to prove that I am a bit more responsible. You have to prove that, especially if you are a woman, by having your own career and showing that you can handle responsibility. They think that is a man's job to get a job and pay the bills. A man can do that, but a woman…she might get a job and give it up later because she is fragile and cannot handle the pressure. That's what they think (Yasmin, SSI, 2019).

Yasmin's quote, expressing the understanding that women are unable to live on their own without a man to support them, conveys a social prevailing sense of mistrust towards a woman's ability to navigate the responsibilities of adult life. As it resonated in the words of women in the workplace struggling to be as trustworthy as men (see

Chapter 2), these ideas expose entrenched misconceptions about women's place in public life. However, Yasmin's story sheds light on how women can subvert this stereotype in the family context "by working hard to prove them wrong" and by appearing incredibly persistent in the pursuit of their goals. In Yasmin's words, perseverance and determination as practices of religious virtues shape her convincing strategy and foster her success. Her sister's success encourages Yasmin not to give up on her dreams and not to let gender stereotypes define her life. Yasmin's story, however, brings another issue to the fore: her family's approval of her sister's settlement abroad does not automatically give her the same right. The fight against gender bias affects every girl and woman who must prove herself worth a right. Thus, she said, "I still need to prove to my family that I can follow in my sister's footsteps and that I can pursue my dreams".

Another female student, Lama (SSI, 2019) resorted to more practical arguments to convince her father to study abroad. For example, she marketed her decision to study of abroad as a good career investment that would enable her to overcome Jordan's job market difficulties characterised by graduates' high unemployment rate:

> I don't want to spend my time here. I want to do an MA in Oxford, I want this so much, but my father disagrees. My sister spent six months in Spain. Initially, my father didn't want her to go, but she convinced him. It took her couple of years though. I also want to convince him by telling him how important it is for me to study in the UK to be economically competitive. In our society, the financial situation is difficult, so it is important to graduate from a highly competitive university. I don't want to live in Jordan, and after my MA, I would like to live in Japan or Canada. I want to get a PhD and work as a professor. I want to travel a lot, visit all of Europe and the Maldives. I have never travelled anywhere except to Mecca for the pilgrimage (Lama, SSI, 2019).

What is interesting about Lama's story – in the contradiction it evokes – is how crucial it is for a young woman like her to devise a convincing strategy that makes perfect sense to her family and keep up with it while dreaming of something else. In fact, Lama, while using the study abroad card to enhance her employability chances in Jordan, did not dream of spending her life in Jordan at all. I remember her eyes bursting with joy when confiding in me her dream of having a successful career and living a life as an independent woman, far away from a society that, as she said, "kills

you, seriously. Here, you feel you are left out when you don't follow the rules, and no one cares about you". Lama had another challenge ahead of her: she had to convince her father that she had no intention of getting married before the age of 25 – as he firmly expected from all of his daughters – as she admitted, "I have too many priorities than getting married". I come back to this aspect of negotiating undesired marriages later when I discuss the significance of the circumventing strategy.

Overall, the strategy of convincing was mentioned most frequently by my research participants, regardless of age, gender, employment, and marital status in all family contexts, from low to high levels of conflictuality. Regardless of its outcome, this strategy seemed particularly revealing, especially in terms of the discussion it opened up when I asked the following question "and what do you do if you fail to convince your parent(s)?". The diversity of responses to this question allowed me to understand how younger generations navigate difficulties by adopting different strategies to achieve their desired path in life. These findings confirm previous ones pointing to the dual relevance of ideological constraints embodied in families own understandings of morality, beliefs, and traditions and the families dynamics that shape individuals' agentive capabilities; overall, this gives us insight into how strategies are carefully developed. Although the intersecting factors of gender, financial independence, and age further influence the degree of agency, they are not determinant in granting freedom. The following section examines the strategies young people resort to when they fail to convince their parents.

The Sabotaging Strategy

As already mentioned, the strategy of convincing is mainly used for life decisions, since parental consent can hardly be circumvented. So when young people fail to convince their parents, do they simply give up their dreams and expectations? My findings show that when consent is not given, other creative strategies, such as sabotaging consent, are used in contexts of high disagreement. The sabotaging strategy is used in life decisions regardless of gender, age, employment, and marital status, and includes sabotaging parental consent. It also includes tactics such as the fake performance one. The deployment of this strategy features young people's need to balance their will to achieve their dreams with the need to obtain parental consent.

Overall, this strategy conveys the power of dreams as a driver of agency and the determination of young people not to give up their aspirations.

In analysing the ways in which young people manage undesired marriage expectations, I found an exciting example of a sabotaging strategy in the practice of "delaying marriage". This was especially true for young female students who disagreed with traditional marriage arrangements and instead wanted to choose their own partner, or who were already in love with someone their family was unlikely to accept. This finding was particularly evident in the context of high family conflict, where the family had strong expectations of the prospective husband's characteristics, such as his ethnicity. During my fieldwork in Jordan and the years I lived and worked in Amman, I encountered people and friends whose parents did not allow intra-ethnic marriages of daughters or sons. I remember some of my friends expressing their concerns because their parents would not accept them marrying a Jordanian or Palestinian man. Remarkably, some Palestinian families only agreed to their daughters marrying within a particular Palestinian family that came from a particular village or town in Palestine. In this case, the girls' strategy of delaying marriage by pushing the age limit was often used in the hope that parents would change their minds when confronted with the fear of their daughters growing older. Some unmarried women who were in their early thirties laughed rather smugly during SSIs, pointing out that their parents would accept anyone they choose at the moment, as they just wanted them to get married. One female student of Transjordanian origin recalled the story of her sister falling in love with a Palestinian guy, as follows:

> My sister loves a Palestinian guy. He has proposed to her, but my father has not accepted him until now. My sister is 25, she has not yet got engaged, and she is waiting for my father to accept him. My father sees that she is already 25 and she is missing the train! He has also found another suitor for her, but she refuses to see him, and keeps insisting on that Palestinian guy (Lama, SSI, 2019).

Lama's expression "missing the train" is my translation of the Arabic expression she used in the interview, "*rahat 'alaia*", which literally means "she missed it". This Arabic expression expresses a common social feeling towards a woman who is getting older and is not yet married. Often, unmarried women over thirty are

addressed with the derogatory term *'anisa* (spinster). Indeed, women who are not married or choose not to marry may face negative comments and resentment. Many women I met recalled being secretly judged as *meskine* (poor thing), even though they had achieved a lot, or being pitied by extended family members. For example, Ruba (SSI, 2019), a 31-year-old professional woman, said, "I don't like to see my relatives because no matter what I have achieved in my life, I am not considered complete because I am not married". Women may choose to delay marriage by resorting to various tactics, such as enrolling in an MA. In this regard, one of my participants answered my question about how she was able to convince her parents that she was not ready for marriage soon after she completed her BA as follows:

> I am smart, so I started my MA and took four years to finish it! My parents will not pressure me if I have a good reason not to get married now (Layan, SSI, 2019).

Layan's words above express that young people need to understand their family's priorities to be able to successfully postpone marriage. In Layan's case, she knew that education was a good reason for her family to delay her marriage to a later date. Similarly, male participants mentioned delaying marriage by rejecting family marriage arrangements until they found the right partner in the hope that parents would be more accommodating over their partner's choice as time passed. My findings illustrate that for the youngest group of student participants, marriage was something to be avoided or temporarily postponed, while for the professional participants, marriage was a strategic decision of critical importance considering its possibilities of enhancing agency.

In analysing the participants' diverse approaches to negotiating life choices, another example of sabotaging consent was that of apparently abandoning a life choice, a desire, or a dream by showing temporary compliance to the will of the family, by resorting to a tactic I named *fake performance*. This tactic involves faking conformity to the family's authority in a risky attempt to prove unsupportive parents wrong, thus earning their trust to make an alternative, more desired, choice. The tactic of fake performance does not include the use of secretive actions to deceive parents. Rather, it involves individuals embracing parents' expectations by performing what parents think is best for them and – by failing in it – proving them

wrong. This tactic emerged in contexts of high family conflict after young people failed to convince or negotiate their decisions about a desired field of study or a spouse. For instance, some students who had complied with their parents' expectations to enrol in a particular field of study admitted that they had failed in it to prove that their parents' choice did not suit them, and were thus given permission to change to their preferred field of study. Furthermore, one male student, Moutaz (SSI, 2019), confided in me how he complied with his father's wishes to arrange his marriage traditionally, only to show him how wrong that choice was by proving not to be a suitable spouse for that girl and eventually being rejected by her family. By taking this risk, this young man allowed himself to be freed from his father's expectations and authority over his choice of marriage. The strategy of sabotaging consent to important life choices occurred only in very few cases of high family conflictuality. This can be explained by the considerable risk involved, especially in fake performance tactic. However, this strategy appeared to be successful when applied, as young people ultimately had agency over important life decisions, such as postponing marriage, enrolling in a chosen field of studies, or avoiding marriage to an undesirable spouse.

The Deceiving Strategy

In some family contexts, young generations often choose to deceive their parents. The decision to deceive parents rather than confront them directly should not be seen as an opportunistic choice to avoid conflict. Indeed, this strategy was used when parent-youth communication lacked considerably or in all situations where consent was unlikely to be achieved *a priori*, as it meant violating social norms and disregarding moral and religious values. Deceiving is an interesting choice of strategy used to gain independence, even if only temporarily, when consent to the desired choice cannot be obtained. It was primarily used in family contexts where conflicts arose over young people's controversial lifestyles or hobbies. It was mainly used by female and male students and professionals only in everyday activities. As Laila, a female student explained:

> I did so many things my parents didn't know about. I travelled to places and they knew nothing about it. I used to tell them that I was at university sleeping in the dorm or at a friend's place. I went to Turkey, Lebanon, and Sharm el-

> Shaykh without them knowing, and so many times I went to the Dead Sea and Aqaba (Laila, SSI, 2019).

In Laila's case, deceiving was possible as she was already entitled to spend the night outside the house, either at a friends' place or at the university's dormitory in Amman, as she lived in northern Jordan and had moved to Amman to study at UJ. Similarly, another female student, Aaliyah (SSI, 2019), said, "I used to go to clubs without my parents knowing, I told them that I was sleeping at my friend's place while I went out to have fun". Furthermore, to avoid confrontation, most of my research participants said in SSIs that they would deceive their parents if they wanted to go on a one-day trip. For instance, Kareem, a male professional, recalls how he had refined this strategy over time and how he could now act more independently:

> When I go on a day trip, I lie to my parents by telling them that I am going somewhere else, or by not telling them anything at all. I worked on this a lot, and now that I am older, I have more freedom (Kareem, SSI, 2019).

In addition, the youngest admitted to lie to their parents also about the area where they were hanging out or the activity they were doing with friends in Amman during daylight, while some young women and men admitted to telling only their mothers.

In analysing the decision to use the deceiving strategy to gain agency, it must be made clear that young people resorted to lying whenever they knew that their parents would not accept their choices, especially when it came to choosing a controversial lifestyle or engaging in activities that were not accepted by the family or society as these conflicted with moral or religious values. Examples of such activities were dancing, singing, playing an instrument, smoking shisha or cigarettes, hanging out in mixed groups, playing some sports, or taking off the *hijab*. It is worth noting that the acceptance of these practices varies greatly from family to family and that the point here is not to show which activities are not frowned upon in society, but to understand the dynamics that lead young people to prefer one strategy over another. For instance, not only did some female participants admit to smoking secretly, but also some males one who were either students or professionals. While women chose to smoke in secret to avoid society's negative judgement over women smoking in public, some men considered it extremely disrespectful to smoke in front of their

fathers and therefore avoided it. Many of my female and male participants stated that they lie about engaging in certain hobbies, such as singing or dancing. For instance, Amal, a female student, told me about her passion for singing and her dream of becoming an actress. However, she stressed that she must keep this a secret, and therefore she constantly lies to her father about participating in singing competitions:

> I love singing, but I am not allowed to sing, either in public or in private. My father does not like that because he is very religious, and music is haram in Islam. However, I attend events that promote talent and perform secretly without anyone knowing my name. This can be an event or karaoke at university or a talent show at a café (Amal, SSI, 2019).

In Amal's case, lying was necessary, as it allowed her to continue doing what she liked without being stopped by her father. Similarly, Farah, by recalling her sister's story, proved how deception is very often the only strategy to break free from parental authority:

> My parents forbade my sister to go to a dance school as she would have danced with boys. But, my sister secretly went and learned to dance. After four months, my mother found out about it. She told my father, but he didn't mind as much as my mother did. My sister had to stop dancing. She told my mother that there are no girls-only salsa classes. Also, my sister took off her *hijab* while dancing. I want to take off my *hijab* too, I tried to talk to my mother about it, but she does not let me (Farah, SSI, 2019).

Similar stories were told by male participants, particularly among those who belonged to a tango dancers community in Amman. The negative stigma of dancing seemed to weigh particularly heavily, with many women and men confessing to lying to their parents about attending dance classes. Kareem (SSI, 2019), a professional in his thirties, confided in me that most dancers in his circle of friends share similar stories and some, he said, "have been dancing for 13 years without their parents knowing". The social stigma is too heavy because "people judge us negatively, without understanding what we do". The frustration in his voice was very heavy as he admitted, "life here is very hard. I have spent many years of my life explaining what I do, but why do I have to do this all the time?". After many years as a member of the tango community, Kareem decided to stop hiding his passion for tango, as he confessed, "it was hard to tell the truth, but I don't lie anymore". For Kareem, the

decision to stop lying was linked to his strong awareness that there is nothing immoral, or to be ashamed of, in dancing, and that society and his family were wrong to believe so. His consciousness-raising, encouraged by his age and financial independence, enabled him to face his family by telling the truth.

Seif (SSI, 2019), another male member of the tango community, not only admitted that he had lied to his family for five years about dancing the tango, but also recalled the struggle he faced when he decided to learn an instrument, the Oud.[31] His mother had firmly opposed Seif's desire to both dance and play music, as according to her religious moral standard, music and dancing with girls was *haram*[32] or illicit in Islam. In analysing the opposite decision taken by Ruba (SSI, 2019), a female professional who faced a similar struggle when decided to take guitar lessons while she was still a student, it became clear that an individual's choice to either lie to or defy parents was linked to parents' reasons for denying permission. Unlike Seif, Ruba did not deceive her mother but displayed a defiant attitude towards her, whose decision to prevent her from taking guitar lessons was based on the fear that her daughter would be judged negatively by society for "carrying the guitar in the street, in front of everyone". Ruba chose to ignore her mother's fear and publicly defy societal norms, as she proudly explained, "I carried it with me every day at university". Seif's and Ruba's contrasting decisions to lie or not to lie concerned their differing evaluations of the reasons for not receiving consent, which in Seif's case concerned his mother's religious understanding, while in Ruba's one concerned her mother's fear of social judgement of her daughter's hobby. This confirms my suggestion that young people mostly deceive when an activity contravene their family's understanding of morals, values, and religious beliefs. Deceiving allows young people to practise, more or less temporarily, an activity that violates a moral and religious code of conduct. However, their ability to permanently and openly practise a supposedly immoral behaviour requires family consent. This is because the consequences of publicly challenging the moral code go beyond the individual and affect the reputation and respectability of the whole family (tribes and clans). Some people I met often mentioned practising deception when trying to convince their parents to give them permission to do something. This was true for young

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[31] Middle Eastern musical instrument resembling the lute.
[32] The word *haram* is used to signify what is illicit and forbidden under Islamic law.

women who expressed their reluctance to adhere to social norms of "modesty", particularly veiling. For instance, Farah (SSI, 2019), a 20-year-old student, confessed that she secretly takes off her *hijab* when she goes to university or meets friends in some neighbourhoods, while in the meanwhile she tries to convince her mother to take it off. Another girl, Hala, a 23-year-old professional who also argued with her mother about wearing the veil, confessed that taking off the *hijab,* even by deceiving, is a red line she is not allowed to cross, while she can more easily negotiate her choice of clothes:

> She tells me to wear the *hijab* and loose clothing. I don't do what she asks me to do in terms of clothing, but I can't take off my hijab, even though I want to. Maybe, in a few years, I will be able to, but for now, I can't. When we argue about the *hijab*, my mother tells me that I have to fear God, but I answer her: do you think God will send me to hell if I don't wear something on my head (Hala, SSI, 2019)?

The fact that both girls seek permission to take off their *hijab* signifies that it is indeed necessary to obtain consent to do something that could undermine the family's reputation. However, the decision of the two girls whether to deceive or not while waiting to convince their mothers depends on their perceived risk, thus, their vulnerability in publicly adopting a controversial behaviour. It is also possible to suggest that Farah, unlike Hala, decided to deceive as she was a student who spent most of her time on campus. It was therefore unlikely that she would be caught by her family members, as she probably knew that none of her relatives studied at the same institution. The fact that the conflict over veiling involved mostly mothers and daughters could also indicate a mother's desire to monitor her daughter's behaviour to preserve her reputation, essential to secure both the daughter's future and the family's respectability within the community, which are closely tied. This is even more evident in the case of Hala who, unlike Farah, is expected to marry soon as she has already completed her studies. Thus, Hala's suggestion that she may make this choice later in life – e.g., when she marries a husband who supports this choice or moves abroad – underlines her belief that this could be a temporary compromise for her to secure her future; hence her choice not to deceive.

Lastly, the choice of deceiving informs us about young people's shifting notions of modesty and respectability in relation to religious practices. For instance, some girls

mentioned wanting to take off the *hijab* as they were no longer religious, did not feel comfortable wearing it, or no longer believed in the religious significance of wearing it. These anecdotes, in the narratives of some young men and women I met, reflect a lack of identification with family and societal norms and moral values of what is decent and acceptable for a girl or boy, including from a cultural-religious perspective. These attitudes go beyond the simple consideration of young people defying parental authority to act as they wish, for this reflects young people's shifting notions of moral standards. This confirms the importance of defining strategies to gain agency in everyday activities, including deceiving, not merely as a means of circumventing parental rules for temporary freedom, but as potentially systemic transformative acts, considering their role in disrupting social norms.

Although most of my participants admitted to deceiving their parents, some defined this practice as unacceptable and therefore admitted to never lying to their parents. In addition, extremely low levels of deceiving were found among young people who had great parental support, who were religious, who valued parental authority, and those who feared the consequences of disobedience. However, in all these cases, other tactics were used which, while serving the purpose of avoiding lying directly, carried the same benefits. For instance, Rasha (SSI, 2019), a deeply religious female professional, admitted that she avoids telling her parents where she goes and what she does during the day, but she tells the truth if asked.

My oldest sample of participants, including female and male professionals, were less likely to choose the strategy of deceiving and opted to confront their parents even about everyday life issues. Many women and men recalled how shifting their behaviour from deception to direct confrontation led them to act more independently. My female respondents emphasised how their behaviour in relation to parental consent had changed in the transition to adulthood and how this had to some extent lost its importance. An example of this kind appeared in professionals succeeding in gaining parental consent by presenting parents with their choice, a tactic I discussed as part of an adult's convincing strategy. The shift towards confrontation is often seen as people grow older and start careers, as their newly-acquired, non-subordinate financial position gives them the ability to directly challenge their family's authority over their lives and not value their parents' opinions as much as they once did. Adults'

ability to better negotiate life choices allows some to confront parents over a contradictory, yet desired, lifestyle and code of behaviour. Overall, financial independence empowers women and men, who have both more choices at hand and the power to negotiate them according to the degree of responsibility they bear.

As I will demonstrate later, adults' power of conducting better negotiations stems from their greater understanding of family dynamics and the risk that taking certain choices may entail, and thus what is worth fighting for or not. The importance of not stepping beyond certain lines is vital in determining what battles to pick and weapons to choose to fight and win them. Even though agency increases in the transition to adulthood, strategies are highly negotiated also in adult life. Thus, when it comes to life choices – where family's authority as the embodiment of the country's power hierarchies cannot be circumvented without disciplinary consequences – young people may resort to another, more sophisticated strategy whose crucial importance rests on its potential to bridge the individual and collective levels: the circumventing strategy.

The Circumventing Strategy

This strategy implies young people's strategic use of co-opted meanings of gendered expectations (see Chapter 3), specifically marriage and education (abroad), to achieve a status of independence within the system. Particularly, women in SSIs admitted that pursuing further education abroad or getting married were the only two options to become independent from their parents. Although this strategy may concern women and men alike, it was mainly mentioned by women. The circumventing strategy is *a way of enacting desired choices* in contexts of high family conflictuality, where individuals cannot contradict the family's authority and contravene social norms, or where the implementation of a desired choice could jeopardise their safety. Apart from the specificity of the context, it is important to note that the use of subversive strategies, such as this one, is not limited to family contexts where agency is restricted. In fact, even in contexts where family constraints are not significantly limiting, societal constraints hinder individuals' agency, as prevailing gender norms can generally prevent people from taking certain actions that might compromise their respectability (e.g., moving out of parents' house or moving in with an unmarried partner). This confirms that it is de-facto impossible to

disentangle the relevance of both family and social constraints in people's lives. This makes everyone, albeit to varying degrees, in need to apply the safest creative strategy to make a desired choice, which may entail circumventing either family or societal constraints, or both.

The most striking example of a circumventing strategy I could identify was that of "leaving Jordan". When I spoke to young women, I was particularly struck by the considerable number of those who mentioned the option of moving abroad as the only possibility of breaking free from family interventions. In addition to several women, a number of men also mentioned this option as the only way to lead a desired life, away from family and society, which they described as the main obstacles to live the life they wanted. The circumventing strategy is closely tied to the co-optation of meanings, as it relies on family expectations to cultivate individuals' desires. Here I show how young people, by positioning themselves within family's expectations, enhance their ability to realise their aspirations without disrupting family ties.

It has been shown that parents' and daughters' expectations of pursuing education abroad simultaneously reflect two inner meanings, namely the parents' dream of social mobility and the young women's dream of independence. Education in this sense is an instrument that enables the daughters to "get out of Jordan" to escape family and societal control and live a life on their own terms. The participants were aware that their actual ability to move abroad could materialise only if they continued their education abroad and then found a job abroad, as this would have guaranteed them to settle in the host country once their student visa expired. Thus, the option of enrolling in an MA or PhD programme abroad was widely mentioned, especially by women who were either studying or working, while a few mentioned the possibility of moving abroad for work, recognising the struggle of getting a job with visa sponsorship, especially in Europe or North America, which were the preferred destinations.[33] Thus, even when they had an established career, many chose to apply for another MA, or a PhD, as a means of settling abroad. Even if parents expected their young daughters to be educated abroad, they did not always wish their

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[33] I am aware of the impact of class on the actual opportunities for young people to move and settle abroad. However, most of my participants from lower and middle classes relied on receiving a scholarship to be financially able to study abroad.

daughters to settle abroad. Again, we can see a convergence of parent-youth expectations, but a divergence of the meaning(s) assigned to these by both parties.

As young women mentioned getting married or moving abroad as the only options available to them to achieve a state of independent adulthood without cutting ties with their family, thus by remaining within the system, proves that economic independence and career are insufficient to guarantee a woman's complete independent status. As Yasmin (SSI, 2019), a female student concerned about her independence, confessed, "if I don't get married, being more independent is a problem unless I leave the country". For these women, "being independent" meant being able to afford their own house, choose their own career and life partner, and make independent decisions without the burden of having to follow norms and expectations with which they did not identify. For Yasmin, "staying in Jordan is not an option". She identifies the main burden in the need to respect traditions and in the way society views women, which she describes as "depressing":

> A woman cannot break free, and if she does, she will get everyone's disapproval. I know a woman who took her own apartment to be more independent. She was religious, wore the *hijab* and followed our traditions. Her only crime was that she wanted to live on her own! Unfortunately, her family disapproved of her choice, and her brother stabbed her. Because of the society, I want to build my life somewhere else. I don't want my daughter to grow up here (Yasmin, SSI, 2019).

Yasmin's words describe how difficult it is to become independent for unmarried women who want to stay in Jordan, or cannot find a way to leave the country, and the consequences some may incur when taking a desired choice against family and societal norms, such as moving out. Yasmin expressed her frustration at not being able to live an independent life without restrictions in Jordan, particularly as she, like many other women, does not want to get married, or study. Thus, she confided in me her alternative plan, which she called a "life-plan", to become independent. "After my graduation, I will try to break free. I have a 5-year plan in which I want to earn some money, so that then I can leave the country". Since Yasmin does not want to continue studying or get married, for her, getting a job to earn money and then settle abroad is the only viable choice. Overall, while moving abroad, mainly for educational purposes, was mostly mentioned by younger and older women, some

male respondents also mentioned it as a means to escape family expectations and societal norms that define a man's worth by his ability to be successful at all costs.

Women who did not have the opportunity or simply the desire to study abroad, and those who wanted to spend their life with a partner, saw marriage as a way to live the life they most desired. Indeed, my findings suggest that marriage is another circumventing strategy used by women to achieve greater independence. Indeed, by getting married, women are able to leave their family house to set out their own household and live a desired life. As mentioned earlier, the circumstances in which marriage can provide women with a passport to freedom are very specific. Indeed, "the right marriage", as defined by many participants, has the potential to give women more agency by loosening parental authority and control. However, this potential depends on women choosing the right partner, a partner who, as all the women, young and adult, repeatedly said, is not too strict or too religious, and allows them to work, as this is crucial to changing women's life for the better in a society that already put heavy expectations on them. For the women I met, an indispensable criterion for a suitable partner was that of having a mutual understanding of morals, tradition, and religious values as well as a code of behaviour, between both the partners and the respective families. Particularly, women placed great importance on the social class of the prospective husbands, which was crucial in guaranteeing women with the same (or sometimes better) level of comfort and lifestyle. As shown earlier, if daughters marry the right partner, they can have more agency over their life choices, as they can escape family expectations with which they disagree by shifting the requirement of obedience\consent from the family of origin to a husband with whom they share similar values and opinions. In these circumstances only, marriage can enhance women's agency and provide them with a "passport to freedom". Furthermore, marriage was often cited by both women and men in SSIs as a means to "enjoy life with a much-loved partner" at a young age. Indeed, for some, getting married meant having the chance to have some freedom by practising a different lifestyle and making autonomous choices that suited both partners' life vision. This included freedom of movement by travelling inside and outside Jordan, with or without friends, or moving abroad together to build a desired life together, or simply enjoying their youth for many years before facing the responsibility of having children. The circumventing strategy appeared to be particularly important in

ensuring the desired agency, as young people could negotiate their life choices more easily when families felt that their daughters and sons had fulfilled their expectations, which often mirrored parents' desire to make sure their daughters and sons had guaranteed future stability and security. Instead, these expectations are co-opted in their inherent meanings, as young people may subvert them by seizing upon gendered norms. This ultimately renders young women and men masters of their own destiny and active agents of social change. But what is the outcome that the deployment of the creative agentive strategies discussed so far may have on individuals' enactment of desired selfhood and realities? The following section addresses this question.

The Aftermath of Creative Agency

The creative strategies outlined above can lead to different outcomes. In retracing my participants' lived accounts, I found four primary outcomes of applying creative strategies, namely compliance, compromise, independence, and independence with family estrangement. To explain these outcomes in more detail, I provide below some stories that mirror each outcome and the possible reasons that might have led to it.

The outcome of compliance seems to be common to specific contexts where individuals are exposed to high family pressure, possibly the nuclear and extended family, and where they have little options other than complying with the family's agenda. The significance of this outcome should be seen in relation to the consequences that the act of disobedience can have for women and men alike. The specificity of the family context may render this choice too risky, as it can jeopardise a powerful network of social relationships, securing one's social respectability, financial and emotional support and wellbeing, by exposing them to threats and future uncertainty. It is often argued that the choice of confronting power depends on the individual's ability to secure alternative means of support, for instance, by switching to friends' network support (e.g., Droeber, 2005; Jabiri, 2016). However, I argue that it is improbable that other means of support can compensate for the individual's loss when alienated from family, at least in contexts of relationality. Indeed, my participants did not wish to reach this outcome, and their most recurring expression "everyone needs a family", clearly indicates that they are aware of the

danger associated with the loss of family support. In fact, most of the people I met who had directly defied their family's authority had anticipated their family's reaction to the disobedient act and the consequences of their choice before making it. In most cases, those who admitted to defying their family's authority in their life choices knew that their disobedient act would not have jeopardised their safety or wellbeing. It is also crucial to note that the consequences of disobedience are also strongly gendered. For a man, family estrangement as a result of disobedience can lead to alienation from the family and the wider community, determining the loss of social respectability and associated privileges. For a woman, instead, contravening family rules, specifically in relation to the code of behaviour and sexual conduct, can result in physical harm, as some families resort to the so-called honour killing to restore their respectability in the eyes of the community. These gendered consequences of disobedience may lead individuals to resort to compliance to avoid wider repercussions that could hinder their empowerment efforts.

For Mahmoud and Yaser (SSIs, 2019), two men from a Transjordanian tribal background, one a professional in his early thirties, and the other a 19-year-old student, the unsuccessful use of the convincing strategy to persuade their parents to let them enrol in their desired course of study, led to two different outcomes: compliance for Mahmoud and compromise for Yaser. When he was younger, Mahmoud, gave up his dream to pursue a military career after failing to get his father's approval to do so. Mahmoud's choice of complying with his father's decision and pursue a civilian profession was not only determined by his fathers' opinion of what was best for him, but also seemed to be dictated by a lack of options. Since his father, who himself held a military position, withdrew his support, Mahmoud felt like having little chances to succeed in a military career.

Different, instead, was the outcome for Yaser, who faced the opposite disagreement, as both his mother and father expected him to follow in their footsteps and join the military, while he preferred to continue studying English language and literature. In Yaser's case, the disagreement over his career choice led the young man to compromise rather than comply with his family's decision. He accepted his family's will to join the Jordanian army only on the condition that he does so "on his own terms", which for Yaser meant seeking admission to a highly competitive military

training programme abroad. Meanwhile, while waiting for an admission decision, he enrolled in his preferred BA programme in English language and literature at UJ. Yaser's story reveals profound conflicting feelings between his own choice of studying English literature and his parallel desire to live up to his parents' expectations, as he said, "I agree with my parents, but in a way, I would rather stay here. I like what I study, and if I go there, I will not be able to study English literature anymore". In my conversation with Yaser, it became clear that his desire to enrol in the army stemmed from a need to prove to his parents that he could fit into the military masculinity model they embodied, ultimately showing to be a mature man who can make responsible choices. His contradictory words, "if I think responsibly I will join the military, but if I think freely I will stay here and study English literature", also offer the possibility that he might later change his strategy or that he already has, perhaps by shifting from the unsuccessful convincing strategy to the sabotaging one that allows him to prove to his parents that he is not suited for the army by not being admitted to a programme he had little chances of admission. Since this choice was particularly challenging for Yaser, one can assume that he secretly hopes not to be admitted in the military academy rather than failing to achieve an ideal of military masculinity. So, for the time being, Yaser is compromising on his desired choices, but its final outcome is yet to be determined.

The outcome of independence, which I distinguish from independence with family estrangement, signifies young people's ability to make desired choices without severing ties with their family. I consider this outcome of deploying creative strategies to be the most successful outcome achieved by the people in my sample, and therefore the most sought-after. The significance of this outcome is that it enabled young people to make life choices in line with their new set of values by remaining within the system. This outcome could be achieved both by people who did not face significant family constraints and those who did. In contexts where families were able to accommodate young people's changing values by supporting their aspirations and compromising on their expectations, young women and men were able to achieve independence easily. In other contexts where conflictuality was higher, young people were eventually able to make their own decisions after having successfully applied a most suitable creative strategy among the convincing, sabotaging, or circumventing ones. As mentioned earlier, crossing the boundaries of

family authority can sometimes estrange individuals from their immediate and larger kin network. In the context of relational connectivity of Arab families, family's estrangement is a tough choice for most individuals, if not a complete failure; therefore, it is not a preferred course of action in the individual's quest for empowerment. Instead, achieving independence without estrangement means that individuals have successfully negotiated their choices by being able to remain within the system.

Accounts of women and men making autonomous life choices were much more common than I had expected. The outcome of independence was achieved by individuals who, having expressed their own conflicting desires, had finally their voices heard and were able to pursue their aspirations with the ultimate support of their family. Thus, they were able to challenge the system and facilitate change from within. I argue that this ability to *stay within the system* is crucial for an individual to pose a threat to the system. Conversely, achieving independence by breaking ties with the system can rarely effect change, as the individual becomes a social outcast; therefore, their actions, which are labelled "abnormal to the system", cannot be normalised and thus cannot produce change.

However, if families are not likely to support individuals' desires, independence within the system cannot be achieved. In this case, young people's independence is sought, whenever deemed appropriate, at the expense of family ties, and this, sometimes can lead to the individual's estrangement from the family. In the transition to adulthood, when young women and men directly confront their families in life choices, the affirmation of subjectivity and the attainment of agency becomes highly gendered, as the choices that women and men make may have different consequences. With this in mind, we should consider women's choice of gaining independence as more strategic than men's. As mentioned earlier, young women prefer alternative ways to escape family control without cutting family ties; for instance, recurring to the circumventing strategy allows women to change their lives by moving abroad or marrying a partner who supports their dreams, rather than making more drastic decisions that could compromise their sense of security and wellbeing.

Most of the single professional women I met were in conflict with their families about their desire to move out of the parental home and live independently. This issue seemed highly contentious and gendered, as such a decision could potentially jeopardise a woman's family ties. Unlike the three men I met who were able to move out, only one woman was able to do the same, but not without causing a significant rapture with her nuclear and extended family. The story of 32-year-old Riham is an example of the outcome of independence with family estrangement that resulted from her drastic choice to move out of her family home:

> I left my house because I cannot tolerate how my father treats me, my mother, my sister, and my brother. So I moved out. He said, "my house, my rules, if you don't like it, you leave" and he did not expect me to actually move out. But I made up my mind and did it. It was hard at first because all my extended family were arguing with me and trying to stop me. I told them some of the things that had happened within the family. They said, "it is not good for me, because I am a woman and my reputation…" you know, everything is about that. I told them that I am an independent woman and I do what I want, because if I cry on my pillow at the end of the day, they will not come to wipe my tears! I told them, "you do not have the right to tell me what to do, if you want to kill me, you can kill me, I don't care. I will do what I believe in" (Riham, SSI, 2019).

Riham's words illustrate the kind of relationship she and other family members had with an authoritative father, and how she chose to stand up for herself despite being aware of the consequences this could bring. She confided in me that she lives an utterly secret life none of her family members know about except her sisters. Her relationship with her father and extended family members was very distant, while she also lied about her real life to the family members she still had contact with, namely her mother and brother. In fact, moving out was not the only red line that Riham courageously crossed, as she was secretly living with her boyfriend, to whom she was not engaged, and who belonged to a different religious community. Riham's courageous decision describes how difficult it is for women to reach a state of independence, but also that crossing boundaries for women does not necessarily mean actually achieving freedom. Riham is forced to constantly lie to protect her wellbeing, and even if her life has improved since she left her family home, she is besieged. By mentioning the "honour killing option", Riham has made it clear to her entire family how far she is willing to go to live her life on her own terms. In contrast

to Riham, another woman, Lana (SSI, 2019), described how she had argued with her family for a while about moving out and eventually had to give up her desire to live alone because she knew it would have jeopardised her personal relationship with her parents. Therefore, she said, "now I have to find another solution", and that solution for an adult and single woman like her is again to leave Jordan. Lana chooses to leave Jordan because her more positive family dynamics do not allow her to go against her family's wishes and upset them by leaving. At the time of the interview, she was looking for a job in Europe that would allow her to meet her own expectations without lowering her standard of living. "As soon as I find something decent," she said, "I will move out immediately. My family would not say no, because in that case society will not judge them".

Riham's and Lana's stories reflect the difficulties unmarried women face in living as independent adults, highlighting how highly gendered the strategies applied to negotiate independence can be. Ultimately, women's most preferred choice remains that of moving abroad for study or work, as other options, such as moving out of the family home, are sometimes out of the question. For some men, instead, at least the ones I met, the outcome of such a decision looked different. Seif, Anas, and Marwan (SSIs, 2019) were all able to move out after overcoming their family's initial resistance, without having their safety put at risk or being threatened with family estrangement. Seif, a 32-year-old professional, described how society perceives the gendered implications of moving out as follows:

> I moved out of my parents' house. For a man, it is hard to make such a decision, but still possible because there is no danger in doing so. But for a girl, people would say that it is shameful. She is automatically outcast from society, she is considered a slut. People think she wants to live alone so she can do what she wants; rumours will start and her family will be affected. Initially, my family didn't accept my decision. But, I didn't even try to convince them, I just told them that I will move out next week. They were angry and asked me why I wanted to do that. I told them that I needed some privacy. When you live with your parents, everything is prepared, the food, the clothes, there is no rent and no responsibility. I wanted to take on more responsibility. So far I like it very much (Seif, SSI, 2019).

The above quote highlights the implication of moving out for women and men who want to achieve a state of independence from their families as they transition to

adulthood. This clarifies how achieving independence requires the use of highly gendered tactics that allow young women and men to challenge the system from a "safer position" from which it is much easier to push existing boundaries and create new ones. Although most of my research participants, not only students but also professionals, were still living with their parents, the frequency with which the topic of "moving out" came up in conversations with professionals seems to illustrate a possible trend of young, financially independent women and men who are no longer willing to compromise their adult-living arrangements. Overall, the dynamics of actions and the unique outcomes they lead to depend on the intersection of gender with individual factors such as employment and marital status, along with other forms of power relations unique to the family background. These include elements such as the nuclear and extended family network ties, the family's exercise of power and degree of control over the individual, and notions of authority, obedience, respectability, understanding of traditions, morals, and beliefs. Overall, agency is always carefully negotiated as the consequence of disobeying the family authority, could in some cases jeopardise the individual's safety, either temporarily or permanently. Furthermore, the impact of such consequences may outweigh other factors such as gender, class, and ethnicity in importance and lead to greater inequalities in the studied context.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how people creatively engage with dominant discourses operating on them to rewrite the gendered script they are expected to adhere to according to their changing desires, expectations, and aspirations. The realm of family relations is not constituted by constraints alone, and individuals do not necessarily struggle within these constraints. Constraints are highly variable, fluid, and constantly shifting as young people transit through different life stages; parent-youth unique relationship primarily determines how young people express and address value conflicts. The relational feature of Arab families posits that all family members define themselves in relation to others. This relationship implies a great deal of tension, but also the individual's ability and willingness to truly support, understand, negotiate, and be open to share personal expectations. Most people I met shared their intimate dreams and desires with their family members, they talked and discussed before arguing, and negotiated before compromising or complying. This

signifies that a relational self encompasses an autonomous one whose desires are by no means secondary. Parental support and understanding of young people's shifting expectations enhance their abilities to enact desired realities. Whereas lack of mutual support exacerbates intergenerational conflict, leading young people to develop creative strategies to negotiate desired life trajectories by staying within the system. This reflects the relational aspect of members of Arab families and their agency in the self-making of gender identities. The convincing strategy was the most cited one by participants across all cohorts, featuring a self that is enmeshed in a web of expectations, consensual actions, and mutual agreements that promote rather than obstruct its potential. This self prioritises points of encounter with significant others, rather than breaking points. When convincing fails, young people use the sabotaging strategy to gain agency in matters of life choices without generating major disruptions. Their desire to conduct a controversial lifestyle or practise alternative feminine and masculine subjectivities leads them to deceive parents. Lastly, the circumventing strategy reflects young people's highly strategic use of consent granted over gendered expectations to achieve independence, by either marrying the right partner or furthering their education outside Jordan, to settle abroad, away from family pressure and societal judgement. The outcomes of these creative strategies are as varied as the circumstances that drive them. Concluding how, if or who is most likely to achieve the desired selfhood is complicated. It is clear that every story is characterised by a constant but fluid interweaving of elements that make it unique. Many factors and life events are at play simultaneously, leading to each making a very specific choice. In the transition to adulthood, the interplay of factors became not only more apparent, but also more complex. This outcome also made me sceptical of generalisations based on the common characteristics of my research participants, who were all university-educated, middle-class, and urban youth. These common characteristics did not make them similar in any way when it came to the obstacles they faced in their daily lives, the options they had, the choices they made, the expectations they faced, the support they received for their ambitions, the level of control they experienced or the freedom they were allowed to enjoy. From my findings on the creativity of agency, it appears that the individual's agency is not confined within the limits of compliance and resistance with power. Individuals enact their desiring selves and realities by moulding the most appropriate alternatives with which they can, safely and securely, effect change. This means that they develop

safe strategies to enhance their chances of achieving their most successful and sought-after outcome, namely independence without family estrangement. This not only enables them not to be marginalised, but also to positively influence personal and social change from within. This outcome was achieved either in contexts with loose constraints through talking, discussing, or negotiating decisions, or in contexts with high constraints, through young people's use of the convincing, sabotaging, or circumventing strategies. These strategies enabled people to negotiate change by staying within the system. A change from within is significant as it allows individuals to connect meanings resignifications from the personal to the collective, whereby a new set of values can not only emerge but also be normalised. However, as strategies are variable, so are their outcomes. The fact that some people resort to compromise or compliance rather than independence does not mean that they will be life-bounded by either choice of resisting or compromising with the system. However, all outcomes are dynamic and constantly renegotiated as they mirror people's shifting desires and expectations, but also their position towards power. The next chapter gives a further account of the lived experience of gender in its dynamic, yet elusive, nature by examining the everyday practices of young people on the UJ campus. This assesses the extent to which young people's everyday experiences reflect their willingness to cross old gendered boundaries and establish new ones. This allows us to understand young people's possibilities to enact more desired masculinities, femininities, and gender relations in adult life.

CHAPTER 5

Youth Lived Experience of the World: Gender Norms as Surpassable Boundaries

Introduction

McNay (2004) observes that becoming agents is a continual process resulting from the complex interplay of people lived experiences, social structures, and inequalities operating on them. Therefore, to understand agency adopting an "experientially oriented, or interpretative perspective, is unavoidable" (McNay, 2009). Indeed, she further states, "it is not possible to understand the effects of oppression and how it constrains or motivates action without first enquiring into its lived dimensions, that is, how individuals understand themselves and their position in the world" (McNay, 2009). McNay's theory (2004, p.175), which reasserts the centrality of agency and experience in the formation of gender identity, allows me to re-connect the individual to the social. This creates the possibility of understanding one's own capacity to produce social change. Furthermore, treating gender identity as a lived social relation allows us to understand how gender intersects with other power structures, and treating experience as a relational entity strengthens the concept of agency that "is required to examine the way individuals make sense of the often submerged conflicts that structure their lives" (McNay, 2004, pp.187-188).

This chapter explores people's "capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities" (McNay, 2000, p.10), by highlighting the significance of young people's everyday lived experience. It does so by analysing how access to new spaces in the transition to adulthood is crucial to the further development of the subjective self, as new opportunities can shift old notions of gender relations and create opportunities for practising more desired relationships, thus constructing new meanings. As this research is concerned with young, educated people exploring the opportunities that access to higher educational spaces, here specifically the UJ campus, provide them with is necessary as to acknowledge the willingness and power of educated youth to transform society. This chapter argues that access to higher education, which constitutes a site of social interaction where new possibilities arise, offers young people three fundamental

opportunities. First, students may shift their notions of gender relations and selfhoods in light of new opportunities and experiences on campus. Second, the campus creates possibilities for students to practise desired relationships that mirror their shifting dreams, aspirations, and expectations. Third, students' new practices generate new meanings that carry the potential to disrupt hegemonic gender norms and ultimately reflect the reality they aspire to create as they transition into adulthood. This chapter begins by arguing that the UJ higher education space is potentially disruptive to the system. It then looks at students' everyday experiences on the UJ campus and how they understand themselves and their agency in relation to the social world they inhabit. Thereafter, it explores how students challenge gender norms in this space. Finally, it examines how practices of alternative gender relations are transferred from the UJ campus to the outside world after students have moved on to professional and married life. Drawing on my participants lived experiences from SSI, FGs, and FOs, this chapter seeks to understand if, and if so, how young people can surpass unwanted gender boundaries and create new, more desired, and meaningful gender relations.

The Disruptive Potential of the Higher Education Space

Scholars concerned with social reproduction emphasise the role of the formal education system in reproducing power relations at the societal level. For example, the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1973; 1977) notes that educational institutions in industrial societies serve to perpetuate class inequalities, social stratification and thus social order. Scholarship on education in Jordan (Adely, 2012a; Cantini, 2016), on the one hand, has nuanced, such claims. On the other hand, however, it eventually reinstated the role of higher education in promoting the status quo. Cantini (2016), for instance, while portraying the UJ as central to the Jordanian project of modernity and the construction of citizenship, discusses its significance as an arena of political contestation highlighting the potential threat of campus-based student activism; nevertheless, he ultimately emphasises the role of the state in suppressing student activism to preserve social stability. Likewise, Adely (2012a), while highlighting the significance of education for young girls, she reinscribes its meaning in terms of reproduction of normative discourses. In order to give a positive account of agency, it is crucial to recognise that people are not merely objects of strategies of overarching structures designed to ensure the continuation of the social order. My research shows that people respond to the multiple constraints acting upon

them on a daily basis. The practices they exhibit in the spaces they inhabit, such as the university where they create new experiences and meaningful interactions, can inform us about how they negotiate desired subjectivities in their everyday lives. Here, I consider the university space as a site of disruption of gender norms rather than reproduction, as much as I do in relation to the institution of the family. Indeed, it is within this space, through everyday practices, that young educated Jordanians cross old gendered boundaries and reshape new ones.

Understanding Divergent Perceptions and Experiences of Social Reality

People's experience of the world is multiple, complex, and diverse and to comprehend its singularity is necessary to uncover immanent structures contained in the contingent (McNay, 2004, pp.184-185). An analysis of lived experience, which is contextually situated, helps make sense of how people perceive and act in the world. This conceptualisation of agency and experience permits not to generalise on women's (and men's) experiences, as feminist theory tends to do, but allows for differences to emerge between groups of women (and men) across different categories such as class, ethnicity, and age (McNay, 2004). A relational account of phenomenology that emphasises the heterogeneity of people's experiences also helps to reframe the discussion towards the dominant, revealing the multiple and complex forces impinging on one's life. In this research, I focus on the contextual, socio-cultural, and material forces that, in the interplay with family\personal circumstances, shape ones' subjectivity formation making its opportunities and constraints unique. Here I contend that these very contextual and unique forces influence how young people experience social space and perceive their agentive capabilities within it. Adopting McNay's conceptualisation of experience as a relational rather than an ontological style of enquiry, which must be situated in a broader context (McNay, 2004, p.184), helps to see the process of becoming a subject as an "ongoing process" that is never completed. In this process, people constantly organise, manage, and redefine gender norms as their possibilities and experiences of the world, as well as their positioning in relation to the constraints acting upon them, keep changing. Here I contend that people's experience of the social world is shaped by the degree of conflict they face, which largely depend on the unique interplay of tangible and more concealed power relations impinging on one's life. Indeed, conflict is always inherent to the reproduction of gender norms.

Before addressing the everyday practices of my youngest participants on the UJ campus, which mirror their desire to cross undesired gendered boundaries, I examine the forces that shape students' contrasting perceptions of their agency on campus. This section reflects on the multiple and diverse lived experiences of students on campus and the factors that determine this diversity. Indeed, students experience the campus differently, defining it as either liberating or oppressive. This unique perception of freedom or restraint appears to be closely tied to the specific degrees of constraints that individuals experience in the family, mirroring one's socialisation into a family's unique understanding of gender norms and gendered expectations. This shape individuals' perceptions and therefore experiences of agentive capabilities within society. The findings I present below show that in family contexts where young people's freedom was restricted as parents required them to follow strict gendered expectations, they perceived the campus, and other public spaces, as more liberating than home. In contrast, those who were not required to follow prevailing gender norms perceived home more liberating than university.

Many students in SSIs emphasises how their "restricted behaviour at home" affected the way they perceived the campus. For instance, Haneen and Amal (SSIs, 2019), two female students, found the UJ campus more liberating than their home; they also pointed out how their behaviour changes at university, away from parental supervision. At home, Haneen's behaviour is constantly disciplined by her mother, who spurs her not to engage in rude behaviour (perceived as non-feminine), specifically sitting crossed-legs, talking or laughing loudly; likewise, Amal describes her household as "very limiting", as she cannot be herself being constantly supervised by her father. For both young women, the campus is liberating as they are free from the restrictions imposed on them by mothers, fathers, or brothers, who constantly check that their behaviour does not overstep the socially accepted femininity code of behaviour. This consideration opens up the possibility of considering the family disciplinary power as stronger than the social one. For other female students, however, home is more liberating, and in this case they feel more restricted by gender norms on campus. Lama (SSI, 2019), admitted "at home, I am more free because I can do what I want, for example I don't have to put on my *hijab*". Likewise, Samah (SSI, 2019) felt more liberated at home as she said, "at home, I am myself, while at university I am more disciplined". Samah's statement that she can

be "herself at home", meant that she could enact supposedly non-feminine behaviours that were rejected by Haneen's mother and other parents. Hence, she said, "at home, I can talk loud, laugh loud, wear clothes I cannot wear outside, and do things I cannot do outside". This perspective confirms how different the understanding of gender norms can be across families, as diverse notions of local norms, traditions, moral, and religious behaviour shape individuals' subjectivity formation and influence their experience of social reality. Like female, male students also defined the campus as liberating when parents imposed strict gender restrictions at home and vice versa. For instance, Muhammad (SSI, 2019) described his home as liberating as, "at university there are rules and codes of behaviour. You have to wear appropriate clothing, be polite and careful with everyone you meet". Students' opinions suggest that young students perceive family control as stronger than social one. Additionally, the fact that participants frequently stated that they did not care about society further supports this finding and confirms the crucial importance of the family compared to society as a benchmark of individuals' moral behaviour.

As Adely (2012a) notes regarding concepts of clothes modesty as not solely related to religious interpretations but also local norms and notions of tradition across family, kin and tribes (Adely, 2012a),[34] this conceptualisation can be applied to young people's divergent interpretations of acceptable behaviour in public and private spaces. Family understandings of moral norms and values affect students' perception of freedom within public spaces and influence their lived experiences. These findings could be clarified by recurring to Gramsci's synchronic understanding of common sense, which is not merely historical, but a multiple and stratified concept across sociocultural categories (see Chapter 1).

Despite students' different perceptions, the UJ campus appeared "liberating" to most of my participants, as it offered them the opportunity to expand their daily lives outside familiar spaces and to drift away from beliefs, norms, and traditions that had previously limited their understanding of the world. Above all, it appears that young people could finally explore social reality as it is, free from parental supervision and

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[34] For a broader discussion on women's bodies, clothing and significance of religiosity see Droeber (2005), Kaya (2010) and Adely (2012a).

constraints. The following quote from Yasmin clearly conveys how the students associate their ability to freely explore social life with a sense of liberation:

> I guess university is liberating as it reflects how I want to deal with life. It is like you can deal with life as it is, not like they thought you to do or as your religion dictates. There is no one watching what you are doing that is why it is liberating (Yasmin, SSI, 2019).

For Yasmin, the campus reflects "life\society as it is", with its enormous possibilities, but also its contradictions and risks, rather than its idealised features. In this sense, the UJ campus is significant as it represents a gateway to adulthood, as young people can test and ultimately rethink the norms and beliefs they have been socialised into. The idea of the UJ campus as a "liberating" space includes the possibility that it constitutes an arena in which dominant gender norms can be potentially breached, particularly as student behaviour does not appear to be subject to strict monitoring by the institution itself. Pointing to the heterogeneity of students' sense of freedom on campus does not undermine their potential to disrupt the prevailing hegemonic norms. In fact, while family constraints shape individual perceptions and experiences, societal ones imposing hegemonic (undesired) gender norms are in place for everyone, making everyone, more or less, in need to act to subvert them. Therefore, all students, regardless of how they perceive freedom on campus, act similarly to redefine undesired social relations. This reconnects the individual to the social and identity to the social structure, allowing us to understand the power of young people to change reality. Thus, the UJ campus functions as a unified heterotopia where gender boundaries can be surpassed by anyone, regardless of family background, level of restriction, and other sociocultural categories impinging on their lives.

Crossing Gendered Boundaries on the UJ Campus

For the students I met, entering university represents a significant turning point in life, as it provides them with immediate chances of independence, in addition to the prospects for future independence already mentioned. As students transition into adulthood, they leave their immediate social environment and expand their life opportunities and lived experiences through access to new social spaces. As Adely (2004, pp.358-359) notes in relation to the lives of adolescent girls, access to secondary school expands their life opportunities; therefore, educational spaces

provide students with new opportunities for relationships and exposure to other ideas. As the most important factor in enhancing their opportunities, students mentioned their exposure, often for the first time, to large-scale opposite-sex peer socialisation. In this section, I discuss the value of desegregation first in guiding students towards shifting understandings of gender relations and then in providing them with opportunities to practise alternative gender self-makings. I argue that within higher education spaces where sex segregation boundaries are broken, students can disrupt dominant gender norms. By being able to socialise with the opposite sex, they can establish friendships, partnerships and romantic relationships. In addition, they can practise more desired gendered selves, as they do not "have to" adhere to other gender norms for supposedly feminine\masculine behaviour. Hence, the institution's potential for disrupting gender norms lies in the opportunities it offers as the first desegregated space that young people inhabit. The findings I discuss below are based on SSIs with students and my lived experiences on campus as a student myself, when I was enmeshed in practices common to the community of students in the Humanities.

Unlike the school context (see Chapter 2), where institutional formal and informal practices contribute to the gendering of male students (Shirazi, 2016) – as well as of female ones, I add, – the university space, especially when perceived as liberating, allowed students to enact non-normative behaviours. On the UJ campus, where gender segregation is formally suspended, the consequent disruption of other gender norms was, if not facilitated, neither heavily and publicly sanctioned. Indeed, the campus can represent a heterotopia where young people can embody desiring selves. When discussing gendered boundaries challenged by students, most female students in SSIs admitted to challenging gendered expectations of moral behaviour, such as smoking in public, speaking or laughing loudly, complying with a strict dress code, or avoiding interaction and friendship with fellow male students. To some extent, my findings showed that female students were better able to negotiate gendered boundaries than male students as they mostly felt free to act as they wished, and for them breaking social and cultural norms did not appear to be a major issue of concern. Their ability to cross boundaries appeared to be influenced by larger peer groups sharing similar desires, which may have encouraged them to push gendered boundaries altogether. As Abeer (SSI, 2019), a female student, admitted, "at

university I am surrounded by people like me, and I know I will not face any bad consequences if I say what I think". In contrast, although the male students expressed similar desires, the pressure on them seemed heavier. Indeed, male students appeared particularly concerned with adhering to social norms and codes of behaviour, dressing appropriately, maintaining socially respectful behaviour when interacting with same-sex peers, along with having a moral code when interacting with females often expressed in religious terms. It is possible to suggest that on campus other power structures may be operating on males with more intensity, leaving female students freer to negotiate gender norms. I shall return to this later. Now, I would like to address the role of space in allowing boundaries to be crossed and alternative realities to be enacted. I draw on Foucault's concept of "heterotopias" (see Chapter 2) to understand how young people use specific spaces where the embodiment of contesting practices becomes possible.

Across campus, students carve out spaces where it is possible to negotiate freedom and contest societal norms from a safer position. The people inhabiting these spaces are directly involved in challenging the gendered status quo and its value system by creating "free spaces" or "heterotopias" across faculties. Previous studies on the UJ have highlighted the link between class and faculty, suggesting a faculty hierarchy (Cantini, 2016) based on student admissions policies that favour the "wealthiest" strata of Jordanian society, and create a middle-and-upper class homogeneity in the science programmes. Moreover, gender practices across the less privileged faculties have been considered more traditional as compared to those across the faculties of the wealthiest students, somehow establishing a link between gender attitudes and social stratification. This point was later confirmed in my SSIs with students, who generally perceived students in the humanities as more traditional than science students. During my fieldwork on the UJ campus, I decided to test whether students' gender practices on campus changed at all between humanities and sciences students, shedding further light on students' agentive capabilities. My findings on a fraction of the UJ student population suggest that biased expectations connecting freedom and class – that is, individuals' ability to negotiate better life agency based on class privilege – and class with egalitarian gender attitudes and practices cannot be upheld. As stated already, if class and economic opportunities can indeed enhance young people's opportunities, overall, family dynamics and understandings of morals and

traditions remain unsurpassable boundaries that limit one's ability to act across social classes. Furthermore, young people's practices of freedom within the so-called less privileged humanities faculties were characterised by greater dynamics of negotiation and contestation compared to the more homogeneous and less contested spaces in the science faculties. Some spaces across the humanities faculties appeared as "safe bubbles", or microcosms where acting differently was possible. My experience on the UJ campus leads me to further suggest that the value of enacted heterotopia should not be limited to itself, but it should be seen in relation to the potential effect it can generate on its surroundings. For instance, attitudes towards girls' smoking on campus seemed to have changed quite a bit in the two years I worked at UJ and when I returned for my fieldwork, as fewer girls were hiding behind university buildings to smoke away from harsh-looking people. When I returned to campus in 2019, I was surprised to see how attitudes seemed to have changed in two years, as some girls would choose to smoke openly rather than hide. Previously, those who smoked either hid behind buildings or smoked in certain "safer" areas of the campus, such as those with a high presence of international students. In this way, they were able to avoid the social stigma and moral judgements of smoking in plain sight and found comfort in similar behaviours practised by international students. When I returned to the UJ campus, I realised that this behaviour was no longer confined to the bubble of international students or to isolated locations, but had expanded across the campus. When, during SSIs, I asked students about this, they confirmed that attitudes towards girls smoking on campus had changed. They pointed out that a few years ago it was rude for girls to smoke anywhere on campus, whereas now it has become the norm. This change in attitude led me to suggest that "international spaces", when used to practise acts of disobedience, can function as a stage from which it is possible to effect change. Spaces such as the UJ Language Center, the School of Languages and the adjacent language square, the School of Business and its seating steps, the tower clock (*burj al-sa'a*), or "el-square" where medical, engineering and IT students often gather, and some spaces inside and outside the main library building were particularly mentioned by students as "liberating spaces". Interestingly, these areas are all located near the humanities faculties where social interactions between sexes are allegedly stricter, suggesting that these are also the areas where rebellion is more likely to arise. Many of my research participants pointed out how comfortable they felt in such spaces

where breaking gender norms was possible. Aaliyah's (SSI, 2019) exciting statement, "I love the language centre because everyone is different here, even the Arabs", highlights students' surprise in seeing unconventional behaviours applied by the members of their community being widespread and normalised.

In addition to the norms already discussed, the most contested norms mentioned by young women across faculties included the female dress code and socialisation practices. The dress code of female students on campus varied widely, ranging from Islamic dress consisting of *jilbab* and *hijab* and sometimes gloves (rarely *niqab*), to Western-style clothing accompanied or not by *hijab*. For male students, meanwhile, dresses tend to vary much less than for females. For some girls, not only the campus but also the cosmopolitan capital, Amman, emerges as an arena where practising alternative dress codes becomes possible; for instance, Farah (SSI, 2019) admitted that she takes off her *hijab* as soon as she enters the campus, and another confided in me that she takes it off every morning as soon as she arrives in Amman from another Jordanian city; likewise, some male students agreed on a female's students practice of changing their clothes in the university's bathrooms of the Faculty of Business. However, if this defiant behaviour for some girls may symbolise them being unhappy with wearing the *hijab*, for others it is a matter of conforming their behaviour to that of their peers. As Adely (2012a) notes, female clothing signifies concepts of success and progress as well as moral respectability. Thus, girls' behaviour widely reflects notions of progress and modernity that are sometimes perceived as incompatible with traditional, cultural, and religious norms. In line with Cantini's (2016, pp.94-95) findings, while men's dress codes are less diverse than women's, they are also less influenced by religious practices, with very few male students, usually confined to the *Shari'a* faculty, adhering to an Islamic dress code that includes wearing a *jallabiyya* (the Islamic long male dress) with a hat and a long beard. For many male students, unacceptable notions of dress code included wearing shorts above the knee and sleeveless shirts. Overall, the male dress code did not emerge as a significant issue of contestation, at least compared to that of girls. In this regard, it can be said that females' variety of dress codes carry different meanings as broader discourses at national, regional, and international levels consider women's bodies as politically contested arenas, in contrast to men's bodies, which in this sense are much less negotiated.

For the male students in my sample, crossing gendered boundaries on campus primarily meant being able to approach female students, hang out with them, show emotions to a girlfriend on campus, often seeking out secluded and isolated spaces to do so. Yaser (SSI, 2019), for instance, stressed the liberating power of university spaces when he said, "my parents are conservative. They don't know much about what I do at university. If they knew I was walking with a girl, they would be mad at me because of religion and culture". However, compared to women, men's behaviour on campus appeared much more monitored at the institution level. Guards at the campus gates, for example, carefully check male students' ID cards and deny them access if these are missing or expired. Instead, the girls were trusted – by default – as if they could pose no threat to the social order on campus.

For both female and male students and professionals, interactions with the opposite sex on campus represented a significant turning point in understanding gender relations, with many admitting that they had changed gendered practices and behaviours over in the years spent in higher education. Most of my participants appeared highly aware of the negative consequences of sex segregation on gender relations, often pointing at it as the main reason behind male-female lack of mutual understanding and ability to build meaningful future relationships. Hala (SSI, 2019), a female student, highlighted, "schools in Jordan are segregated, people don't socialise with the opposite sex and don't know how to interact with each other. But at university, you can socialise, and then you see how different society is". In addition, some students in SSIs emphasised that gender socialisation practices are stratified across faculties as they reflect students' future job expectations. For instance, Ali (SSI, 2019), a male student, stressed the link between market expectations and one's gender practices, pointing out that in the faculties of Engineering, Medicine, and Business, greater interaction between female and male peers reflects the demands of gender interaction in the future workplace; while, in other faculties such as *Shari'a* or Education, opposite-sex interactions are much more limited and socio-cultural and religious values are reinforced, mirroring the values of the workplace. While a discussion concerning the role of some educational fields in reinforcing gender norms is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is nevertheless worth noting that the dynamics of desegregation on the UJ campus have the potential –

albeit to varying degrees – to provide every student with the ability to subvert prevailing social norms.

In several semi-structured interviews, both students and professionals confirmed that entering the UJ desegregated arena had, as first outcome, that of shifting progressively their notions of male-female friendship. The process of crossing boundaries regarding male-female friendships often encompassed various stages. On many occasions both professionals and older students recalled how their behaviour had utterly shifted from considering friendship as unacceptable to engaging in romantic relationships on campus. In most cases, this change appeared to be due to students' shifting gender understandings as a result of opportunities on campus and their first experience of freedom from family supervision. Although some students had shifted their notions of acceptable male-female interactions, some restricted their interactions to the campus, if their changed behaviour was perceived to be in contrast with their family understanding of gender relations. For instance, Samah (SSI, 2019), a female student enrolled in a mixed high school, stressed that she did not meet any group of males who wanted to hang out in a mixed group outside the university. As she stated, "not many guys accept hanging out with girls outside the university because male-female friendship is not socially acceptable". Thus, while the UJ campus certainly provides young people with the first opportunity to redefine gender relations, the extent to which these opportunities extend beyond the campus itself is controversial. It should be emphasised, however, that the change in attitudes towards male-female friendship have been facilitated by young people's use of notions of acceptable male-female interaction for study (and later for work) purposes, which by legitimating opposite sex interactions, helped normalising them. Hence, students whose parents disapproved of them being friends with the opposite sex limited opposite-sex interactions to the campus, where, instead, relations for study purposes (and work purposes) are widely accepted and practised. These findings may reinstate the significance of the campus as a heterotopia space, where students can somehow safely cross gendered boundaries. Most professionals or students have co-opted meanings of acceptable relationships for study or work purposes, by successfully establishing genuine male-female friendships or other meaningful relationships. Negotiations about gender relations occur every day and sometimes generate interesting compromises at the individual level, especially when some values are

deeply entrenched and internalised. Thus, in the process of assigning new meanings to notions of male-female relationships, many young people maintain socio-cultural and religious norms, such as refraining from shaking hands, to easily accommodate the boundaries of what they still perceive as conflicting values. In this way, while reshaping new gender boundaries, women and men inscribe them into "acceptable" categories to facilitate the normalisation of a new value. The opportunities opened up by male-female interaction on campus, apart from friendship, include the possibility of meeting a potential life partner or forming romantic relationships, whether casual or more committed ones. I shall return to this in the following pages.

UJ Campus Violence and Harassment: Resistance to Change?

The process of negotiating change entails conflict. Conflict is inherent in the reproduction, hence disruption, of gender normative, which implies individuals' active involvement in it. As already mentioned, McNay's (1999; 2000; 2004) theory of gender as a lived social relation defines experience as key in revealing underlying tensions where many power structures are often concealed. In this section, I reflect on the tensions that arise on the UJ campus when students attempt to cross gendered boundaries and establish new ones. I argue that these tensions, specifically male violence and female harassment, mirror broader dynamics of patriarchal power aiming at reinforcing the gendered status quo by pushing back against people's attempts to renegotiate gender norms through systemic violence. In the following analysis, I demonstrate how this conflict, as it emerges in campus tensions, do not merely signify constraint on social change, but represents the active engagement of young people in the process of redefining gender norms.

As I briefly mentioned in the previous section, young women's process of pushing gendered boundaries on the UJ campus appeared to be challenging, nonetheless not impossible, whereas, for young men, this process appeared much more demanding. In considering the reasons why crossing gendered boundaries might be more demanding for men, I contend that men breaking societal rules in a male-dominated environment may trigger significant backlash, as this carries the potential to disrupt the system from within. When a young man crosses boundaries, he is at greater risk of being excluded from the system as he endangers his own position, reputation, and interests, as well as those of his family. A dominant form of hegemonic masculinity

(Connell, 1996; 2005) enforced through practices of violence, fights, or bullying was already mentioned as the main obstacle to male students' ability to implement and embody alternative models of masculinity at school. Hegemonic masculinity resurfaces on campus to disrupt the process of dismantling hierarchical relations between male and female peers. The UJ space succinctly mirrors Jordanian society, and as such embraces its inner, unresolved tensions and unequal power dynamics in which students are inevitably caught up while inhabiting this space. The UJ has often been the stage of violent incidents between large tribal and kinship groups confronting each other. It is often an episode of "crossing gendered boundaries on campus" that initiate campus violence, mostly over already-existing social tensions between opposite tribal groups. Campus violence is a controversial and widespread issue at UJ and many other universities across the country, which has forced institutions to take serious measures to prevent young men from becoming involved in it. For instance, expelling students and permanently banning them from pursuing education in Jordan is the strictest measure laid down in the University of Jordan Student Code of Conduct for involvement on-campus violence (Al-Harahsheh, 2017).

Whilst recent reforms sanctioning students involved in campus violence with permanent expulsion served as a warning to curb this behaviour, the threat of male group violence and exclusion pushes other men to better negotiate their desire to establish alternative gender relations with females. For instance, Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a Business student, explained the importance of observing a woman's behaviour towards other peers before approaching and interacting with her. Remarkably, he stressed that identifying the girl's family name is crucial to understand what behaviour is most appropriate and how far he can go to break social norms. A young woman's affiliation with a powerful tribal group often represents a clear red line that can discourage young men from initiating social interactions or lead them to reject an interaction initiated by a woman as to avoid stepping beyond social boundaries and facing potentially adverse consequences. However, tribal affiliation is not the only clear boundary that guide male students in choosing to interact with female students. Some male students admitted that they did not feel comfortable to cross gendered boundaries with veiled girls, as they perceived the *hijab* as a symbol of a woman setting stricter boundaries with the opposite sex.

> If I see a girl wearing the *hijab* and sitting alone without socialising with anyone, I will not try to engage with her out of respect for her. Otherwise, if I see a girl who is already socialising with male peers, I would just go and talk to her without fear of restrictions. I usually interact with both genders on campus, except for someone who is a strict Muslim, wears a *niqab* or *hijab* (Moutaz, SSI, 2019).

For Moutaz, the *hijab* reflects female moral standards, which, while consistent with religious values and an understanding of limited gender interactions, establishes gender boundaries *a priori*. However, this appears to be a male-only perception and does not reflect veiled women's understanding of gender relations. Most male students I met expressed frustration at not being able to reshape gender relations to their liking, by saying, "as a guy, I cannot approach a girl on campus" (Yaser, SSI, 2019), or "I cannot kiss my girlfriend on campus, or even hold her hand" (Moutaz, SSI, 2019). Overall, social restrictions entail that the reconfiguration of gender relations on campus, which include practices of courtship, dating, and romantic relationship that exist, if not abound on campus, alternate between safe heterotopias and hidden spaces where these can be practised protected from prying eyes.

Besides creating new possibilities, gender segregation simultaneously generates conflict and tensions. Indeed, "hegemonic heterosexuality does not passively exist as a form of dominance, rather it "has to be renewed, recreated, defended, and… also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (William, 1977, cited in McNay, 2004, p.185). Thus, tensions that arise from breaking gender norms appear in parallel informal practices carried out by peers in the attempt to resist the emergence of alternative practices. I have identified these tensions in both men's group violence and women's sexual harassment.

If men who disrupt norms face physical violence, women face sexual harassment, both on and off-campus. In Jordan, women's street harassment is widespread, including catcalling, comments, gestures, honking, and wolf-whistling, and rarely sexual assault. The problem of sexual harassment on the UJ campus was brought into the spotlight in 2012 when four students enrolled in Rula Quawas's course of Feminist Theory produced the video *"Adhi khususati"* (This is my privacy), condemning sexual harassment experienced by female students on campus. The

video consisted of a series of "shots of young women holding handmade signs, each quoting a sexually charged word that the woman personally heard as she walked through the public spaces of the university" (Quawas, 2017, p.22). Six months later, the video was uploaded on YouTube (Amami, 2012), sparking society's outrage and indignation towards the well-respected institution and leaving doubts on students' respectable interactions. The video's public release sparked a great controversy both in Jordan and in the Arab region, where the debate shifted from raising awareness of an issue that is too-often hushed up around the world to the "badness" of the women who shot the video and their teacher, Rula Quawas, responsible for promoting "Westoxification", through her Feminist classes. Both students and the teacher were targeted in a campaign launched by a *Shari'a* faculty professor who blamed the victims instead of condemning the immoral act and its perpetrators. High-ranking university administrators called the video a "fabrication of lies" and sought to curb its alleged "harmful effect" on the university's reputation (Quawas, 2017, p.25). The institution removed Professor Quawas – a champion of women's rights in Jordan who dedicated her life to raising the feminist consciousness of her students – from her post as Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Professor Rula Quawas, whom I met several times and who inspired me greatly in the development of my research proposal, was deeply touched by the events triggered by the video's release. As she once told me, she was painfully aware that her position as a Christian, Palestinian, and unmarried woman greatly undermined her entitlement to speak about (Muslim) women's rights in an Islamic country.

During my fieldwork on the UJ campus, I asked young women if they had experienced any form of harassment to explore if – and if so, to what extent – sexual harassments is still widespread on campus, or if anything has changed at all since 2012. Surprisingly, most female students reported feeling more comfortable on campus than in the city, as they admitted to avoiding some areas in Amman, especially downtown, due to street harassment. In addition, many female students described that the university environment has become much more tolerant of unconventional gendered behaviour in recent years, and that male students have changed their catcalling behaviour, considering the consequence they may incur if a girl complains. In fact, harassment, though widespread, is also widely condemned

and deemed a shameful practice that undermines a man's respectability when exposed.

The overwhelming majority of female students in SSIs said they had not experienced any form of gender-related restraint, but some mentioned episodes of harassment, particularly staring, some catcalling, and whistling. For instance, Haneen (SSI, 2019), a female student, recalled her experience of harassment by saying, "when I go to grab my sandwich and walk past the men sitting next to the *Insaniyya* (Faculty of Humanities), it is so uncomfortable because they all stare and comment". She also mentioned another episode where the male students' comments targeted her allegedly inappropriate dress code at university. Thus, she said:

> Once I was wearing trainer pants and a guy told me, "do you want me to bring you a bed"? I do not wear super-catchy clothes, and I also wear the *hijab*, but they still comment on it (Haneen, SSI, 2019).

This quote sheds further light on the issue of female harassment on campus, which may also be related to young women crossing gendered boundaries of what is considered acceptable or appropriate in a given context. For instance, Haneen appeared to have transgressed norms related to the decency of dress code, mostly as her outfit was considered inconsistent with Islamic norms of modestly, to which, Haneen appeared to have ascribed to by wearing the *hijab*. Furthermore, this episode highlights how informal peer behaviour can aim to re-address non-normative behaviour by public shaming or mocking. This suggests that campus violence and harassment may signify a broader conflict inherent in young people's desire to renegotiate gendered boundaries. However, university dynamics seem to be very different from those at school, and peer judgement has no particular influence on one's decisions to act against gender norms.

Although some awareness of the issue of harassment was present and acknowledged by women and men alike, in some cases the issue of harassment was perceived differently by some male students. For instance, Hussein, a male student who commented on the changing expectations of female students, stressed that young women's definition of harassment may not be in line with those of males, who instead

perceive it as an innocent act, aimed at complementing a woman rather than belittling her. Thus, he said:

> I think that girls in the School of Business are not serious. It is the way they grow up, they are very spoilt. They laugh at me when I say I want to get married. Also, do you know that if you say even an innocent word to a girl, it is considered harassment? Like, "you're honey"! It's crazy (Hussein, SSI, 2019).

Hussein makes a connection between girls' faculties' enrolment, moral standards, and life expectations. He interprets girls' shifting attitudes towards marriage as a sign of their frivolity. He implies that girls moving away from traditional gendered expectations are "spoilt" and not responsible enough as the expected role of a wife and mother would require. Other conversations with male students and professionals revealed how negatively some men judge a young woman who is demanding her right to maintain her social life after marriage, for instance, by hanging out with friends and colleagues – labelling her as a "spoilt girl" who is too young to take over household responsibility. This last point exposes the underlying tensions that co-exist in the process of reproducing of gender norms and highlight a mismatch of gender value among young, educated Jordanians. I will return to this point later when discussing the so-called marriage crisis in Jordan.

The gender dynamics described in this section illustrate how male-female interactions are constantly negotiated. Gender relations on campus reflect the contradictions of Jordanian society, its entrenched social, economic, and political inequalities shaping individuals' everyday lives, and highlight the underlying tensions in young people's negotiation of practices to find acceptable and viable ways to effectively change the system from within. On the one hand, male violence and female sexual harassment may represent a backlash against a system that is still predominantly masculine and overall privileges men. Yet, on the other hand, the use of extreme acts, such as violence, both physical and emotional, highlights the resilience, tenacity, and strong will of young people to create a better world. As Kandiyoti (2019) notes, violent practices symbolise the fragility of a dying (or already dead) patriarchal system.

Even though I do not understand these practices as a sign of patriarchy being defunct, as Kandiyoti suggests, I argue that these represent the challenges young people face in their everyday lives to enact desired selfhood and shift gender relations. The role of desegregation in changing understandings of gender seems crucial. To paraphrase Mernissi (2011, p.23), "the desegregation of social life makes them realise that besides sex, they can also give each other friendship and love". While pointing out that gender segregation allows women and men to be socialised to perceive each other as enemies, Mernissi (2011) also emphasises the potential intrinsic to shifting towards an ideology that encompasses new understandings of gender relations and its significance for transforming society. The subsequent section explores the impact that young people's shifting notions of gender relations on campus have on their life choices as adults off campus.

From Alternative Practices to New Meanings Construction

Drawing on Mernissi's consideration of male-female shifting traditional gender dynamics as potentially disruptive to the system, in this section, I examine the extent to which young people have implemented alternative notions of gender relations they practised on campus in their adult life. Therefore, I expand the significance of my discourse on young people's crossing gendered boundaries from a circumscribed youthful act of rebellion to the actual reality of social life. Overall, I recognise that in shifting meanings of asymmetrical gender relations lies the potential to disrupt Jordan's gendered status quo. However, in relation to practices, I contend that this potential should not be identified in young people rejecting or simply resisting traditions and norms their families identify with, but in their co-optation of meanings and re-appropriation of inner purposes according to their own desires. In the following sections, I show how the opportunities created by campus desegregation, particularly male-female friendships, led students first to explore autonomous dating practices and then to reconsider notions of traditional marriage by expanding their understandings to encompass new meanings of partnership and conjugality. Finally, drawing on FOs with young married couples and SSIs with married participants, I analyse how these new conceptualisations work on the ground and the limits and contradictions that distinguish them.

Youth Dating Culture

The perceived danger of inappropriate and forbidden sexual relations outside the legitimacy of marriage leads families, and society at large, to socialise men and women as enemies (Mernissi, 2011). Men and women are kept under strict control, first by the family, then by society, and, ultimately, by the state, which, as Mahadeen (2015) notes, plays the role of paternalistic authority over women's sexuality. Young women and men seeking agency in intimate relationships navigate social norms defining the acceptability and unacceptability of relationship boundaries by balancing societal and familial expectations with their personal beliefs and desires. Social norms fixing acceptable relationship practices mirror concerns for people's respectability, reputation, and modesty. Notions of gendered respectability and discourses of love, marriage, and relationships are not exclusively religious in nature, but are related to notions of class, culture and customs, and tied up with family and kin obligations and reputation (Adely, 2012a, pp.109-113). Considering this, I reflect on the diverse findings that my investigation of young people's dating culture has unearthed.

Older and younger participants in SSIs confirmed that the practice of dating before marriage is acceptable within Jordanian society when it implies the couple's formal engagement in front of their respective families. This engagement serves the purpose of announcing the young couple's commitment to each other to the entire community, before whom their dating becomes acceptable. The terms of this commitment vary across families depending on their understanding of the intersection of social class, ethnic differences, and level of religiosity. Hence, some families would agree to an informal engagement based only on the respective families' and\or daughter's or son's partner acquiescence, whereas other families require the signing of an official marriage contract (*katb al-kitab*) that registers the couple as legally married. For some people, engagement becomes the only way dating becomes possible, as it justifies one's behaviour, thus it protects their respectability.

Some participants referred to an engagement period as a time for partners to get to know each other before getting married. The length of the engagement period varies by sociodemographic group and can last from a few months to a few years (Salem, 2014). Notably, this dating time spanned from the "engagement" which often – but

not always – coincides with the signing of the marriage contract (*katb al-kitab),* to the wedding ceremony, which serves to publicly announce the couple's marriage. FGs (FG1-6, 2019) participants agreed on the length of the engagement period, which can range from one to two years. During this time, young people can get to know their partner better and thus decide whether to marry or separate.[35] Separation after the signing of the marriage contract constitutes a divorce, in Arabic *talaq*, or *khul'* (divorce by mutual consent), which takes place even though there has been no cohabitation between the partners, i.e., consummation.[36]

My research participants commonly understood dating as the time spent together by two people who like and choose each other. Most of them acknowledged the existence of a dating culture, on and off-campus, but they were also careful not to confuse dating with committing *zina.*[37] Female and male students' emphasis on the importance of the UJ campus for exploring *love and relationships* suggests an active dating culture on campus as an alternative to the official one mentioned above. From FGs discussions (FG1-2-4-5, 2019), it emerged that the university space is a popular place for casual dating, as Lama (SSI, 2019), a female student, put it, "people are waiting to start university to date!". Conversely, some women in one FG discussion (FG1, 2019) expressed concern about guys approaching girls on campus, complaining that they just "want to have fun and are not serious at all". However, there is an alternative dating culture that is challenging traditional expectations of relationships among youngsters on campus. Overall statements in SSIs suggest that less than a fifth of the young people I met fully adhere to societal norms for dating, while most of them are finding new ways to build relationships and escape societal and familial scrutiny by either deceiving societal norms and dating secretly or challenging them and dating openly. The opening-up of non-segregated spaces where interactions between women and men are legitimised by studying and working practices provides opportunities for young people to date in a safe environment. As

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[35] The high divorce rates among young Jordanian couples are attributed to youth break-ups between the signing of the contract and the holding of a marriage ceremony.

[36] Previous research in the Palestinian context by Welchman (2000) and Moors (1995) on the use of *khul'* for divorce prior to consummation suggests that the engagement period is used as a legitimate dating period.

[37] In the Islamic legal tradition, the term *zina* generally denotes adultery or fornication, i.e., illegitimate sexual relations outside marriage. For an overview of *zina* law in the Islamic context, see Hamzić and Mir-Hosseini (2010).

Adey (2012a) asserts, nowadays, notions of respectability in Jordan have shifted to conflate notions of development with women's access to non-segregated spaces, that is, higher education spaces and the workplace. Interestingly, the rhetoric in the country has pushed for a redefinition of women's respectability that does not collide with the requirement of progress and does not see desegregation as a fundamental threat to the social order. These alternative notions of respectability enabled the establishment of an alternative dating culture, whether at university or in the workplace.

Both the student and professional participants did not appear overly concerned with complying with traditional social norms for dating. They affirmed to be willing to date someone outside the official framework of acceptable relationships; however, a distinction was made between open and clandestine dating practices. I found that these distinctions were due to different evaluations of dating practices, defined as acceptable or unacceptable by the individual, family, and society. Overall, if dating was acceptable to the individual, it was practised either openly or secretly prior to a formal engagement; if dating was acceptable to both the family and the society (here intended as immediate social environment of both individuals), individuals practised it openly; if it was acceptable to the individual but unacceptable to the families or respective communities, it was practised secretly. Finally, if dating was not acceptable to the individual, it was not practised outside the framework of social norms.

Aaliyah (SSI, 2019), a female language student, met her boyfriend on campus where they were both studying. She had a (partially) secret relationship, as only her mother knew about her boyfriend, while her father did not. When asked the reasons for concealing this from her father, she admitted that she did not feel comfortable telling him as, she said, "then, whenever I go out, he will ask me where I am going and with whom". Indeed, Aaliyah's choice of lying to her father gave her immediate freedom from any constraints over her movement and full agency over her relationship. Her further statement that her boyfriend and she had agreed that he would come to propose to her father after she had completed her MA and found a job "just as my parents want" signifies the couple's will to manage the relationship autonomously, until they were ready for marriage, or perhaps until their relationship could be

accepted by Aaliyah's father, who wanted her daughter to have a career before marriage. Similar was the case for Haneen (SSI, 2019), the second female student who admitted to being open about her relationship. She had met her Norwegian boyfriend in the NGO where they both worked and dated him for a while before her boyfriend's proposal was rejected by Haneen's family because he was a foreigner. However, she said, "we will give them (her parents) time, as I don't want to lose them by choosing my boyfriend". As she put it, "even if he was an Arab and Jordanian, but from a different village from ours, they would have said no. They still say no to everything outside their comfort zone".

Aaliyah's and Haneen's stories showcase how desegregated higher education spaces and the workplace can give young people the opportunity to meet a potential partner, to date independently of family supervision, and to decide autonomously on their partner's suitability for themselves and their family. However, for both girls, this autonomous dating choice does not mean that they can bypass parental approval of their chosen partner. Because they ultimately wish their choice to be validated by their families, they have found ways to ensure that the partner is well-chosen and meet their parents' criteria. For Aaliyah, this meant graduating and secured a job before getting married. Haneen's story, instead, sheds light on the aspect of high politicisation of marriage arrangements in Jordanian families, reflecting the country's political identity, which is divided across national, ethnic, and religious lines. As Johnson et al. (2009) note, in relation to the Palestinian context during the first and second Intifada, families arranged marriages based on political affiliation rather than cultural practices. Marriage arrangements in Jordan similarly reflect the division between Transjordanians, Palestinians, Chechens, or Circassians, and even further between the same groups according to region\town or village of origin, settlement patterns, class, clan\tribe, degree of religiosity of the family, its accountability and respectability within the community. From my further conversation with Haneen, it emerged that she had "looked up" how she could marry her Norwegian boyfriend without her father's consent. Jabiri (2016, p.10) notes that a *wali* (male blood relative) has the right to act on behalf of a daughter in marriage matters to safeguard her interests. This legal authority stems from the daughter's alleged incapacity to act independently as defined in the *fiqh* literature, juristic law. Haneen found that she has the right to appeal her father's decision to the *Shari'a* court, whose refusal is

legally unfounded on the basis of her partner's nationality as, she explained, the only two requirements a person must meet for marriage under the Islamic law are ""*khuluk* (good manners) and *din* (religion), and my boyfriend has both". Meanwhile, Haneen, while giving her parents time to accept her choice, keeps dating her boyfriend on and off-campus.

Couples' Experiences: From Dating to Marriage

In this section, I discuss the findings of FOs and SSIs interviews with married people who had first succeeded in practising alternative dating approaches and then in signing their most desired marriage contract. I then reflect on the significance of these alternative gender relationships for understanding the young people's new value system. Of my FOs in six intergenerational households, of the four youngest couples who had been married between five years and a few months, two had met at university and dated secretly for years (FO3 and FO6, 2019), one couple had met at work (FO2, 2019) and another through social media, i.e., Facebook (FO4, 2019), and had dated secretly for a shorter period of time. The remaining two families (FO1 and FO5) where I conducted observations included the oldest generation couples and those who had traditionally arranged marriages. Consistent with the findings of FOs, the SSIs with married people overall confirmed that young Jordanians are likely to choose their own spouses, unlike older generations who used to have their marriages arranged by their families. The most commonly mentioned places for young Jordanians to meet a potential partner are the university, the workplace, friends, or social media, especially Facebook.

Yara and Feras (FO6, 2019) – a newly married couple expecting their first child – had met at university and had been secretly dating for three years. They introduced each other to their respective families once they had graduated and were emotionally and financially ready to marry. During the family observation – which took place at an extended family gathering attended by an older (FO6) and a younger generation (FO5) of households – Feras' brother-in-law, Muath (FO6), entertained me with tales of the younger couple's secret love story, and kept joking about their ability to keep their relationship secret from male relatives for so long. Interestingly, Muath, a man in his mid-40s, acknowledged the young couple's decision to retain full control over their love story, from dating to marriage.

Hatem and Dina (FO3, 2019) also met and fell in love on the UJ campus. Dina recalled how hard Hatem had tried to get into a relationship with her, who at that time was "very strict and religious" and did not want to talk to any guy. It took her a while to trust him and they had a relationship for six years before they got engaged. She admitted that it took so long for them to get engaged and then married because of financial problems, "we waited for the right moment and then got married in 2014".

Couples who had met and dated at university found a way to reconcile their expectations and the financial difficulties of being young and unemployed, and introduced to each other's families only after they had secured their partner and their own suitability for marriage. Conversely, couples who met at work, thus, those who were already employed, such as Marwan and Mais (FO2, 2019) and Muhammad and Zeina (FO4, 2019), involved their families earlier as they may have felt ready to marry.

Mais (FO2, 2019) recalled how her story with Marwan began when he saw her at the bank where she worked and asked her out. They dated for two months before Mais asked Marwan to come to her house, introduce himself to her parents and propose to her. Mais admitted that she disliked traditional marriage "because you don't know the person enough" and preferred to have enough time to get to know her partner before marriage. Mais' relationship with Marwan was secret at first, for she admitted that she only told her older sister and friends about him. After a few months, she revealed her secret to her mother, who asked her to take him home and not go out with him alone. However, Mais refused because, she said, "I feel free outside and I wanted to make sure on my own whether he was good for me or not". Mais' quote underlines how important it is for young women to make sure "on their own" that they have found the right partner. The fact that only afterwards the prospective husband is invited to come home to propose suggests the complete independence of couples in this process. For many young women who dated outside of family supervision, families only became involved at the final stage but parental approval of the suitability of the spouse was still crucial for them to be able to get married.

Besides university and work, social media, particularly Facebook, was also cited as a key arena in which a new dating culture is unfolding. In discussing young people's desire to engage in an alternative dating culture, it is vital to note that they may also resort to alternative practices in situations where freedom is more restricted, in situations of vulnerability, lack of opportunities, or simply whenever they want to explore alternatives. In a study of online romance in Jordan, specifically among students at Yarmuk University, the internet was defined as a suitable space where young people can form relationships to escape social networks and avoid concerns about respectability while developing a "personal rapport" (Kaya, 2009, p.267). For young Jordanian women and men, social media represents a powerful dating arena that allows them to escape social and family constraints and date freely.

Muhammad and Zeina (FO4, 2019) are another couple in whose household I conducted an observation. Muhammad was at a friend's house when he saw Zeina's profile picture on his friend's Facebook page and said, "I instantly liked her and asked my friend who she was". Interestingly, Zeina was his friend's cousin, so Muhammad asked him to contact her. Perhaps, his friend's involvement shifted the dynamics by which Muhammad could approach Zeina towards more traditional practices. To legitimise his request to date his friend's female relative, Muhammad asked for Zeina's mother's phone number in order to obtain permission to speak with Zeina. Moreover, the intermediary of such a request was Muhammad's mother and not Muhammad himself. At that time, Muhammad and Zeina were living in different countries. Zeina was Jordanian but lived with her family in the United Arab Emirates, while Muhammad lived in Amman. After talking on WhatsApp for a few months, Zeina came to Amman with her mother to meet Muhammad's family and introduced herself. The couple met face-to-face, got engaged after some time and got married after a year. Zeina's agency in this process represents a perfect balance of an active, independent decision embedded in the traditional practices of dating that suited both families and individuals' beliefs. It was Muhammad's decision to conduct the initial interaction with Zeina through their mothers, and then Zeina's to introduce herself to Muhammad's family by coming along with her mother, that enabled both of them to shift the appropriateness of their interaction from the informal framework of social media to the formal one of the family by co-opting the traditional meaning of mothers' involvement in the marriage process, which in this case appeared merely

symbolic. This story illustrates how the traditional dynamics of dating can encompass the more desired dynamics of the individual without the former disempowering or destabilising the individual's agency first in the process of deciding to date and then marry a partner.

Unlike social networking apps, dating apps were viewed with suspicion, especially by women who claimed that they did not trust a man who wanted to find a wife through online apps. Dating apps, however, seem to be on the rise, although only one research participant (Abdallah, SSI, 2019) admitted to knowing someone who had married through a dating app.

In conclusion, young, educated Jordanians, whether students or professionals, are aware of the diverse dating practices they can adopt if they want to enter into a meaningful relationship outside of the traditional networks. Their agency is remarkable, and their practices of meanings co-optation illustrate that they are interested in staying within the system rather than breaking out of it. By inscribing non-normative dating practices into the old structures, these alternative meanings become validated and thus, possible. Desegregation allows young people to meet a potential partner either at work, at university or even at school (if these are not segregated), and to form friendships and to create new networks of emotional support. Above all, the legitimacy of educational or workplaces inscribes male-female relationships within the framework of respectability. If control is tighter, young people can switch to a safer online platform. Otherwise, Amman's crowded and cosmopolitan urban environment makes it easily to deceive the family when starting dating. Ultimately, young people's agency in dating practices outside of the family supervision depends on individual and family understandings of tradition, norms, and levels of religiosity, leading each to act according to their own needs. Ultimately, in the words of a female student I met, Aaliyah (SSI, 2019), "nowadays, dating in Jordan is like everywhere. Young people go out together, go on a date in cinemas, restaurants, and see each other at university, that's all".

Shifting Notions of Traditional Marriage: A Co-opted Concept

The overwhelming majority of my research participants admitted in SSIs that they wanted to choose their partner outside of traditional arrangements trajectories. The

lived experiences described above demonstrate that in many cases they have the agency to do so. A closer look at the dynamics of arranged marriages suggests that traditional marriage arrangements – apart from the rhetoric on culture, traditions, and religion – are "lived politics" (Johnson et al., 2009). According to the general understanding of my participants, traditional marriage meant an arrangement planned by families, especially by the prospective groom's mother, who involved an intertwined network of kinship and friendship to find a suitable girl willing to marry. Negotiations about arrangements are primarily conducted within the immediate family community, sometimes also among relatives, neighbours, friends, or co-workers. The search for a suitable marriage partner mirrors the interests and preferences of a family. Thus, first, it is conducted by affinity group as to include families who share sociodemographic characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background, settlement pattern, class, degree of religiosity, customs, and culture. Second, the bride's characteristics are negotiated, including personal and physical features, age, education, degree of religiosity, and dress code, as some families require the bride-to-be to comply with religious mores. As a quote from a professional single man named Seif (SSI, 2019) perfectly sums up, "for our families, there is a checklist for brides that says they must be Muslim, come from a good family, have a good education, and good manners".

To mention a general trend, in Jordan, marriages are performed within the same religious groups and sometimes within the same ethnic groups, e.g., between Chechens and Circassians, or generally between Transjordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin. Christians rarely marry outside their community as they may face harsh consequences, including social and family ostracism. Interfaith marriages are rare, but love stories are not. In my sample of respondents, I had two examples of love stories between Muslim boys and Christian girls, one born on campus and one off campus, one failed and one still surviving, but both completely secret.[38] Usually families prefer to arrange marriage by group affinity, especially social class, to avoid contrasts in lifestyle and expectations.

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[38] For a discussion on religious dynamics of Muslim and Christian communities in Jordan, see Droeber, J. (2012).

In exploring the understanding of traditional marriage, young people distinguished between a stricter and older form of traditional marriage (in Arabic, *zawaj taqlidi*) and a more recent one, which is also defined as traditional, or *taqlidi*. The designation of both types of arrangements as *taqlidi* is another example of the successful co-optation of meanings by young people, which, while allowing them to preserve the formal and symbolic meaning of so-called traditional marriage in front of the community, simultaneously subverts its inner meaning according to their desires and expectations. Most female participants described the stricter and older form of traditional marriage as "when a complete stranger knocks on your door and asks you to marry him " (Amal, SSI, 2019), and firmly rejected it without hesitation of coming into conflict with their families when it was proposed. This traditional marriage was often associated with negative perceptions by middle-class Ammani women. The following quote from a female student illustrates these perceptions:

> I disagree with traditional marriage! If you want to marry someone, you must know him! Here, when a man wants to marry, he tells his mother to find a girl for him. My friend was proposed to; the man came to her house and asked her nothing more than if she was ready to marry! My friend was disappointed. She wanted him to ask her something about her studies and hobbies, to get to know her better. However, he only wanted her to be beautiful and wear the *hijab*. He also told her not to work but to stay at home while he would work and give her everything she wanted. She rejected him and told her mother not to bring anyone else home for her. Men only see women as objects (Farah, SSI, Amman, 2019).

Farah's quote above sums up the views of most of my women participants about the *zawaj taqlidi*, where the couple have never met before. As Adely (2016, p.103) notes, young people who reject traditional marriage "want to know a potential partner before committing". This point was also confirmed in my interviews with women and men alike. For the women I met, the expression "knowing a partner" meant being aware of a spouse's opinions, ideas, and morals on various matters, as this could indicate whether he was incline to reject a wife's traditional role. Young women challenging expectations of "a wife's traditional role" did not simply mean rejecting women's role as caregivers, but also demanding the right of women to be active members of the family and society. In concrete terms, this meant affirming not only women's right to have a life outside of the household, but also their right to have a different one within the household. Farah's concluding words about men seeing

women as objects call for a reconsideration of women's role in relation to men, in the domestic and public spheres; for example, a woman has the right to work, but also to have desires, hobbies, and ambitions, and not just to be submissive and subject to a husband's control over finances or behaviour. Farah further calls into question a form of hegemonic masculinity that cannot relate to women, as it understands gender relations as strictly hierarchical, saying that "men are narrow-minded and only want to give orders and be the boss". She further stressed the need to overcome such inegalitarian gender attitudes by moving to a new conceptualisation of male-female relations based on partnership and mutual support, where "a man and a woman get along well, agree on many life issues and are mostly equal partners". It is in the impossibility of meeting each other's expectations and in conflicting values, mainly in relation to gender roles, that I would identify the primary reason for the so-called "marriage crisis" in Jordan, rather than within other structural challenges (e.g., Hughes, 2021). My findings demonstrate that the "marriage crisis" in Jordan should be viewed in a different light. I argued that this crisis is fuelled not only by economic uncertainty, but also by the shifting gender values of young people, who are raising contrasting new expectations by challenging all together the gendered status quo, male privilege, family prerogatives, and authority. This urges us to question labels such as "marriage crisis" that carry the problematic legacy of developmental narratives that are reinforced by statements such as "rising age of marriage", "decreasing fertility rate", or increasing "singlehood" that are often equated with modernisation and development. My findings show that for some women and men I met, being single was a choice because they were not interested in getting married. However, for the majority, it was a matter of prioritising "finding the right partner for themselves" rather than simply meeting the expectations of family and society. Difficulties in getting married for economic reasons, e.g., unemployment, low salaries, and high marriage costs, which still exclusively affect men, even though were frequently mentioned by men, did not appear to be the main problem related to the "marriage crisis". In fact, these economic burdens were well navigated by young men either by finding a wife whose demands in terms of *maher* (dowry), jewellery, and wedding party expenses matched the groom's financial capabilities, or by finding a wife who was willing to work after marriage and share financial responsibilities. For instance, an increasing number of men migrated to GCC countries for a few years to earn enough money to cover

wedding expenses. Some temporarily negotiated their freedom and autonomy by either selling their car to pay for an expensive *maher* or accepting to live in a family's building to set up their household. The marriage crisis in Jordan is more than an economic issue. It tells us that if couples do not share egalitarian values and goals, the marriage crisis in Jordan will most likely continue, hence, the number of women and men who choose singlehood.

Like females, male participants rejected this very traditional form of marriage, demanding their active involvement in the choice of a spouse, which should no longer be the prerogative of their mothers. Young people's rejection of old notions of marriage arrangements illustrates how they redefine the boundaries of established notions of marriage through complex negotiations. Such negotiations aim to circumvent the primacy of the family in the marriage contract, demonstrating young people's desire to gain agency over important life choices and to shape more egalitarian, equal, and fair gender roles and relations. This form of negotiation can be recognised in young people's co-optation of the notion of "traditional marriage" to create a new one encompassing both their families and their own expectations and desires. This new notion of marriage, which is also reflected in the shifting approaches to dating, envisages family mediation only after the couple has met or interacted independently, and after they have mutually agreed to introduce themselves to respective families. Thus, young married people who had met at university, at work, through friends, or on the internet and had dated secretly before deciding to involve each other's families still considered their marriage as traditional. This reconceptualised traditional marriage finds acceptance among the youngsters, whose agency in this process has been central from the beginning, but who seek to retain the relevance of the family in concretising marriage; a relevance that is perhaps reflected in the decision to continue to define this marriage as "traditional".

This conceptualisation of marriage, where agency is central, requires young people to strike a proper balance between the family expectations and their own desires for love, conjugality, and mutual respect. Overall, my findings show that individuals' expectations in choosing a spouse are to some extent in line with those of the family. This point is not a misconception that young people conform to family expectations

of marriage, but mirrors the crucial importance of parental approval of marriage; a parental approval that is valued equally by women and men.

All the women I met were highly confident in describing their future husband's features of social status, education, and openness. These precise descriptions aroused my curiosity and interest, especially as they left no room for alternative thoughts or even uncertainty. Overall, the women I met were more concerned with social class than men, possibly because marrying a partner from a lower social class would have required them to significantly lower their standard of living; in fact, the men's financial obligations in marriage would have required the women to adjust their lifestyle, households arrangement, and possibly to rearrange gender roles. Instead, in FGs discussions (FG4-5-6, 2019), the men admitted that they would be willing to marry a woman from a lower social class, but not an upper-class one, to avoid the "shame" of not being able to meet her family's expectations and provide her with the same lifestyle in which she grew up. A similar understanding is shown by Samah (SSI, 2019), a female student, who responded to my biased (towards romantic love) question, "what if you fell in love with a poorer man?" as follows: "I don't think I would. I don't want to judge him, so I wouldn't marry him. Besides, this situation could lead to problems between us later, like a divorce… so I don't think I would marry him".

In contexts where young people's agency in implementing this alternative traditional marriage appeared more limited, people still found exciting ways to navigate different family demands and expectations without giving up their aspirations. For instance, Amal, the female student I talked about, whose freedom was significantly limited by her father, confessed to me that she had been thinking about a plan to marry a partner of her choice, as her parents were unlikely to accept her initiative in the marriage process:

> If I wanted to get married, I would secretly date someone, and then we would agree that when he comes to my house to propose, he will pretend he doesn't know me, and I will pretend I don't know him, and see if that works. But I still wouldn't marry a man without their consent. I disagree with my parents on many things, but I respect my family's reputation and my own, and I wouldn't marry without their consent (Amal, SSI, 2019).

Amal's plan is an example of a practical implementation of creative agency that enables the young woman to get what she wants without breaking or subverting dominant rules. Amal has realised that she needs a viable solution to fulfil her dream of finding a spouse independently. Therefore she has elaborated a plan to meet her parents' criteria for a socially acceptable marriage. This further proves that women and men alike can be reluctant to contravene the ultimate authority of the family in marriage when much is at stake. For Amal, her parents' approval of her marriage is important for her reputation as a respectable young woman, so she would not marry without their consent.

Young people co-opting the concept of traditional marriage, presented here as a concept in evolution, point to the importance of couples choosing each other, knowing each other well, and meeting each other's expectations as for prerequisite of marriage. The evidence presented here demonstrate that the patriarchal institution of marriage is finding less space to reproduce entrenched inequalities among young people who aspire to establish more egalitarian relationships and expect to realise alternative models of womanhood and manhood. Additionally, the persistence of a so-called traditional marriage arrangement does not mean that young people subscribe to it and nonetheless undermines their agency in it. The following section presents young, educated Jordanian's new conceptualisation of marriage that encompasses love, conjugality, and partnership as fundamental conditions for signing their most desired marriage contract.

A New Marriage Contract: Sharing Values, Feelings, and Vision

Young people's rejection of traditional marriage arrangements seemed to be due to the possibility that not knowing a partner well enough and sometimes also not loving him\her, could lead to an unhappy life. In the SSIs, most participants expressed a desire to have a married life different from that of their parents, most of whom neither knew nor loved each other before marriage. When asked what they thought were the reasons for their parents' unsuccessful marriage, the most recurring statements from participants were: "Because they married traditionally"; "they had nothing in common and fought all the time"; "they have neither a life of their own nor a partner life"; "they devoted their whole life only to their children". Distancing themselves from the negative features of their parents' marriage, which was often the result of a

traditional arrangement, also meant that young people rejected traditional gender roles in marriage. As Layan (SSI, 2019), a female professional, said, "my mother stayed at home, cooked, cleaned, and took care of the children. She had no opportunities, no job, and no education. My father worked to support the family. I want to build a different family". When further enquired about what they thought was lacking in their parents' relationship, most of the participants mentioned that their parents did not share finances or feelings, nor did they discuss and make decisions together. In discussing new conceptualisations of marriage, young women particularly questioned the husband's decision-making power and emphasised the relevance of partnership and friendship between spouses. Lama (SSI, 2019), a female student, further highlighted that the concept of partnership can include friendship, as she said, "I don't want to marry someone who treats me like a maid. I want to marry my best friend". Overall, the prevailing notions of traditional marriage reflect the glim reality of a marriage characterised by unequal gender dynamics. As most women, students and professionals, confirmed in the SSIs, if marriage was to be this, they would prefer to remain single.

Sonbol (2003, p.151) notes that "at the heart of marriage are several assumptions that are not written out but are socially accepted and legally recognised by the law". These include the husband's financial responsibility to his wife and the wife's obedience in return (Sonbol, 2003, pp.151-152). Indeed, my female participants' perceptions of traditional marriage abounded with concerns about the wife's obedience to the husband, who has the authority to prevent her mobility, limit her professional opportunities (or even forbid her to work or demand her resignation), control her dress code and behaviour. Similarly, male respondents were concerned about the burden of heavy family responsibilities holding back their personal life achievements, dreams, and aspirations. The conversation below, extrapolated from one FG with only male students, highlights the men's perceptions of traditional marriage and the lack of freedom they perceived in it. Furthermore, this group of young men underlines that love has no place in the premises of such a marriage:

> **Ameer:** Love and marriage are two different things!
> **Fahed:** Hate comes after marriage, not love!
> **Fadi:** I always hear from married men that they need a visa to enter and leave the house. The marriage stereotype is very ugly. I am so influenced by this

idea that I think marriage will limit my opportunities. You work better when you're single.

Fadel: Yes, I think marriage will limit me if I want to pursue my career dream. I need more freedom to do what I want and what I like!

(FG5, 2019).

Surprisingly, men's views on traditional marriage resonate with fears about the incompatibility of married life with personal goals and overwhelming concerns about the restriction of men's freedom. As traditional marriage has acquired a rather sinister connotation, stemming from both parental experience and social accounts, young people are no longer accepting of signing this rather undesired marriage contract and are reconceptualising the concept of marriage. In my participants' view, marriage is a spiritual and emotional bond between two people who have chosen each other as they both share a deeper connection, similar visions of life, and values.

In discussing the significance of marriage, many research participants defined marriage as *"sunnat al-hayat"* (norm of life). This definition conveys the social importance of marriage, and configures it as a central pillar of life, something that will happen or is expected to happen in a person's life, and on which society's perception of personal success and fulfilment is often based. Even though this expression highlights marriage as a social value, it does not mean that young people embrace it as such. As has already been shown, young people reject the traditional meaning that marriage conveys. Their new conceptualisation of marriage embraces a new notion of family, which is no longer a patriarchal institution that reproduces gender hierarchies, but a heterotopia in which young couples can adopt more egalitarian gender roles and constructs a more egalitarian society. Thus, redefining, that is, co-opting, normative notions of marriage, reflects the aspirations of young women and men to shift gender relations, gender roles, and gendered subjectivities. Ultimately, the significance of shifting notions of marriage should be seen in the opportunities that challenging traditional gender norms offers to drive social change.

In discussing the marriage significance, most women and men participants did not consider marriage as a life priority, however, contrary to students, professionals, at times, perceived marriage as something mandatory or somehow inevitable in their society. As discussed earlier, the marriage pressure appears to increase with age.

Thus, this perception of marriage among professionals may reflect the heavy societal pressures to which my group of single and working women and men were predominantly exposed, reflecting a tension in marriage expectations between the society\family and individuals. Despite the differences in perceptions between the two groups, the professional participants' understanding of marriage was consistent with that of the students. Indeed, as Hussein (SSI, 2019), a male student, confidently admitted, "marriage itself is not important, but being married to the right partner who will push me forward as a person, is". Finally, students' narratives about marriage sometimes seemed much more idealised and less grounded in reality than those of professionals.

In discussing the proper basis for marriage in the Arab world, 19th century modernisers, such as the Egyptian Qasim Amin, argue that companionship is the basis for marriage (Adely, 2016, pp.121-122). Given its arranged nature, love was consistently disentangled from marriage, however, discussions included the possibilities for it to develop after marriage. So-called romantic love or *"hubb romansi",* in Arabic, conveyed somewhat ambivalent connotations and its reliability as a basis for marriage was often questioned (Adely, 2016, p.103). The traditional understanding of marriage as a social contract, aimed at extending ties between families or strengthening existing ones, entails that marriage arrangements are generally delegated to families rather than individuals. This means that love is not a prerequisite for marriage and notions of romance are often perceived as antithetical – if not incompatible – with marriage. Findings from FGs discussions on love and marriage show that notions combining love with marriage are complex and – at times – controversial. As it falls out of societal control defining the boundaries of marriage acceptability in terms of kinship ties, ethnicity, class, and religion of the spouses, love is kept separate from marriage as it has the potential to cross further boundaries, especially those related to sexual relationships. In speaking about love and marriage, my participants brought about contrasting opinions. In outlining why love is often disassociated from marriage, most participants have spoken about the possibility of love developing either before or after marriage, but none of them excluded it from marriage. Students participating in a mixed FG (FG3, 2019), explain that love before marriage is tainted with negative ideas in social discourse, as it is seen as "something forbidden", "something wrong that can cause problems", "something unacceptable"

or "something that can turn you into a bad (morally speaking) person". Similarly, male professionals (FG6, 2019) pointed to the instability of love and how its "silliness and craziness" would not make of love a reliable marriage foundation. To support this point, some recalled stories of friends, family members, or acquaintances who had married for love and divorced soon after, unable to cope with marriage responsibilities. Sometimes, marriage was considered the "real test of love". As Rahaf, a young female student, said:

> Marriage shows whether the love you felt for the person was real or not. If they stand by you in challenging situations, if they are by your side and don't run away, that's when true love begins (Rahaf, FG1, 2019).

Rahaf's quote highlights how love develops through marriage as the work of two people who care for each other on a daily basis and support each other in difficult times. In a way, it sounds like love before marriage cannot be trusted enough or proven yet. Some participants explained that they had changed their opinion about love before marriage, and that after a heartbreak, they resorted to traditional marriage arrangements – previously rejected – where love before marriage is not a precondition. Indeed, the disappointment that idealised love brought caused them to consider traditional engagement as the best possible choice. So, for Hussein, a male student, love means above all making difficult choices and taking responsibility towards a loved one:

> I don't like girls who just follow instructions and listen to their families, or girls who do not take responsibility. For example, if a girl loves you but her parents don't want her to marry to you, she will give up on you. I got engaged once but we broke up because I had a concept of sharing finances, working together and building a life together, but her father didn't accept it. I loved her, she loved me, and that's why she promised me many things. That's why I don't agree with love before marriage anymore, because when we got the real problems, she backed down and rejected me (Hussein, SSI, 2019).

Hussein's quote highlights how expectations of unconditional love can sometimes clash with larger societal and familial expectations of marriage, and how difficult it is for young couples to build an alternative married life by implementing new gender roles. Repercussions over lack of consent can halt change by pushing young people to fall back on traditional definitions of partnership and marriage. Love, for Hussain, is a choice of commitment, responsibility, hard work, and support, which goes

beyond family's interests and expectations. Interestingly, parallel and positive conceptions of love emerged simultaneously in young people's accounts. For instance, married couples expressed that the difference between their parents' married life and their own lies in the unique marital bond based on love, partnership, and conjugality, which, in the case of the newly married couples whose stories I have recalled above, developed before marriage. In all my conversations about marriage with young women and men, married or single, harmony or compatibility in marriage – known in Arabic as *insijam* – was mentioned as the primary basis for a highly desirable marriage.

In Adely's (2016) conceptualisation, *insijam* is a youth negotiation between love and traditional matches. *Insijam* has been framed as cultural, classed and personal (Adely, 2016, p.104). It can thus be defined as the partners being comfortable with each other and sharing characteristics such as education level, socio-economic class, moral standards and values, and level of religiosity. Adely's notion of *insijam* emerged in my research as young people pointed out the importance of balancing family and personal expectations of marriage. However, it is worth emphasising that this negotiation appears necessary as it is driven by the need to obtain family approval for marriage, for which socio-economic status, ethnicity, education attainment, moral standards, religion and religiosity cannot be dismissed. Here, I argue that the significance of *insijam* should be shifted from partners' giving primacy to families "material" conditions of marriage – whose validity is not in discussion – to partners connection on a deeper level. In this sense, love is compatible with marriage, but instead of taking a mere idealised romantic feature, it is anchored in a reality that best suits the partners.

The new marriage contract reflects above all the partners' need to meet each other's expectations. Furthermore, the perfect partner is not intended to be an idealised woman\men, but a matching counterpart who shares gender egalitarian values and is ready to implement them when starting a family. My findings show that the participants' experiences, the partners' future goals, and shared ideas about responsibilities and roles were never subordinated to the need to accommodate the family's expectations. In fact, all the women and men I met who were facing strong family pressure to marry had so far rejected "suitable partners" choosing to remain

single rather than give up their expectation of a marriage partnership for the sake of the family. Overall, marriage among young, well-educated Jordanians is a desire for companionship, shared life values and vision, love and affection between two people who support, understand, and encourage each other's personal development rather than hinder it. In this contract, love is always highly sought (or desired) and definitely never excluded. However, love is also heavily negotiated among young people, as it still has to meet societal and family requirements in order to find legitimacy and thus exist.

Conclusion

This chapter explored gendering practices as lived experience, illuminating the inextricable connection between one's agency, experience, and subjectivity formation with unique social structures of power and broader gender discourses. Ethnographic accounts of everyday life on the UJ campus revealed the diverse and heterogeneous experiences of students. The way people understand the world and their agency within it depends on the different constraints and gendered expectations that families impose on them according to local understandings of traditions, customs, religion, and beliefs. Such an understanding of the world is not fixed or immutable, and young people in transition to adulthood expand their options by shifting their notions of gender relations, desires, expectations, and aspirations towards themselves and others. Particularly, entering higher education spaces appeared a life turning point for most of my participants. The campus life, which was often the first desegregated environment young people inhabited, not only created new opportunities for them to shape the gender relations they desired, but also provided them with a safe space in which to engage in alternative practices. Freedom from both parental supervision and the institution itself – which did not appear to have implemented major rules to uphold traditional gender norms, at least across all campus spaces – encouraged young people to cross gendered boundaries regulating men-women interactions, gendered behaviours, and dress codes. Overall, female students appeared more free to implement alternative practices, while male students appeared more constrained by broader socio-political power relations impinging on their lives. Some spaces on campus constituted heterotopias that enable young people to safely cross gendered boundaries. There is evidence that these spaces can provide a springboard for the normalisation of alternative gender norms.

Overall, students lived experiences on campus highlight conflict, tensions, and struggles inherent in the process of renegotiating gender norms, which attend the individual's agency in the self-making of gender identities. Male violence and sexual harassment of female students on campus make visible the latent forces acting upon people and the hegemonic discourses and structures that constrain their agency. The stronger the social constraints, the more creative people's agency becomes. Young people's crossing gendered boundaries on campus reflects the practical enactment of the new value system with which they identified. The transposition of these alternative gender practices, first enacted on campus, to adult life off campus accounts for the strong capacity of the individuals to effect change on a wider societal level. Young women and men engaging in alternative dating practices show their desire to choose a partner autonomously, as most participants disagreed with traditional marriage arrangements. The new marriage contract that young people aspire to sign entails partners meeting their expectations before families do. Dating practices are varied and highly negotiated. They range from open to secret or partially secret, depending on one's needs and constraints. Practices appeared perfectly balanced to meet both personal expectations and the need to obtain parental consent for marriage, which is highly sought to maintain strong family relationships. In order to surpass gendered boundaries and successfully enact desired change, young people have co-opted values and shifted their internal meanings. The appropriation of meanings, such as that of traditional marriage, allows to dismantle the system from within by replacing old values with new ones. The emerging values reflected by the discussed alternative gendering practices are re-inscribed into acceptable and legitimised old narratives to facilitate their enactment and subsequent normalisation. In this sense, young people renegotiate undesirable gender norms with desirable ones, treading a path of transformation that is not overly radical, revolutionary, or violent, and is marked by the silent, tenacious, and relentless work of a conscious and self-aware relational self. Ultimately, the practices of crossing gendered boundaries have revealed young people's emerging conceptualisation of marriage, which encompasses love, partnership, common life goals and, most importantly, a shared, more egalitarian, attitude towards gender roles and expectations. They rejected the old marriage contract that prioritised the family's expectations over their own, demanding wife-husband equal rights and respect for each other's dreams and aspirations for personal fulfilment. A new conceptualisation

of conjugality, love, marriage, and gender roles reflects the active role of young people in the self-making of gender identities, which I explore in the next chapter. Ultimately, the findings of this chapter have laid the foundation for understanding the role of agency in self-fashioning alternative masculinities and femininities and for questioning the ultimate relevance of hegemonic discourses in people's lives. Next, I discuss my participants enacted desired subjectivities and what ideal society their new (co-opted) set of values reflect. In this last aspect lies the potential of intangible aspects of human subjectivity, such as desire, aspirations, and dreams to transform society. In doing so, I attempt to reply to the research question posed in this thesis: Is young people's desire for change enough to disrupt the prevailing gender ideology, characterised by unequal power relations between men and women, parents and children, and husbands and wives, upon which Jordan's status quo rests?

CHAPTER 6

Enacted Desires of Transformation: Alternative Femininity and Masculinity Selves

Introduction

Young people's desire to shake power relations in intimate relationships sheds light on the agency of individuals over the self-fashioning of gender identities. As shown so far, gender identities, gender roles, and gender relations are never fixed, yet are fluid and changeable. Femininity and masculinity models are not essentialist and ahistorical, but complex and multiple. They are the product of the interplay of unique intersections at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, always adjusted to respond to the changing life circumstances of the individuals and their shifting positions in relation to power during the life course. As this research aims to affirm people's agency in relation to hegemonic discourses acting upon them, this final chapter concludes this central argument by showing how the young women and men I met can shape their most desired femininities and masculinities selves. This challenges the alleged homogeneity of femininity and masculinity in Arab\Muslim contexts and deconstructs dominant discourses that objectify and victimise Arab women and dehumanise Arab men.

Drawing on the narratives of participants in SSIs and FGs discussions about understandings of masculinities and femininities, I explore the plurality of young people's gender subjectivities and the development of their desired manhood(s) and womanhood(s) trajectories. I stress that these trajectories are as multiple and diverse as the young people's desired life pathways and the dreams, aspirations, and expectations that motivate their actions. Even in their heterogeneity, these trajectories inevitably reflected the new set of values young people identified with. Thus, the first two sections of this chapter explore the feminine and masculine subjectivities the young educated Jordanians I met have been constructing and shaping, and what these alternative subjectivities tell us about the new role they aspire to play in their family and society. Women and men alike always act and re-act to hegemonic narratives, albeit in different ways, but always making room for their desires, needs, and aspirations. The final section discusses the FOs findings in

more detail and looks more closely at the everyday dynamics of gender roles, conjugality, motherhood and fatherhood in the households of the young married couples where I conducted observations. This allows me to provide a brief overview of the structural challenges that individuals encounter when trying to enact alternative realities. In so doing, I reflect on the capacity of young people to redefine the country's asymmetrical gender relations and implement the change they seek, ultimately connecting (again) the individual to the social. This conclusion reaffirms young people's agency in the self-making of desired gender identities and, above all, their determination in finding creative ways to enact change. Finally, I reflect on gender roles in the attempt to challenge essentialist assumptions about supposed "traditional" gender roles notions. I argue that the implementation of traditional gender roles by young married couples should not signify their retreat from gender egalitarian values. The final argument of this thesis is that young women and men are constructing a counter-hegemonic project that carries the seeds of reshaping society's power hierarchies. Findings suggesting that young people are becoming increasingly aware of the national narratives fixing hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity and the negative implications of these models on both their personal lives and the future of Jordanian society, stand as the most substantial evidence to this argument. As Kandiyoti (2014) notes, young generations are fully alert to the intimate relations between authoritarian rule and forms of oppression based on gender. Therefore, I understand the consciousness-raising found among my participants to be potentially disruptive to Jordan's gendered status quo.

Womanhood Trajectories

Ruba (SSI, 2019), a successful nutritionist who has just opened her clinic in Amman, recalls her mother's comment when she announced that she wanted to further her education abroad rather than accept another marriage proposal, as follows: *"Ruba, what do you want to do with all these dreams?"*. Ruba suffered from depression after her fiancé broke off their engagement when she was 25 years old. His family could not accept that Ruba was older (even if only a few months) than their son. "The relationship ended because of his family's interference, not because of us" she said. She emphasised her frustration at how a family could reject a woman for such a reason, instead of judging her on her values and morals, or on her qualities as a strong, independent, and successful woman. Nevertheless, the biggest

disappointment for Ruba was the lack of support from her partner, who did not stand by her in difficult times. She overcame the heartbreak of a love story that developed in the workplace by giving her life a new meaning. She went back to university, got a master's degree (MA), and now at the age of 31, she thanks God she did not marry that guy. Even today, Ruba is determined not to compromise her dreams to please her family who wish to see her married and keep arranging matches for her. Like her uncle, who, she said, "knows the type of person I want, but he insists on bringing me someone completely different. Once he brought me someone who had no education!". She is assertive in stating that she will only marry when she has found the right partner, someone who shares her values, and if that will not happen, it does not matter. She believes that a woman who does not marry is not missing out on a great opportunity, as many other opportunities may arise along the way. When I met Ruba, she was thrilled because she had just received an offer to study a second MA in Rome in nutritional sciences. She dreamed of fighting hunger and developing ways to create a more sustainable global food system. She believes that her greatest responsibility as a Jordanian, educated woman is to help the vulnerable by putting her knowledge at the service of poor local communities. Ruba's story shows the incredible force of one's dreams and aspirations in shaping the self and how a creative approach to life's ups and downs can pave unpredictable pathways and shape new desires. Ruba's story is not unique, yet it mirrors most of the life stories of the professional women I met.

In discussing middle-class urban women's agency in shaping alternative life pathways, education was defined as the key to deconstructing gendered life trajectories. All the women I met interpreted knowledge as power. Aaliyah (SSI, 2019), a female student, while explaining that she chose higher education to build her own life, further wondered: "How can I become independent without education?". Furthermore, Yasmin (SSI, 2019) emphasised young women's awareness of the dynamics behind the national discourse on women and education, and that education, as understood by some families or communities, can function as a mere tool for social mobility. Thus, she explained, "if a woman has a degree, she has a better chance of being married off well. It is like buying something with more features". Yasmin explained that for some girls, a university degree does not mean that they will have a career, as families ultimately decide on the most suitable life

path for their daughters. As mentioned earlier, female and male students were somewhat disappointed by an understanding of education as securing a suitable marriage deal or as a mere tool for social mobility. Yasmin and the other women I met wanted education to be a means of empowering women rather than relegating them to the usual life trajectory. In my conversations with female participants across faculties, this use of education was rejected, as if education used in this way had lost its inner meaning. Male students also addressed the same issue quite depressingly, stressing that nowadays they need a degree to get married, as many families would not accept a marriage proposal from a man who does not have at least a BA. These findings not only confirm that parents' and young people's expectations do not coincide, but also indicate that young people are very much aware of the national discourse on education and progress, which seems to be losing ground, mainly as the state keeps failing to expand employment opportunities for the growing number of graduates.

Overall, education for women encompasses meanings of independence and the ability to negotiate better life choices. As I mentioned earlier, young women also use education to liberate themselves or loosen family ties, settle abroad, or find a partner who shares their life vision. Education is also a means to make a career and earn money. Indeed, independence was one of the greatest expectations that women with higher education had for themselves. As Rahaf (SSI, 2019) stated, "I want to have a career before and after marriage. I want to be successful in life, you cannot just rely on someone to do something for you, you have to do things yourself". Since this expectation emerged in all conversations with women, both younger and older, married or single, perhaps we can begin to move away from constantly discussing and associating women's education with marriageability expectations, or its importance for future mothers, which is a legacy of post-independence national discourses. If these readings about the importance of education have somehow abounded in the literature on women in Jordan, it would be interesting to recognise the value of education for women (and men) for what it is: a genuine human desire to enhance self-potential and achieve personal fulfilment.

Furthermore, the women I met no longer identify their expectations with those of their family, let alone those of society, where marriage is the only pathway allowing

them to transition to adulthood. Jordanian young women confidently express their desires and claim their right to do things differently. In the women's accounts of marriage, it is clear that marriage is no longer a life priority, but a personal choice, it is not a merely an internalised expectation, but a conscious decision worth making only if certain conditions are met. Women do not consider marriage as a measure of their own success and make this clear to their families. We should explain the increasing number of adult single women or those who admit that they do not want to marry at all by referring to the most common statements made by young women regarding marriage, "I will not marry until I find the right partner". As mentioned earlier, the new marriage contract that young people seek to sign reflects their desire for egalitarian gender relations in both the private and public spheres and presupposes the partners' *insijam* (chemistry) first and only then that of their respective families. Women are conscious that they are more than mothers and wives and demand to be treated as individuals with autonomous selves who have dreams, aspirations, and desires. The young Jordanians have chosen to commit to a marriage that encompasses the partners' mutual fulfilment. Moreover, the young couples not only mentioned the importance of establishing egalitarian gender roles among themselves, but also in relation to their children and between their daughters and sons. In discussing the significance of motherhood, young married women with children pointed to their role as mothers in disrupting gender discriminatory attitudes. Young mothers expressed the desire to raise a boy who respects women, a "gentleman" who treats women well and is aware of his own share in the household. As per the girls, the mothers – and more significantly, also the fathers – wished to raise a strong and independent woman who studies, works, and follows her dreams, who is not afraid of anything and speaks her mind loudly. Most of the young couples I met wished that their daughters and sons would not experience the same difficulties they had in choosing their own life path, particularly their field of study, career, and spouse. The desire of young parents to let their children decide autonomously what they want to become mirrors a shift in parent-children power relations, where parental authority leaves room for support, guidance, and friendship.

The presentation of desired trajectories of womanhood is not intended to homogenise the desires, dreams, or expectations of women, whose plurality I wish to emphasise. Women's desired walks of life are diverse, complex, and constantly shifting. They

reflect changing interpersonal dynamics and intrapersonal features shaped by personal experience. Throughout their lives, women's trajectories are characterised by different and contradictory desires for education, marriage, career, motherhood, or singlehood; some women want to play a supposedly more traditional female role, and others do not; some want to follow their parents' advice and others want to make independent choices; some selves are characterised by reverence for or disregard of authority; some selves are pious and others are not, and do not want to be. Despite the differences in their desired trajectories, none of these women's choices undermine their strong desire for gender justice. Indeed, regardless of the multiple desired trajectories of womanhood, all the women I met strongly wished that the members of their community would respect, recognise, and value them as human beings. I conclude this section with two quotes that perfectly convey my women participants' view of the changes in gender roles and relations they seek in their society:

> I want them to stop "otherising" women. We are all human beings, we are all equal. I would like men to change much more than women. I would like them to stop seeing a woman only as someone who will be the mother of my children, who will cook for me. We (women) are people too. We have dreams, we want to have jobs, we think, you know (Rania, SSI, 2019).

> I would change the culture of masculinity. I hate the idea that men decide everything about women's lives. What we should wear, how we should work, or speak or laugh, how we should treat our children. I hate that, and I think we need to work on education to improve awareness of women's rights. I think this will take time (Ruba, SSI, 2019).

Manhood Trajectories

In this section I discuss models of masculinities the men I met identified with as opposed to the dominant models embodied by military and toxic masculinity. Discourses of military masculinity emerged in SSIs with professional men who happened to work in the military or had a military background. Whereas discourses of toxic masculinity emerged in SSIs and FGs with male students. These models reflect the two dominant forms of masculinity into which Jordanian male students and professionals have been socialised. This different socialisation seems to be due not only to the age difference between the two groups, but possibly also to shifting

socio-cultural and political discourses in the local, regional, and international context.

Here, I argue that there exists a self-fashioning of masculinities, as much as of femininities, that is highly subjective and unique, as men constantly contest and negotiate the prevailing notions of masculinity with their inner dreams, aspirations, and expectations. My findings indicate that several young Jordanian men do not identify either the country's military masculinity model or with the toxic masculinity. This might suggest a raising awareness among men (similar to feminists) of how hegemonic masculinity can constitute an impediment to building a better society that benefits women and men equally. In analysing dominant models of masculinity, my first focus is placed on men's perceptions of, relationship to, and affiliation with the most masculine of institutions: the military. In the Jordanian context, men often refer to the military with the Arabic expression "*masna' al-rijal*", the machinery of men, an expression that succinctly conveys the role of the military in re-producing hegemonic masculinity among young men. Previous studies of the military in Jordan have highlighted the institution's role in shaping national identity and national culture (Massad, 2001). Here, I am concerned with the crucial role the military plays in feeding Jordanian men's imaginary of an ideal manhood to aspire to. In Jordan, the image of the military man as a hero, who embodies the desire for invincibility, power, and authority has been cultivated since the post-independence period, when the nationalist propaganda fixed the country's new cultural identity. Nationalist propaganda, supported by nationalist songs and symbols, was applied to ensure that young boys embraced an idealised militarism that encompassed hegemonic masculinity and loyalty to the monarchy, the king, and the country. Overall, my male participants held members of the military in high esteem as their position was associated with high social status, social prestige, power, and authority derived from the privileges they acquired from holding this position. Remarkably, some of the male students, and most of the military men I met admitted that becoming a member of the army was their greatest dream when they were young. However, my findings further show that Jordanian men's dream of becoming a military hero is fading away, as fewer and fewer young men, representative of the urban, well-educated middle-class in my sample, identify with the hegemonic model of masculinity as moulded by the Jordanian military narrative.

When I asked Moutaz (SSI, 2019), a 27-year-old student who used to dream of joining the military, what he thought fuelled his dream, he replied, "we are taught from a young age that military men are heroes. We watch American movies and think that if we join the Jordanian army, we will become like marines". He also explained the importance of the legacy of the "Jaish al-Arabi" (Arabic name of the Jordanian army) in the national discourse, where militarism is associated with heroism and great victories (e.g., the Great Arab Revolt and the Battle of Karama). Moutaz's dream of entering the military academy faded as soon as he realised that the many restrictions and rules he had to abide by as a member of the military were not in line with his life aspirations. Low income, years of minimum service, and restrictions on personal freedom were key factors in Moutaz's decision to give up his dream of joining the military. Therefore, he continued, "there is a contrast between what you think you gain in terms of social recognition and the actual benefits you receive: low salary, slow levelling up and many burdens". Finally, Moutaz pointed out that "the instability of the region" further discourages young men from military service. Indeed, Moutaz noted that the national rhetoric of "protecting the country" is not very relevant to the younger generations, who cling to the real benefits that a military career offers in a country with high unemployment and job shortages. At the end of our conversation, he confided in me how poorly he was doing in his studies when he began to consider a career in the army, and that this decision represented an easy way for him to succeed and keep up with both personal and societal expectations of manhood. Like Moutaz, most of the male students I met, with one exception only,[39] did not mention wanting to join the army. This may suggest – with due caution and further research needed – young men's raising awareness of the national rhetoric surrounding the benefits of starting a military career and men's shifting concepts of power and authority within society.

Men's shifting notions of military masculinity were further confirmed in my interviews with military men. In my sample of older male participants, three were currently in the army and one had just left, but all were planning to leave soon; whereas, among the youngest participants, only one was considering joining the

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[39] The story of Yaser was described in Chapter 4 as an example of young people's struggle to live up to their parents' expectations.

army, while two others had decided not to pursue a military career. In all cases, these men came from a Transjordanian, Bedouin, military background, and their fathers had been or were currently in the Jordanian army. However, a gap in the military narrative emerged from the contrast between sons – who aspired to join the army – and their fathers – who were in the military. All the military men I met had confided in me how much they had struggled with their fathers' resistance to their decision to pursue a military career and, in most cases, had enlisted in the army contravening their fathers' wishes. However, it was interesting to see how they think today about the decision they made years ago, what they think about the military institution itself and how the military has shaped their masculinity and gender relations. In this regard, Hatem (SSI, 2019), a former military lawyer in his early thirties, described how the military has shaped his masculinity identity as follows:

> The army has taught me many things, how to behave and hold back my anger, how to listen and not give orders, and how to deal with people. But most of all, I have learned how to behave like a man. We say the army is "maasna al-rijal", you have to endure a lot, be patient and be able to handle stress. You have to be loyal, listen, take orders and carry them out. You have to do what they say. They are very strict with us (Hatem, SSI, 2019).

Hatem recalled the role of the army in shaping his masculine character. According to him, military service shaped his own standards of masculinity, particularly self-control and self-discipline. Hatem's desire to join the army stemmed from a desire to emulate his father, who was himself a member of the military. Whereas, while speaking about his father as a role model, Hatem made it clear that he *only* aspires to achieve his father's social standing, but he does not want to be the same man as him, as he said, "my father is very narrow-minded and has limited views". What distinguishes Hatem's model of masculinity from his father's is, above all, the two men's different understanding of gender relations. Thus, he admitted:

> I think my parents live the traditional role of husband and wife. I don't want to be like them with my wife. I want my wife to be my partner and not just my wife and the mother of my children. I want her to have her job and her income, and I want her to be "the one" in society. I don't want to be like my parents (Hatem, SSI, 2019).

Hatem's story shows men's agency in the self-making of masculinity. It illustrates how the dominant model of masculinity into which men are socialised – in this case, the military one – is not merely internalised but also redefined according to many factors at play, especially the individual's personal history, deep aspirations, and dreams. After almost ten years of service, Hatem, who is now more financially stable, has decided to leave the army. Now he wants to increase his income by opening his own firm. This would also allow him to cut (working) ties with his father, from whom he aspired to become completely independent, even if he said ironically, "I do not even share an office with him, only a workplace".

Military masculinity is not only defined by concepts of social respectability, benefits, and job stability, as in Hatem's case. For Raed (SSI, 2019), another military man in his early thirties who also disregarded his father's opposition to his decision to join the army, being a military man is not synonymous with social respectability and benefits. For Raed, joining the army is a form of commitment to his country. He explained, "as an army engineer, it is my duty to bring in innovative ideas and achieve a high standard of military technology to protect my country". Despite his strong commitment, Raed's experience in the army has also been marked by disillusions and frustrations due to the restrictions imposed on him, to the point that he admitted that he does not feel privileged as a man in Jordan and described his sisters as more privileged than him:

> Joining the army means having a low income and many restrictions. For example, I cannot travel without permission or marry a foreign woman, I need special permission for everything, for security reasons. That's why my father did not want me to join the army, he wanted me to have an easy life (Raed, SSI, 2019).

Like Hatem, Raed's understanding of gender relations was oriented towards fair attitudes. Particularly, he pointed out that men should change their attitudes towards women in order to build a better society. For him, men should stop treating women as commodities and build equal and respectful relationships with them.

The above stories illustrate that military men's masculinity identity is not entirely defined by, or limited to, the hegemonic model moulded by the institution of the

army; moreover, gender relations do not seem to be negatively affected by military narratives. The fact that most of the youngest men I met did not relate their masculinity identity to the army model may be further confirmation that Jordanian young men are distancing themselves from nationalist discourses of hegemonic masculinity. However, the role of the military in expanding men's networks and connections for personal gain continues to feed young men's imaginary of ideal manhood, which rests on notions of reputation and social respectability. At this point, questioning the role of state narratives of ideal masculinity in maintaining elite privilege (and thus, the status quo) is imperative as to expand our understanding of the gendered implications of narratives of hegemonic masculinity as constructed in the post-independence period. Men's bodies, thereby, should be considered as much a site of social control as women's bodies. Moreover, the contrast between the sons – who wished to enrol in the army – and their fathers – who were serving or still serving in the army – points to a somewhat consistent old sense of disillusionment about the real benefits of enrolling in the army; a sense that in all cases, was later confirmed by the sons. The same attitude observed among the male students could indicate an increasing disenchantment of young, educated men with the military ideal of masculinity.

In discussing masculinity with male students, the young men also emphasised – as did the professionals – how different their masculine identity was from that of their fathers and from the widespread toxic model of which they were deeply aware. They described themselves as more tolerant than previous generations of men, indicating how masculinity performativity has changed. In one all-male FG (FG5, 2019), the students stressed how different they are from their fathers, saying, "we don't do things like them, we don't behave or talk like them, we are more open-minded". While the male students rejected the old notions of masculinity as performed by their fathers, they also distanced themselves from the currently prevalent forms, such as toxic masculinity. As Yaser (FG5, 2019) said, "there is a lot of toxic masculinity in Jordan nowadays. My friends tend to objectify women a lot, that's toxic. This behaviour is amplifying, and that is worrying". Interestingly, this quote shows a strong awareness of the dangerous effects of toxic masculinity and young men's strong desire to produce a counter-model. These conversations piqued my interest

and prompted me to ask them what they do, if anything, to defy toxic masculinity, and some responded as follows:

> One thing I do is that when I see a girl, I don't treat her in a "certain way", I just see her as a person (Ismael, FG5, 2019).

> One thing I like to do when a girl is a friend to me or comes up to me is that I never shake her hand or initiate anything that she might not like. I let it be…I never ask for it, I give her the choice. But I know some guys who find ways to force a girl to do something she might not want to do, like give high-fives and so on. I don't do that, it may be irrelevant, but I don't do it (Ameer, FG5, 2019).

The above quotes are meant to showcase the co-existence of alternative models of masculinity that respect the individual's right to be and act differently. It highlights the will of young men to establish fair, equal, and just relationships with women. Similar conversations have emerged in relation to men-only relations as alternative men's lifestyles, dress codes, and body types are increasingly tolerated and accepted. As emerged from another FG discussion with young male students (FG6, 2019), younger generations are "more human and respectful" of someone who does not embody hegemonic models of masculinity, both on an emotional and physical level, e.g., "having long hair" or "being more emotional". However, while the younger group of students was found to be more tolerant of non-normative masculinity behaviours, the older\professional men appeared to be more concerned with the proper behaviour, look, and dress code of men in society. However, both groups of men agreed on the importance of embodying alternative, yet not-new notions of manhood, encompassing the attributes of a so-called "good man". These attributes, evoked by the Jordanian vernacular expression *"kullak marjaleh"* (you are full of manhood), convey primarily positive qualities of a man, such as self-assertion, perseverance, generosity, and courage. A man who is "full of marjaleh" is characterised by honesty, trust, bravery, and independence. A man full of marjaleh is not afraid to speak the truth, he is respectful and respected for his moral values and good actions.

In discussing masculinity, most male students and professionals considered hegemonic masculinity as detrimental to their wellbeing and a cause of

psychological distress. This reflects the extremely negative emotional impact that the conflict between societal pressure to conform to hegemonic models of masculinity and men's deeper rejection of such models has on men's lives. Interestingly, I found that many men countered this inner dilemma by retreating into heterotopias or safe spaces where they could safely live out their most desired masculinity identity. Abdallah, an engineer in his late twenties, recognised such heterotopias in couples' households, stating that marriage provides men with the "the ultimate emotional stability they aspire to". Consequently, he said:

> Marriage is important because it gives you emotional stability. I always play the strong, independent, and uncaring character, and very few people have seen the emotional side of me. For example, in my profession most people look tough. Emotional stability is a problem for men because they can't express their emotions. In marriage, your emotional gap is filled (Abdallah, SSI, 2019).

Abdallah's words highlight one of the most critical problems associated with dominant masculinity models, namely the requirement to be "tough and unemotional". Interestingly, marriage turns out to be a "refuge" for men whose society requires them to be tough and unemotional at all costs, rather than a place where men reinforce their dominant role over women. Nevertheless, marriage offers them a space where they can finally safely shed their armour. For younger generations of men, marriage offers a future arbour where they can safely land and get the comfort, care, love, and attention they need. This notion of marriage as men's heterotopia, representing the ultimate (and sometimes only) men's emotional stability, while defies essentialist, ahistorical depictions of Arab men, it also shows the depth of societal pressures to be a man. What is particularly interesting is that men consider marriage as a safe arbour where they can protect themselves from both society's idealised (and thus unattainable) models of masculinity (which reflect men's gender roles and expectations) and toxic masculinity models (which imply that men should not "feel", be emotional, loving, and caring). Marriage, as such, is the embodiment of masculinities that seek to distance themselves from the pressures of hegemonic – and inherently unjust – masculinities, and ultimately conveys men's desire to establish more egalitarian gender relations.

Here, men's conceptualisation of marriage as heterotopia matches women's notion of marriage in which love, shared egalitarian values, common goals, companionship, and emotional and financial support between partners are predominant features. Men's understanding of love as women's devotion, voluntary submission and sacrifice of the self – which indeed coexists – was never mentioned by the men I met. Moreover, the hegemonic masculinity model of the unemotional and detached husband and father was widely condemned by young men when embodied by their fathers. The reconceptualisation of masculinity in marriage ultimately demonstrates men's desire to overcome asymmetrical gender roles and norms associated with the old marriage contract. Many young men overwhelmingly expressed a desire to choose their partner outside of family arrangements, to make independent decisions for themselves and their new family, and to find a wife who is willing to work and share financial expenses.

In summary, the traditional societal expectations of manhood are not aspired to by the men in my sample. Instead, the self-fashioning of masculinities reveals that alternatives are sought and power hierarchies are understood as not necessarily beneficial for women and men. Men's relationship to the hegemonic masculinity model perpetuated by the country's military narrative seems to be highly subjective and is definitely negotiated according to the multitude of other factors that shape one's life. So far, militarism does not seem to have had a negative effect on men's desire for equal gender relations, as the stories above demonstrated. Moreover, younger men who are distancing themselves from toxic behaviours brings hope for the future of gender relations in the country. Bearing in mind these reflections on alternative masculinity and femininity self-makings, a new question arises: are young married couples succeeding in enacting co-opted values reflecting alternative gender identities, roles, and relationship in their new households? The next section addresses this question.

The Household Heterotopia: Reconsidering Intrinsic Assumptions of Gender Roles

Ruba (SSI, 2019), the woman whose story I mentioned earlier, recalled her mother's friend's comment on the apparently inappropriate behaviour of her son, who had just become a father, "oh my God, my son is helping his wife carrying the baby and he

looks like a fool!". Ruba claimed to have intervened in the ladies' conversation by saying how proud she should be of her son instead of thinking him a fool. In recalling this episode, Ruba re-emphasised how different they (the younger generations) are from the older ones and how they are changing to be more supportive, understanding, and caring towards each other. Similarly, the male student I mentioned already who recalled the embarrassment he felt when his mother told him not to bake a cake as this was not a man's job. Likewise, Hatem (SSI, 2019), the military man whose story I reported on earlier, also shyly confessed to me how he is forced to secretly support his wife's dream – without his father knowing – as he said, "I do not know what he would do to me if he knew". So, he said, "my wife, Dina, wants to be a TV presenter. I started supporting her after I understood how important it was for her to pursue this dream". The day before my observation in their household, Hatem had accompanied his wife to her first job interview for a TV show.

This section explores young people's agency in advancing alternative and more egalitarian gender roles and relations. So far, it has been shown that younger generations are indeed redefining gender relations in a more egalitarian sense, but to what extent is change possible? As the stories above illustrate, society in general and the family in particular play a role in reinforcing hegemonic gender models, especially among young couples who do not conform to prevailing gender norms. Society steers people towards gender normative throughout their lives and influences people's expectations of themselves and each other. Redefining gender roles is particularly problematic as socio-economic factors and political developments at local, regional, and international levels can lead to major setbacks. However, women's and men's agency in "playing" their gender roles is crucial. In this section, I argue that the traditional gender roles that, at times, seemed to be reinforced within newly married couples' households, may not signify that young people give in to societal pressures to conform to expected models of femininity and masculinity. Instead, I contend that young couples who have signed their most desired marriage contract, based on companionship, navigate the difficulties of an inegalitarian society and respond to its backlash by playing the role that best suits the couple's needs during harsh times. They do this on their own terms, without assuming that "deploying traditional gender roles" signifies a failure of their will to build more egalitarian relationships or to love and care for each other.

My findings from FOs across the youngest households and SSIs with married people suggest that couples are more likely to apply the traditional division of labour during transitional periods such as parenthood. The traditionalisation of gender roles may not be constant, and gender roles, such as gender identities, are fluid and reflect socio-economic changes. As discussed in Chapter 2, the definition of "traditional gender roles" is problematic per se, considering that essentialised discourses that label women as caregivers and men as breadwinners often neglect realities on the ground. In the households where I conducted observations, both the wife and husband were usually working. However, in the two households with a baby, both women had temporarily dropped out of work after giving birth. While Dina (FO3, 2019) went back to work six months after giving birth, Zeina (FO4, 2019) did not. Unlike Dina, when Zeina considered returning to work six months after the birth of her daughter, her husband disagreed with her as he believed that their daughter was too young to be left to someone else's care. Zeina (SSI, 2019) explained, "this caused some problems between us. I spent a lot of time alone with my baby as my husband worked all day. I felt bored and stressed. Maybe I had postpartum depression". But then, she continues, "I thought about it, and I felt that my husband was right". Zeina decided to stay at home for a few more months. At the time of the observation, her daughter was one year old, and Zeina had already started looking for a job. Interestingly, as both women, at the time of writing, had given birth a second time, the smart work arrangement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic enabled them not to leave their jobs again after the birth of their second child. Women's decision to temporarily drop out of work was apparently triggered by societal constraints such as parental leave, availability of childcare, gender pay gap, and gender expectations of society and families. However, it was primarily a consensual parental decision made in the best interest of the child. Men's role of main breadwinner, although a persistent expectation, does not constitute the reality. Economic hardship pushed present-day Jordanian men to recognise that they are not capable of being the sole breadwinner of the family, as most of the young men I interviewed admitted that they wish to find a wife who is willing to work and share the economic responsibilities in the household.

As for childcare and household duties, these did not appear to be strictly traditional, but somehow shared – though not equally – between wife and husband. Changes in men's role mostly concerned their active involvement in childcare. Overall, men appeared as caring fathers and attentive husbands. As was evident in all my observations (FO1-2-3-4-5, 2019) at evening gatherings, the wife was usually in charge of preparing tea and coffee while the husband entertained the guests. In FO5-6, where two households, one older (FO5) and one younger (FO6), reconvened, only the older wife, in whose household the gathering took place, Mariam (FO5), was in charge of preparing the meal, while the other, younger wife, Yara, refrained from doing so. It is not clear whether this was because Yara was pregnant at the time, or because Mariam, as mistress of the house, wanted to manage the gathering.

However, in the two households (FO3-4, 2019) with a baby, while wives were busy, the husbands were looking after, playing, and feeding the child. In further conversations with the wives about the implementation of gender roles in the household, it became clear that the wife was primarily responsible for household duties, while the husband sometimes "helped out". Mais (FO2, 2019), a young married woman, admitted, "my husband helps me when I can't finish something because I am sick. But he doesn't help me with housework every day, unless I am sick, or I ask for help". Similarly, Zeina describes her household life with her husband, Muhammad, as follows:

> Sometimes, he helps me. But sometimes he doesn't want to do anything, then he just lies on the sofa and keeps asking, "Zeina, bring me this, Zeina, bring me that". But when he senses that I am tired or sick, he never asks me for anything. The garbage is his job because it's far away from home, otherwise, he would tell me to go throw it away. Regarding our child, the only thing he doesn't accept is changing diapers. I asked him what he would do if I went away or got sick, and he said, "I will take her to my mother, and she will do it for me". He helps with our daughter, he feeds her, put her to bed, and takes her out when I have things to do. Our childcare responsibilities are 40 per cent on him and 60 per cent on me. The household instead is 90 per cent on me. Anyway, I don't want him to do anything at home, *khalas* that's my job (FO4, 2019).

Zeina's quote illustrates how gender roles in the household may be willingly performed traditionally and how women like Zeina might perceive the enactment of

women's gendered role as empowering, rather than disempowering, of their position in the household.[40] Zeina did not want her husband to take on more household chores because she perceives household chores as her responsibility, and more importantly, as her way of showing her husband that she cares for him, supports and love him, just as he cares for her, supports and loves her, by ensuring that she is provided with everything she needs and desires. For Zeina, her husband's role is *not that of* taking over chores or taking care of the child; *he can* contribute, if asked or if he wants to, but *he is not supposed to*. Similarly, the wife's role is to contribute to family expenses, as *she can*, if asked or if she wants to, but *she does not have to*. In this particular understanding of women and men having the possibility to shift roles, when and if they prefer, wish, or need to, we can identify young people's agency in redefining fixed notions of gender roles and identities.

As for the male perspective, a married man, Nabeel (SSI, 2019), describes how fatherhood has completely changed his life by limiting his free time and increasing his responsibilities towards his wife and daughter, so he says, "before my daughter was born, I had more free time, but now I don't. I help with my daughter. It's hard to raise a daughter, it's a 24-hour job. I do everything except change diapers!". Interestingly, both Zeina's and Nabeel's accounts above mentioned the husband's active involvement in their young daughters' care, which was corroborated by both SSIs with young married people and FOs in young couples' households (FO2-3-4-5-6, 2019). This suggests that young men understand fatherhood in caring and loving terms, as opposed to the abundant old stereotypical figures of aloof patriarchal fathers who only fulfil their role as providers.

Findings from my observations with local families demonstrate that men are slowly but inexorably starting to take on more responsibility for childcare. Similar changes in household duties appear to be more limited, but exist and depend on other factors such as working hours, individual upbringing, preferences and attitudes, the desire to shift or maintain a certain position in the household, and individual's perceived power position in the household as caregiver or breadwinner. Women's accounts of their husbands' behaviour show that women are not held primarily responsible for

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[40] For an analysis of women's and men's desired gendered subject positions, which involve a re-traditionalisation of gender roles, see Muhanna (2013).

childcare or the household duties, and that men no longer contribute to the family income alone, at least for extended periods. The major change in these young households is that both the wife and husband acknowledge the partner's struggle in performing their gender role, and support each other emotionally, physically, and financially. The couples' great support emerges especially when social and economic constraints override their will to establish egalitarian roles and they consciously seek solutions to help each other overcome temporary difficulties or fulfil certain needs by playing the gender role they deem more appropriate for a (temporary) situation.

Overall, the results have shown that both women and men desire greater equality and that gender relations have already taken on a new meaning and are already in place, despite the many factors hindering egalitarian practices. Young people's agency seems to be severely weakened by the country's current economic challenges, which de-facto forces them to rely on family support networks to compensate for the lack of an adequate welfare system. Furthermore, it is inevitable to assume that economic setbacks may have long-term effects on reinforcing the patriarchal status quo, such as unequal gender roles, but also the return of the extended family household, which could challenge young people's authority over their lives and halt progress towards gender equality. Vast scholarship on Arab families have already documented the decline of extended family households in Arab societies and acknowledged the prevalence of the nuclear one. During my fieldwork, it emerged that the living arrangement of young, middle-class married youth have shifted. Jordan's economic crisis has pushed young married couples, unable to afford the high cost of rent or mortgages, to rely on family property and move into flats adjacent to or in the husbands' parents' building. These types of extended groups of related households are certainly not new in Arab society, yet their importance here is represented by the fact that they are new to the people in my sample. Most of the parents of the people I interviewed had been able to set up separate households from those of their parents, as their social mobility enabled them to do so, whereas most young married couples in my sample had to rely on their parents to sort out household arrangements, at least in the early years of marriage. I contend that these family living arrangements have the effect of fostering the young couple's dependence on the husbands' family, resulting in a lack of privacy and possibly interference at the expense of the young couples' agency over their household. Apart from their own preferences and

attitudes, it emerged from FOs that the two older couples lived in a household separate from their original family and relatives, while, amongst the youngest ones, only one couple lived in a separate household. This finding was confirmed in two SSIs with married individuals, including Nabeel (SSI, 2019), a man who had recently married and was living in his family's building, and Laila (SSI, 2019), a 36-year-old woman who had been married for about ten years and moved in with her in-laws soon after marriage. Laila, recalled her experience of living in an extended family household during her first years of marriage and the problems she faced as her expectations and lifestyle conflicted with those of her in-laws:

> When I was coming back from work, my mother-in-law told me what to do and what not to do. I wanted to eat, and she was telling me to wait for my husband. I wanted to rest, and she told me to keep them company, it was a must! These things always got on my nerves and caused problems between us. She (mother-in-law) didn't know who she was dealing with! After we had our first child, we decided to move far away from both our parents. I like living alone, we have our privacy and that's good. Moving out was a mutual decision, it came spontaneously (Laila, SSI, 2019).

Mais (SSI, 2019), a newly married woman in whose house I also conducted observations while her husband was away, confided in me the tensions with her in-laws who live in the same building. Thus, she admitted, "I have to be strong every day. If I start arguing with them, I will say many things that will affect my marriage". But, she added, "although I avoid arguments and I don't let them interfere, they live right next door, so they do interfere!". Mais' words highlight the difficulties couples face when living in an extended family household. For Mais and Marwan (FO2, 2019), the family conflicts concerned their lifestyle, as he also later admitted, "my parents do not agree with the things my wife and I decided to buy for our new house. We always argue, but in the end, I do what I want". Couples' accounts of lived experience in extended households show how young couples might choose to compromise their own preferences to cope with economic difficulties, whether temporarily or not, based on personal experiences and desires. However, we cannot consider this arrangement, and thus its effects, to be permanent. As Laila's case above has shown, couples may later be able to afford a private accommodation where they have more freedom to pursue their desired lifestyles.

These findings reveal that gender inequalities have systemic roots in that they are entrenched at the state level, codified in law and underpinned by socio-cultural and religious narratives, hence, are translated in the public and private spheres. However, we should reconsider the assumptions that gender roles are essentially rigid and permanently fixed. In addition to the redefinition of femininities and masculinities identities, there is also a redefinition of the division of gender roles, which entails that individuals divide their labour, tasks, and responsibilities for each other in the way that suits them best at certain times. Also, the fact that each gender plays a specific role does not mean that there is gender inequality in the household. Gender inequality also exist when one gender carries or is expected to carry a double burden, such as being a caregiver and a breadwinner simultaneously, while concepts of sharing responsibilities may be declined differently according to people's special circumstances and times they live in. This argument should not be mistaken for a reaffirmation of women's role as caregivers and men as breadwinners. These are, in fact, part of the hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity the people I met did not identify with, while gender roles understood as flexible and adaptable or as a form of empowerment, care, and love towards spouses are a different concept. Mahmood (2001, p.225) argues, "to judge, in a morally and politically informed way, even the practices we consider objectionable, it is important to take into consideration the desires, motivations, commitments, and aspirations of the people for whom those practices are important". As such, I have interpreted my participants lived experiences narrated in this thesis.

Conclusion

Young people construction of alternative life trajectories mirrors the enactment of the new set of co-opted values they identify with. Their persistence in finding creative ways to enact desired subjectivities and to shift unequal gender relations derives from their profound aspirations to transform unfair personal and social realities, as well as their growing awareness of the impact of power structures on their lives. Young people rejected the official discourses that reflected Jordan's nationalist narrative fixing the ideal model of masculinity on the strong, military man and that of femininity on the educated and caring mother of Jordanian men. They appeared profoundly aware of the paternalistic use of such narratives by a third actor representing the patriarchal system aimed at undermining their potential in society.

Both women and men aspire to play an active role in their family and society; they are less willing to compromise, can manage family pressure, and reject societal one. Far from presenting the desired subjectivities as easy to achieve, women and men navigate through vulnerabilities by co-opting norms to be able to transform their personal and social world by staying within the system. The femininity identity with which my participants identified was characterised by features of strength, independence, and freedom to choose one's life path, reflecting personal aspirations and expectations. Women call for gender justice and that society and family recognise their freedom to choose who they want to be. Men call for alternatives to models of dominant masculinity by rejecting either the concept of military or toxic masculinity they have been socialised into. Masculinities, such as femininities, are plural and complex and never entirely constrained within gender normative. However, men's agency in enacting alternative models of masculinities seemed to be extremely limited in the public sphere, where men are required to act manly and perform their masculinity. As Hasso (2018) asserts, "men, no more or less than women, are irrational, emotional and fragile in their psychic structures and embodiments". Thus, societal pressure often leads men to find solace and refuge in the domestic heterotopia, where men's emotions find their legitimisation to exist. The emerging conceptualisations of marriage as the ultimate heterotopia reflects younger generations' commitment to shape a better society for themselves and their children. In young people's desire to establish an egalitarian household based on equal relational dynamics, between husband and wife, parents and children, I see the revolutionary potential of intangible aspects of human subjectivities to transform social life. This desire to create an egalitarian family reflects young people's hope to redefine social arrangements and disrupt power relations laying the foundation for a better world. Marriage, in this sense, is women's and men's commitment to care, love, support, and understanding, but also acceptance of each other's differences, and respect for individuality. However, this heterotopia, even though it has the potential to create a better society, is often affected by wider implications. Findings from FOs and SSIs with young married couples, revealed that structural inequalities, obstacles, and pushback from extended family and society can converge to halt change in young people's transition to adulthood, specifically after marriage. However, young couples who share the same life vision and egalitarian values keep supporting each other through difficult times by arranging and adjusting gender roles to overcome

obstacles as best suit their own needs. My findings suggest that deadlocks may be temporary and obstacles can be surmounted, as young people always find their way to negotiate desired change. In this thesis, the most important and tangible evidence of young people's ability to enact desired change has been found in the process of meanings co-optations, resulted from the deployment of creative agency, which mostly appears in contexts where change may determine significant disruption to the social order. Hence, to answer the research question of whether young people's desire for change is enough for disrupting dominant gender ideology, a positive answer is possible to the extent that we consider the relevance of alternative, perhaps, less revolutionary, ways to enact change. In fact, beyond the scholarly need to demonstrate tangible change, we should also consider the wider, long-term impact of the silent work that inspired young people have on affecting social change. This includes people's commitment to establishing egalitarian gender relations at various levels, including friendship, work relations, intimate relationships, and family dynamics. Young couples' teaching their children about gender equality is also a major sign of positive change that may be ahead. In summary, the structural challenges that can push people back into traditional gender roles prove that gender inequality is not merely a gender issue. It is not merely an issue of woman's right, or of patriarchy or misogynistic men, but it is with the state, which bases its status quo on a power system heavily gendered and reproduces a hegemonic discourse (perceived as common sense) through state-apparatuses (e.g., education and family) that guarantees its own survival and stability. My final argument is that it is in a raising consciousness that unites women and men that we must see the transformative potential that enables the disruption of the country's gendered status quo. Although these emerging findings are yet to be explored in terms of their relevance to the wider Jordanian society – preliminary analyses open up future avenues for research and raise new demanding questions. In particular, I wonder: what does young people value change signify for the country's stability as its core nationalist narrative fixing normative masculinities and femininities starts wobbling?

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Eager, resolute, and resilient. These are the words I would choose to describe the young people I have met during this research journey and whose life stories have deeply inspired my research and, more importantly, my journey through self-discovery and development. "I will not give up on my dreams!", Farah, a young woman, said firmly to me, showing extraordinary resilience in the face of the obstacles she and her sister before her were confronted with. Farah, who was about to graduate, was willing to fight to be able to continue her studies abroad, even though her older sister, a few years earlier, had to give up her dream of pursuing a PhD after her mother disapproved of her moving abroad. Yet, I thought, here I am, as a PhD student myself – a dream I have long cultivated – trying to capture the unique agentive capabilities and choices of action of these young people. So, I asked myself: how can I grasp the significance of agency and convey its value without confining it to narratives of resistance or compliance with power? Farah's sister's story denotes an outcome of compliance. However, it begs the question: is this label accurate for what lies behind her very personal decision to (apparently) give up her aspiration? Can this label dismiss the multitude of factors and reasons that may have led to this outcome? Can we suggest that this outcome, which is either temporary or permanent, does not tell us the whole story, as it does not provide us with a definitive answer as to how a life path will unfold? With these questions in mind, I chose to explore the significance of agency amongst my participants by reflecting on the process of selfhood formation and the multiple dynamics that mould and define its agentive capabilities. This helped me understand what shapes, drives, and distinguishes each individual's choices of action. In doing so, this research posits that agency, which is relational, dynamic, and fluid, belongs to everyone and that therefore everyone can be an *agent of change*.

This research has established young peoples' agency over hegemonic ideologies and structures operating upon them, affirming their power to shift undesired (by them) gender identities and relations. To address this aim, the research began by tracing the gender socialisation of children and the role of different socialising agents through

their life stages; this confirmed the role of family and society in reproducing dominant gender narratives. Further analysis of young people's understandings of gender revealed that their gender identities are influenced – yet not totally defined or constrained – by dominant ideologies and social norms. In contrast, the young people I met often defined gender norms as a burden on their aspirational self and distanced themselves from traditional notions of gender. Their recognition of the inherent contradictions and limitations of traditional gender roles enabled them to explore alternative gender self-makings that transcend idealised norms of femininity and masculinity. An examination of young people's lived gender experiences showed that experiences of privilege and oppression are not homogeneous and extend beyond the category of gender. An assessment of parent-youth expectations proved that young people not only do not identify with gendered expectations reflecting straightforward life paths, but also have co-opted their significance. This indicates the existence of an intergenerational conflict due to a value misalignment between the younger and older generations, which arises from young people's shifting dreams, aspirations, and expectations of themselves and others. Intergenerational conflict encompassed the domains of education, career, marriage, but also lifestyle and life choices, whose new co-opted significance mirrored young people's shifting sets of values. Exploring intergenerational conflicts, on the one hand, enabled me to uncover parent-youth misaligned values; while, on the other hand, exploring its dynamics across family contexts, allowed me to identify the factors that influence individuals' agentive capabilities, and the strategies they choose to employ, in order to negotiate desired life choices.

This research argued that people actively engage with hegemonic narratives with which they do not identify by finding creative means to bring about desired changes, despite the personal and public constraints acting upon them. Specifically, the research identified the process of *meanings co-optation* – which entails young people's resignification of hegemonic gendered meanings – as being the most significant aspect of the creative agency developed by my participants in order to quietly and safely subvert the system from within. Meanings co-optation in the context of this research highlights young people's extraordinary capacity to deal with power beyond resistance or compliance. In this conceptualisation, agency is defined by the intangible aspects of human subjectivity, consisting of dreams, longings, and

yearnings that cultivate and drive the aspirational self and act as transformative forces of change. Besides its intangible aspect, agency is moulded in relational contexts characterised by multiple personal and interpersonal dynamics, degrees of vulnerabilities, diverse material circumstances, lived experiences, but also personal and social expectations. Agency is fluid and never fixed; it is dynamic, as dynamic are our lived experiences and desires, as well as our vulnerabilities and possibilities to negotiate better choices through life stages. Hence, as agency is constantly shifting, we cannot expect to crystallise its outcomes.

In this research, I have captured the significance of agency not merely by highlighting its multiple possibilities, but also by identifying the outcome of action my participants most desired, which is reaching a state of independence by remaining within the system. This outcome mirrored young people's willingness to make desired, yet contrasting, choices by remaining part of a system of belonging. Therefore, this outcome appeared to be the most sought-after, as it allowed individuals to meet desired expectations and normalise co-opted values without compromising their positions. This finding also emphasised the relational nature of agency, reflecting young people's desire to maintain connections and avoid ruptures. The research also provided an account of young people's practical enactment of value change by analysing the everyday practices of UJ students on campus. The desegregation of educational spaces was crucial to enabling students to shift their understanding of gender relations and enact new, more egalitarian, yet contested, practices first on campus and then, as they transitioned into adulthood, outside of it. Indeed, most participants had shifted their understanding of male-female relationships while inhabiting the campus, as notions of friendship, love, and companionship replaced hierarchical, asymmetrical, and constrained gender relations. Finally, by examining participants' gendered self-fashioning, the research gave insight into emerging conceptualisations of womanhood and manhood among young Jordanians; this was vital in highlighting young people's awareness of the rhetoric and impact of national gender narratives on their lives.

The findings discussed above should be considered in light of some limitations which can be addressed in subsequent research. Specifically, the limitations of this research mainly stem from methodological and research design choices, which

included the use of a single case study research method with a focus on a particular segment of the Jordanian population. Additional limitations concerned the primary use of a gender binary approach and not expanding on the broader backlash to gender equality, particularly the pushbacks young people encounter in the practical enactment of change in adult life. Addressing these limitations could have nuanced my findings, offering a more inclusive perspective on gender and a more comprehensive assessment of the barriers to gender equality in Jordan. Finally, an analysis of the role played by local activists, grassroots movements and academics who tenaciously challenge the system from within, as well as that of political actors in either advancing or halting progress in gender equality, would have offered a broader perspective on the prospects of change in the coming years.

In assessing the limitations of qualitative research, it is essential to re-state that this research applied a qualitative-centric methodology to complement the strengths and limitations of recent studies, which by primarily relying on quantitative data have already documented an increase in gender equality attitudes among Middle Eastern educated youth. Therefore, my methodological choice seemed most appropriate for bridging the gap between young educated people's attitudes and the reality of gender roles and relations in their daily lives. However, this research design has also resulted in producing a single unit study presenting the common shortcomings of qualitative research, including difficulties in determining results generalisability. Specifically, the research has a restricted focus on a relatively small sample of the Jordanian youth population, comprising of urbanised and educated young adults who self-identified as middle-class. Indeed, challenges related to time constraints, limited funding, and a lack of easily accessible transportation prevented me from expanding my fieldwork sites beyond the UJ campus and a few neighbourhoods in Amman to bring in a broader sample of participants from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Though the UJ campus has been selected as the primary fieldwork site due to its merit-based admission system, which potentially provides access to students from different backgrounds, other variables (e.g., participants' place of residence and parents' educational levels) have been applied to ensure participants' class heterogeneity. However, most of my participants did not provide sufficiently clear information to allow me to confirm their socioeconomic background, and their tendency to self-identify as middle-class resulted in unintended – and not totally accurate –

homogenisation of my sample across the category of class. Consequently, these research findings apply to a limited segment of Jordan's young, educated population.

It is possible to speculate that the research findings might have been different if a larger portion of the population had been targeted. Indeed, young people's desiring subjectivities, aspirations and expectations are shaped by their unique lived experiences, personal circumstances, and family dynamics, which inevitably intersect with the variables of class, ethnicity, religion, place of residence, and – in the Jordanian case – also tribal affiliation; such power structures determine the extent of opportunities people have, the freedom they enjoy, and the choices they make to build a desired life. My findings have highlighted that people within similar socioeconomic groups often hold different gendered positions due to the unique intersections of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. Therefore, we could expect to find other understandings of gender roles within households characterised by vulnerability and poverty, as well as class privilege, or a complex intersection of other variables. However, expectations concerning differentiated findings across different social groups should never undermine all social groups' ability to engage in desired change through everyday life practices. Indeed, my findings have shown that people's multiple dreams, longings, attitudes, and expectations are complex and constantly shifting, and they cannot be generalised by homogenising categories (e.g., social class), which have the controversial effect of erasing, rather than highlighting the intersection of multiple power structures. Finally, in this thesis, I have taken a critical stance towards a tendency to generalise people's experiences; hence, this research does not pretend to be exhaustive or to hold universal truth and, above all, to make generalisations on the attitudes and expectations of a Jordanian, educated, urban, middle-class youth. Overall, these findings speak for the youth I met, and the extent to which those can be extended to other strata of Jordanian youth, let alone society, is yet to be confirmed by further research.

Additional considerations should be made with regard to the limiting generalisability of the findings, which also serves to challenge a common critique of using a single case study analysis. In fact, my research results appear useful in contributing to analytic generalisations and theoretical contributions that can be applied to the larger Middle Eastern and North African context. Specifically, by complementing existing

studies on youth in the region, my research enhances our understanding of the role played by the educated youth in the development of future Middle Eastern societies. This helps assess the extent of challenges Arab societies are likely to be facing in the near future, providing political leaders and policymakers with the necessary tools to address such challenges. Furthermore, a region-wide comparative analysis can also be drawn to test young Arab generations' convergence of sociocultural values and consistency of sociopolitical demands, building new theoretical contributions on the analysis of social transformations and shedding new light on the possibilities for collective action by Middle East youth. This consideration further leads us to pose questions on the implications of ordinary people's everyday life practices for understanding social change. Specifically, paying closer attention to the everyday practices of young people can be crucial to gauge their demands for transformations, which, in the future, can trigger revolutionary movements calling for broader sociopolitical change. Indeed, exploring the *creativity of the ordinary* allows us to pre-emptively expose value change and dwelling into the inner realm of longings, desires, and aspirations can inform us on emerging societal demands that would otherwise escape a mere political analysis. I would therefore suggest that the upheavals that culminated in the Green Movement in Iran, the 2011 Arab Uprisings, and the Gezi Protests in Turkey – which took many political analysts and regional experts by surprise – owe their roots to the creativity of ordinary dissent, that first and foremost, quietly affected citizens' everyday life practices. As argued by Kandiyoti (2019, pp.18-19), the 2011 protests, which displayed more egalitarian, inclusive and democratic impulses across gender, class, religion, age and the rural-urban divides, and expressed new forms of feminity and masculinity, could give us pointers for transformations in both gender relations and the polity. I suggest that there were stirrings indicating women and men shifting values in the everyday life practices of many ordinary people long before the protests occurred. Therefore, this Middle Eastern youth making unified claims for social and gender justice, provides evidence that my research findings might resonate with experiences elsewhere in the Middle East context. This also underscores the role of gender studies in understanding new social and political trends in the region. People's demands for change find different and expected territories to grow and flourish until the right conditions for pushing forward desired change arise. In the meantime, people's inability to achieve their demands bring them to the street more often than ever. It is

in this light that we should consider the recent street protests across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, and Sudan. In the case of Jordan, it is worth noting that the country has a long history of recurring, yet often-ignored, small and larger-scale protests, where the youth, either poor and marginalised, or alleged middle-class, educated, and more privileged, have made collective claims for social justice. The current climate of uncertainty within the region that sees young Middle Eastern generations at the forefront of protests renders my findings extremely timely.

This research has a number of other implications which are significant for both theory and practice. As per its theoretical implications, my research has contributed to a number of contemporary debates in the fields of Middle East gender studies, youth and family studies. The primary debate my findings contributed to concerns how to overcome the compliance-resistance paradigm when analysing Arab and Muslim people's agency, overall providing insights into the agency and structure dilemma. Furthermore, my research contributed to debates on the status of gender equality in the region, addressing topics such as gender roles and relations change, shifting understandings of femininity and masculinity, men's involvement in domestic work and childcare, military and hegemonic masculinity, kinship relations, love and marriage. Overall, this research has significant implications for how Middle East scholars think about and analyse social change, contributing to challenging an Orientalist epistemology that still underpins the idea that Arab/Muslim people are fundamentally powerless victims of multiple oppressions. My argument in favour of conducting an alternative analysis of social transformations eventually allowed me to restore ordinary women and men as change agents in the face of hegemonic structures. This further helps decolonise narrow approaches to studying Arab and Muslim people's agency, deconstructing their dichotomous representations as either passive victims or heroes. Moreover, the relevance of focusing on intergenerational conflict to identify values misalignment between older and young generations reaffirms the crucial importance of studying families to analyse sociopolitical change. Similarly, acknowledging youth's agency in redefining the direction of future societies helps us see young people as integral members of society, rather than as an isolated category devoid of real potential. Finally, my approach of considering how women and men are similarly oppressed within a masculinist system shows the coherency and unity of the demands across genders. These findings tell us how

important it is to bring together the perspectives of women, men, families, and youth to provide a more comprehensive analysis of ongoing societal transformations.

As per the practical implications of this research, my findings point at the inadequacy of current state policies, especially those related to the areas of family, gender, and employment in addressing young peoples' shifting needs and desires. The results of this research therefore could inform state agencies and grassroots movements on the most appropriate actions to take to address youth's demand to live in a fairer society. As a result, it may be necessary to push for greater reforms to review state policies, which by reinforcing gendered and generational hierarchies at multiple levels, underpin the Jordanian state regime's authority. Finally, my contribution to identifying domains of intergenerational conflict and value change can help address critical social issues that affect young Jordanians and have wider repercussions on the wellbeing of society, including youth migration, high family conflict, increasing singlehood, and high divorce rates. Knowledge exchange on these issues is needed so that researchers, state agencies, NGOs, policymakers, political movements, and service providers can define the new trajectories of social development, thus improving the conditions of individuals, families, and communities alike.

A reflection on the theoretical and practical implications of the research allows us to gauge its overall contribution to the mentioned fields of study. Specifically, this research has primarily contributed to seeing young Jordanians as *agents of change*, acknowledging their potential to drive personal and social change. Notably, it has recognised *young people's desire for change* as potentially disruptive for the system, as ordinary people's practices do not merely aim to temporarily circumvent private and public constraints, but expect them to challenge prevailing gender narratives. However, for this evaluation to be possible, I argued that an alternative assessment of social change is required, which goes beyond phenomena indicating tangible, revolutionary, let alone quantifiable change. Overall, my findings have highlighted this transformative potential in young people's creative practice of co-opting hegemonic gendered meanings, which allows for a quiet normalisation of co-opted values without causing major conflict, thus averting the possibility of pushback. Returning to McNay's (2000) theory, this practice contains the seeds to catalyse broader change, as young people's creative appropriation of conflicting values can

constitute a new value system and generate a new collective identity. Another important contribution of this research is to show how young women and men in Jordan are becoming increasingly aware of the national narratives about gender and the wider implications of power relations in their lives. My approach to study gender by looking at women's and men's experiences as complementary rather than contrasting, has contributed to broadening our perspective on systemic inequalities beyond the category of gender. Men, as much as women, felt burdened by norms that constrained their identities on multiple levels and yearned for a reality in which "their emotional and fragile embodiments", to paraphrase Hasso (2018), could find the recognition they are longing for. By connecting experiences of oppression, this research illuminates the mutual desire of women and men to transform society positioning them as indispensable allies in the struggle for gender justice.

To conclude, findings and contributions of this research pave the way for future research, raising important questions about the implications of women's and men's gender consciousness-raising for the stability of Jordan's gendered status-quo, as well as that of other masculinist and authoritarian states in the Middle East and North Africa region. As Kandiyoti (2014; 2019, p.215) notes, there is a new generation of young people in the Middle East who are fully aware of the relations between authoritarian rule and gender oppression, and who increasingly recognise gender equality aspirations as part of greater demands for democracy, human rights, and pluralism. Research investigating this link could shed light on the significance of people's disrupting postcolonial constructs of masculinity and femininity to dismantle the ultimate patriarchal relationship between the authoritarian state and its citizens. To do this, I propose that we recognise that people's success in dismantling hierarchical relations strictly depends on the ability of women and men to unite their struggle for justice. This is only possible to the extent that women and men realise that their constant contraposition is instrumental to the reproduction and legitimisation of the gendered status quo. In order to assess this broader potential for change, further research should explore similar consciousness-raising within other strata of Jordanian society, expanding the focus across class, age groups, and educational levels. In addition, considering how timely it is to study youth in contexts of precarity, insecurity, and conflict, scholars may build on my findings to draw comparisons between the aspirations for change of the employed and unemployed

urban educated youth, examining how employment (and lack thereof) impacts young people's desired life trajectories and reshapes their sociopolitical demands. There is also a need for research on structurally marginalised groups, such as vulnerable girls and boys who belong to tribal or indigenous groups, minorities, or refugee communities. These directions of research could help us understand how consistent Jordanians' demands for change can be, assessing whether and how they can serve as a future catalyst for broader sociopolitical transformations.

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Appendix A: List of Research Participants

Appendix A1: Student Sample

UJ Female Students									
	Name	**Age**	**Level of education and faculty**	**Ethnic origin and settlement patters**	**Parents' educational background**	**Marital status**	**Place of residence**	**Religion**	**Date of the interview**
1	Samah	22	BA Foreign Languages	Palestinian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	20\03\19
2	Haneen	21	BA Foreign Languages	Palestinian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: University	In a relationship	Amman West	Muslim	21\03\19
3	Aaliyah	21	BA Foreign Languages	Palestinian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: Secondary	In a relationship	Amman West	Muslim	21\03\19
4	Rahaf	18	BA Applied English Language	Palestinian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	21\03\19
5	Lama	18	BA Applied English Language	Jordanian\ Bedouin	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman West	Muslim	21\03\19
6	Yasmin	20	BA Computer Information System	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	24\03\19
7	Amal	22	BA English Literature	Jordanian\ Bedouin	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Salt	Muslim	24\03\19
8	Farah	20	BA Management Information Systems	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: Secondary Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman East	Muslim	31\03\19
9	Laila	36	MA Women's Studies	Jordanian\ Bedouin	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Christian	2\04\19
10	Maryam	23	MA Women's Studies	Jordanian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Christian	3\04\19
11	Yara	19	BA Occupational Therapy	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: Secondary Mother: Secondary	Single	Zarqa	Muslim	4\04\19
12	Abeer	21	BA Accounting Business	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman West	Muslim	7\04\19

13	Rania	20	BA Food Science	Palestinian\Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	7\04\19

<div align="center">UJ Male Students</div>

14	Moutaz	26	BA Business	Palestinian\Rural	Father: University Mother: University	In a relationship	Amman West	Muslim	24\03\19
15	Ahmad	22	BA Business	Jordanian\Bedouin	Father: Secondary Mother: University	Engaged	Salt	Muslim	27\03\19
16	Sameer	21	BA Finance	Jordanian\Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	27\03\19
17	Abbas	23	BA Political Science	Jordanian\Unknown	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	28\03\19
18	Ameer	20	BA Mechatronics Engineering	Palestinian\Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	7\04\19
19	Yaser	19	BA English Literature	Jordanian\Bedouin	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	7\04\19
20	Fahed	22	BA Marketing	Chechen\Unknown	Father: Secondary Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	8\04\19
21	Ismael	22	BA Physiotherapy	Palestinian\Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	15\04\1
22	Hussein	24	BA Business	Palestinian\Urban	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman West	Muslim	17\04\19

Appendix A2: Professional Sample

			Female Professionals					
	Name	**Age**	**Level of education and job position**	**Ethnic origin and settlement patters**	**Parents' educational background**	**Marital Status**	**Place of residence**	**Religion**	**Date of the interview**
1	Layan	28	MA NGO Field Facilitator	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: Elementary Mother: Elementary	Single	Amman East	Muslim	20\03\19
2	Reem	24	BA Reservation Agent	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	24\03\19
3	Rula	33	BA Graphic Designer	Jordanian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	25\03\19
4	Ruba	31	MA Nutritionist	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	27\03\19
5	Rasha	24	BA Admin Assistant	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	29\03\19
6	Riham	32	BA Senior Transport Specialist	Jordanian\ Unknown	Father: Secondary Mother: Secondary	In a relationship	Amman West	Christian	30\03\19
7	Hala	23	BA Foreign Service Officer	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman East	Muslim	31\03\19
8	Meis	27	BA Bank Customer Service	Jordanian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Muslim	31\03\19
9	Dina	31	BA Unemployed (Former Legal Advisor)	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Muslim	3\04\19
10	Zeina	30	BA Stay-at Home Mother (Industrial Engineer)	Jordanian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Muslim	5\04\19
11	Lana	36	BA Senior HR Manager	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Amman West	Muslim	7\04\19

				Male Professionals					
12	Mahmoud	32	PhD Government Employee	Jordanian\ Bedouin	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	19\03\19
13	Abdallah	29	BA Technical Support Sales Engineer	Palestinian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman East	Muslim	23\03\19
14	Kareem	33	BA Business Analyst	Jordanian\ Unknown	Father: Secondary Mother: Elementary	Single	Amman West	Muslim	23\03\19
15	Mousab	23	BA Hotel Receptionist	Palestinian\ Unknown	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Single	Zarqa	Muslim	23\03\19
16	Anas	33	MA Dentist	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	25\03\19
17	Seif	32	MA Dentist	Palestinian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	27\03\19
18	Marwan	32	BA Software Engineer	Jordanian\ Urban	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Muslim	27\03\19
19	Hatem	33	BA Lawyer	Jordanian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Married	Amman West	Muslim	3\04\19
20	Nabeel	32	MA Aviation Engineer	Jordanian\ Bedouin	Father: University Mother: Secondary	Married	Amman West	Muslim	3\04\19
21	Muhammad	31	MA Lawyer	Jordanian\ Rural	Father: University Mother: University	Married	Amman West	Muslim	5\04\19
22	Raed	32	BA Military Engineer	Jordanian\ Urban	Father: Secondary Mother: University	Single	Amman West	Muslim	5\04\19

Appendix B: Summary of Participants

Total number of participants	**44**
- **Total number of students:**	**22**
o *Females:*	13
o *Males:*	9
- **Total number of professionals:**	**22**
o *Females:*	11
o *Males:*	11
Participants average age	
- **Students:**	22
- **Professionals:**	30
Participants by ethnicity	
- **Transjordanian:**	19
- **Jordanian of Palestinian origin:**	24
- **Chechen:**	1
Participants by place of residence	
- **Amman**	40
o *Amman East:*	37
o *Amman East:*	3
- **Salt:**	2
- **Zarqa:**	2
Participants by religion	
- **Muslim:**	41
- **Christian:**	3
Participants by marital status	
- **Females:**	
o *Single:*	17
o *Married:*	4
o *Engaged:*	0
o *In a relationship:*	3
- **Males:**	
o *Single:*	14
o *Married:*	4
o *Engaged:*	1
o *In a relationship:*	1

Appendix C: Focus Groups Description

FG1: *All-Female Students*

Total number of participants	Four
Participants name	Lama; Rahaf; Randa; Lina
Participants status	BA Students (Humanities)
FG discussion place	UJ campus
FG discussion date	2\4\2019

FG2: *All-Female Students*

Total number of participants	Eight
Participants name	Tamara; Samira; Iman; Razan; Melissa; Nawal; Mona; Maysoon
Participants status	BA Students (Humanities)
FG discussion place	UJ campus
FG discussion date	3\4\2019

FG3: *Female and Male Students Mixed*

Total number of participants	Three
Participants name and sex	Afaf (Female); Amina (Female); Ayad (Male)
Participants status	BA Students (Humanities)
FG discussion place	UJ campus
FG discussion date	3\4\2019

FG4: *Female and Male Students and Professionals Mixed*

Total number of participants	Four
Participants name and sex	Mousab (Male student); Abbas (Male student); Ghena (Female professional); Khadija (Female professional)
Participants status	BA Students and Professionals (Humanities and Science)
FG discussion place	Café Jebel al-Weibdeh
FG discussion date	7\4\2019

FG5: *All-Male Students*

Total number of participants	Eight
Participants name	Ameer; Yaser; Fahed; Fadi; Ismael; Yousef; Omar; Fadel
Participants status	BA Students (Humanities and Science)
FG Discussion place	UJ campus
FG Discussion date	9\4\2019

FG6: *All-Male Professionals*

Total number of participants	Six
Participants name	Bishr; Mahmoud; Ali; Ibrahim; Ta'el; Raed
Participants status	BA\MA\PhD Professionals (Humanities and Science)
FG Discussion place	Bishr and Ibrahim Family Home
FG Discussion date	17\4\2019

Appendix D: Family Observations Description

FO1

Household type	Couple family with adult children
Years of marriage	35 years
Parents name and occupation	Abu Mahmoud: retired (former Jordanian army major) Umm Mahmoud: retired (former school teacher)
Number of children	Five daughters, one son
Living arrangement	Independent household
Type of activities	Everyday life activities; mealtimes; special occasions gatherings (e.g., 'Azume and Fridays); family trips
Duration of the observation	One-month
Date	From 18\3\2019 to 18\4\2019

FO2

Household type	Couple family expecting first child
Years of marriage	One year
Couple name and occupation	Marwan: Senior Software Engineer Mais: Bank Customer Service
Number of children	None
Living arrangement	Husband's Family Building
Type of activities	Evening time social gathering
Duration of the observation	One day
Date	3\4\2019

FO3

Household type	Couple family with a daughter

Years of marriage	Five years
Parents name and occupation	Hatem: Lawyer Dina: Unemployed
Number of children	One daughter (three years old)
Living arrangement	Independent household
Type of activities	Afternoon social gathering
Duration of the observation	One-day
Date	3\4\2019

FO4

Household type	Couple family with a daughter
Years of marriage	Three years
Parents name and occupation	Muhammad: Lawyer Zeina: Stay-at-home mother
Number of children	One daughter (one year old)
Living arrangement	Husband's Family Building
Type of activities	Afternoon social gathering
Duration of the observation	One-day
Date	5\4\2019

FO5

Household type	Couple family with two children
Years of marriage	13 years
Parents name and occupation	Muath: Military Mariam: School teacher
Number of children	Two. One daughter (12 years old); One son (six years old)
Living arrangement	Independent household
Type of activities	Mealtime; extended family social gathering

Duration of the observation	One-day
Date	16\4\2019

FO6

Household type	Couple family expecting first child
Years of marriage	Eight months
Parents name and occupation	Feras: IT programmer Yara: IT programmer
Number of children	None
Living arrangement	Unknown
Type of activities	Mealtime; Extended family social gathering
Duration of the observation	16\4\2019
Date	One-day

Appendix E: Sample Interviewee Profile (IP)

First Name:	**Age:**

Sex:
☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other

Ethnic Origin:
☐ Transjordanian ☐ Jordanian of Palestinian descent ☐ Chechen
☐ Circassian ☐ Syrian

☐ Mixed (Palestinian mother) Other (please specify):_____

Parents' Education background:
Father ☐ Elementary level ☐ Secondary level ☐ University level

Mother ☐ Elementary level ☐ Secondary level ☐ University level

Your Education level:
☐ Undergraduate Studies (BA) ☐ Postgraduate Studies (MA) ☐ PhD

Major Degree\Faculty: **University:**

Employment Status:
☐ Studying ☐ Working
Faculty: Job position:

Marital Status:
☐ Single ☐ Engaged ☐ In a relationship ☐ Married* ☐ Divorced*
☐ Widowed*

* (If any) Number of Children:

Place of Residence:
☐ Amman East ☐ Amman West ☐ Other in city in Jordan _____
☐ Abroad_____

Settlement Patterns:
☐ Urban (Madani) ☐ Rural (Fallahi) ☐ Bedouin

Religion:
☐ Muslim ☐ Christian ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Appendix F: Sample Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) – Students

1) What does it mean to be a man\woman in your society?

2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a man or a woman in Jordan?

3) How do you socialise with young men or women on campus?*[1]

4) Is there any place on campus where you usually go to spend time with friends?*

5) Have you ever experienced gender-related restrictions on campus? If so, what kind?*

6) Is your behaviour at University different from your behaviour at home? Which environment (University or home) is more liberating for you, and why?*

7) What is your relationship with your parents and siblings like? Who do you get along better with, your mother or father, your brother(s) or sister(s), and why?

8) What are your family expectations about yourself, and to what extent do you agree with them?

9) Do you feel your opinions are more in contrast with that of your mother or father? How often do you argue with him\her\them and for which reasons?

10) Have you ever done anything without your parents' approval? If so, what was it and why they disagreed with you?

11) What do you do if you want to do something your parents disagree with? Would you try to convince them? If so, how?

12) Do you live alone or with your family?

13) Is there any contrast between you and your parents regarding any of your life dreams\aspirations?

14) Would you marry the man\woman you love against your family's approval and why?

15) What do you usually do after University? How do you spend your free time?*

16) What are the places\neighbourhoods in Amman where you usually like to hang out? Tell me what you do on a night out with friends.

17) Is there any person who inspires you, and do you have a role model?

---

[1] Starred questions pertain to the designated sample of respondents, while unstarred questions relate to both students and professionals.

18) Why have you chosen to pursue higher education?*

19) What would you like to do after graduation: keep studying, have a career, or neither?*

20) Would you like to get married? Is this important to you? Please explain why

21) Would you like to have children? Please explain why

22) Are you engaged or married? If so, how did you meet your partner?

23) How is your ideal marriage partner?

24) What are your future dreams and life ambitions?

25) Would you sacrifice your life ambitions and dreams if your family\partner didn't approve of them?

26) Would you wish to have a similar or a different marital life to that of your parents, and in which aspects would you like it to be similar or different?

27) What kind of man or woman would you like your son and daughter to become?

28) If you could change something in your society regarding men-women relations, what would you change?

Appendix G: Sample Semi-Structured Interview (SSI) – Professionals

1) What does it mean to be a man\woman in your society?

2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a man or a woman in Jordan?

3) How do you socialise with men or women in Jordan?*

4) What is your relationship with your parents and siblings like? Who do you get along better with, your mother or father, your brother(s) or sister(s), and why?

5) What are your family expectations about yourself, and to what extent do you agree with them?

6) Do you feel your opinions are more in contrast with that of your mother or father? How often do you argue with him\her\them and for which reasons?

7) Have you ever done anything without your family's approval? If so, what was it and why they disagreed with you?

8) What do you do if you want to do something your parents disagree with? Would you try to convince them? If so, how?

9) Do you live alone or with your family?

10) Which is the biggest argument about your personal life that you had to face with your family?*

11) Is there any contrast between you and your parents regarding any of your life dreams\aspirations?

12) Would you marry the man\woman you love against your family's approval and why?

13) How do you spend your free time?*

14) What are the places\neighbourhoods in Amman where you usually like to hang out? Tell me what you do on a night out with friends.

15) Is there any person who inspires you, and do you have a role model?

16) Would you like to get married? Is this important to you? Please explain why

17) Would you like to have children? Please explain why

18) Which is the biggest responsibility you have as a man\woman in your family\society?*

19) Are you engaged or married? If so, how did you meet your partner?

20) How is your ideal marriage partner?

21) What are your future dreams and life ambitions?

22) Would you sacrifice your life ambitions and dreams if your family\partner didn't approve of them?

23) Would you wish to have a similar or a different marital life to that of your parents, and in which aspects would you like it to be similar or different?

24) What kind of man or woman would you like your son and daughter to become?

25) Do you think you are a different person than the one you were ten years ago? What are the main differences in terms of life freedom\choices\behaviour between now and then?*

26) If you could change something in your society regarding men-women relations, what would you change?

Appendix H: Sample Focus Group Discussion (FG)

Section 1: Social construction of masculinity and femininity

1) Do you think there are "feminine/masculine" traits in humans, and if so, what are they?

2) How were you treated as a boy/girl in your family during your childhood?

3) What were your responsibilities as a young boy/girl?

4) What toys did you play with as a child?

5) What do you think are the characteristics of a man/woman?

6) What should a man/woman look like? Do they have to conform to a certain dress code or body type?

7) What are your perceptions about motherhood\fatherhood?

Section 2: Concepts and understanding of love and marriage

8) How do you define love and marriage?

9) How and where is it likely for you to meet a potential partner?

10) How did you or any of your friends meet his\he partner?

11) Do you consider marriage as mandatory\important and if so, why?

12) Do you think love comes before or after marriage? If it comes after, how does it actually develop?

13) How is your ideal marriage partner?

14) How do women and men express love?

15) Do you value family ties more than marital ties? Is familial love more important than love between spouses?

16) How do you see an unmarried man or a woman?

17) What is your opinion on divorce?

18) The divorce rate in Jordan is one of the highest in the world. Why do you think divorce is so common in Jordan nowadays?

19) How would you deal with extended family interference in your marriage?

20) Would you marry a man\woman who does not have good financial resources?

21) Would you marry a man\woman from a lower social class?

22) Would you marry a man\woman from another nationality?

23) Would you consider getting engaged to someone who had a broken engagement in the past?

24) Are personal choices incompatible with married life?