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SOCIAL INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?  
NEVER-MARRIED SINGLES IN WEST AMMAN

Masters Thesis

Gender and Women Studies: Gender and Women's Studies in the Middle  
East and North Africa Specialization  
American University in Cairo

August, 2010

Dana Mustafa Sabbah  
August, 2010  
Principal Advisor: Dr. Hania Sholkamy  
American University in Cairo

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

SOCIAL INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?  
NEVER-MARRIED SINGLES IN WEST AMMAN

A Thesis submitted by

Dana Mustafa Sabbah

Submitted to the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

August 2010

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies  
in Middle East/ North Africa

Gender and Women's Studies in Middle East and North Africa Specialization

has been approved by

Hania Sholkamy \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Adviser  
Affiliation SRC  
Date \_\_\_\_ August, 2010 \_\_

Hanan Sabea \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Second Reader  
Affiliation SAPE  
Date \_\_\_\_ August, 2010 \_\_

Mulki Al-Sharmani \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Third Reader  
Affiliation SRC  
Date \_\_\_\_ August, 2010 \_\_

Martina Rieker \_\_\_\_\_  
Institute Director  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador \_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of GAPP  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Dedication*

*As you have always been my source of inspiration, I dedicate my first research work to  
you*

*With All my love*

*For my mother's soul. . .*

*My soul-mate who embraced me through all my life and whose soul always hovers to  
provide me with her endless love, care and prayers.*

*God bless your soul*

*Dana  
August 2010*

## *ACKNOWLEDGMENT*

First and foremost I owe my deepest and most sincere gratitude to my principal advisor Dr. Hania Sholkamy who has been a great support since I joined AUC. Her patience, understanding, endless giving of her knowledge, as well as her time and effort devotion, will always leave a remarkable print that would influence my work.

I attribute the fruitful experience of my research and the success of getting my Master degree to Dr. Sholkamy in the first place. With no less importance and contribution, my two readers: Dr. Hanan Sabea and Dr. Mulki Al-Sharmani has been very helpful and added value to my academic and personal experience. My whole committee went out of their ways many times encouraging and affirming their strong belief in my work. Their guidance, support and effort helped me develop better my work to a better standard and offered me the space for creative thinking.

In addition, I would like to thank the director of Graduate Student Services, Mrs. Sawsan Mardini for giving me the opportunity to be part of Nadhmi Auchi Fellowship. This fellowship was not only important as a source of financial support, but it also offered the fellow the ability to get their collaborative works acknowledged.

Dr. Amal Sabbagh was my main key informant. Dr. Amal helped me in developing my questions, introducing me to some interviewees and dealing with fieldwork challenges as a knowledgeable experienced professional researcher who is familiar with the society of Amman. Without her assistance, my fieldwork in Amman would not have been possible.

I would like to extend my ultimate thanks to my informants and interviewees. My research would not have come to light without their cooperation, trust, enthusiasm and willingness to open up and be a vital part of this research. I was really touched by their trust and I am proud to have all of them as admired friends.

I can not forget the support of Dr. Heba Habib, my therapist, Dr. Jihan Rashed, Miss Nayra Ijjeh; my mentor and friend, and all my friends whom I was lucky to know through the last period particularly Marwa Tharwat, Hala Sonbaty and my flat-mates through the two years of my studies: Hanine Omari, Sana Jamal, Candy Lynne, Irinie Zariief and Nada Radwan. Their assistance and emotional support, love, care, encouragement and belief in my work were invaluable in providing the most conducive environment that boosted my spirit and energy and helped me to get over the fluctuations and challenges of studies and completing my thesis.

The encouragement I have got from my family was a core element to get my degree, starting from my mom- God bless her soul. My dad's support, tolerance and sacrifice were reasons to where I stand now. In addition, I am blessed to have my second mother and Aunt Da'ad in my life, I truly wouldn't have made it without her love and care.

Very special thanks to the two beautiful and loving kids: my dearest nephew and friend Fahed and my little niece Mira who are my key source of inspiration, the ones who keep

my heart beating, and my sunshine that I keep looking for with passion, love, smile and happiness. I am also indebted to my brothers, cousins and their families. I thank all of them for their continuous help and support through my studies.

Finally, I owe God endless gratefulness and gratitude for giving me this opportunity in life, giving me the power to reach this point and surrounding me with all beloved ones who have always been my support in very special and different ways, and whom I am blessed to have as part of my life.

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## Chapter One: Introduction:

Due to the continuous belief in the centrality of marriage and family value in Arab and Middle Eastern countries, the noticeable increase in the average age of females' marriages in Jordan for the last years is starting to ring alarming bells. This is associated with first, the increasing numbers of Never-Married women, whether this occurs due to personal choice or due to other circumstances. Second, it is associated with delayed marriages (in 2007 more than 100000 women over the age of 30 years were reported by Aljazeera as still not married, Aljazeera News 26 Dec, 2008). This is compounded by a delay in the average age of marriage for females, which rose from 21 years in 1979 to 27 years in 2002 (Department of Statistics-Jordan 2003). The average age mentioned is the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) which is the average age at which a person gets married for the first time. According to Osman M, Rashad, H. and Roudi-Fahimi, 13 % of females, between the ages of 35- 39 years are Never-Married (2005, 3).

This trend is particularly visible among the urban middle class, who compose a large category of Jordanian society. The mixed texture of the urban middle class is characterized by varied degrees of conservatism and liberalism, despite their educational and professional life experiences. The urban middle class will be the focus of my research.

Using the lens of social exclusion, my thesis investigates the lives of women who are *A'ness*-Never Married Singles –and who have passed the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM). I ask: how do Never-Married women navigate social spaces? How do they define and claim rights in their daily interactions? What are the challenges and opportunities they might encounter in dealing with the larger society?

Throughout my thesis, I particularly explore whether Never-Married Single women are included or excluded from different social circles (e.g. family, friends, work, and society) in West Amman. I examine the reasons, meanings, forms and tactics they deploy in dealing with their inclusion/exclusion. In addition, I investigate possible explanations to why the Never-Married women are left from the accounts of social and gendered life in the Middle East and Arab World.

In the context of my research, the terms inclusion and exclusion are not related to the physical space, but rather to the social construct in public and private spheres. I use the definition of exclusion and inclusion set by Seteny Shami as a tool to find out how it can be applied in the case of Never-Married women. Analytically, I also rely on the construct of gender relations and patriarchy. Shami defined inclusion and exclusion through the concepts of space of the “Other,” the use of public and private spheres and the feeling of belonging and integration. In other words, the terms inclusion and exclusion are related to freedom, rights and equal opportunities that may vary along lines of gender, age, and social position (Hannoyer & Shami ed. 1996, 40-45).

My methodology relied on qualitative research in West Amman, using snowballing techniques to locate informants, conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eleven Never-Married women in West Amman within the age group of 32-45, in addition to a couple of Never-Married men within the age group of 40-50 years to unpack gender differences. The purpose of conducting interviews was to understand how Ammani women, who have never been married, construct their identities and how their identity can shape and influence their social interactions, daily lives, and their future expectations.

In view of that, my research relays aspects of women's lived realities and describes the freedoms and restrictions experienced by single women living in urban spaces.

Furthermore, it describes and analyzes the consequences of the changes that take place in the foundations of marriage and the nuclear family. How these changes shape and are shaped by modern patriarchy and the making of gender difference, and how they constitute vital part of gender relations and wellbeing, are key concerns of my research.

#### 1-1 Questions to be Answered:

My thesis investigates whether Never-Married women in West Amman are excluded from different social settings. Are they excluded from certain circuits but included in others? In other words, are married women entitled to different social rights because of their familial and social status? I explore how Never-Married women experience the exclusion and/or inclusion in terms of different life dimensions: personal, social, sexual, familial, and economic. In addition, I study the access Never-Married women have to their property, sexual rights, and public entitlements. Do these cases of exclusion or inclusion apply to both Never-Married women and men similarly? Do they contribute in strengthening the notions of masculinity and femininity? Does marriage constitute a mean to access different entitlements in public, private and individual spheres? How does marriage play a role in patriarchal structures and gender constructions? In other words, how and why are the Never-Married excluded from the analysis of gendered life, and how do they contribute to changing patriarchal systems?

Looking first at social and familial domains, several important aspects are investigated. This includes the inclusion or exclusion from collective decision making processes

whether within the family or at significant social events, in addition to the exclusion of Never-Married women from social outings and familial interactions (family and friends' visits, interactions taking place in social clubs, coffee houses, reunions, and recreational activities, among others).

Since the nuclear family and marriage compose core values in Middle Eastern societies, it is essential to investigate how these concepts are embedded in people's perceptions, beliefs, and ideals, and how much these ideals shape the lives of unmarried women. In other words, to what extent are concepts and beliefs about family, marriage, motherhood, and sexuality important in directing people's life and wellbeing? And how do they affect the daily life and socializing spaces of Never-Married singles?

Are the Never-Married women entitled to the same space and share of commitments, obligations, and rights as other family members? What roles are Never-Married Singles expected to play? How does this status differ between Never-Married males and females? How does Never-Married status influence privacy and independence? I explore Never-Married relationship with mothers as well as male family members whether fathers or brothers. These family relationships exemplify the continuity of perceptions about women's weaknesses and their need for protection and guardianship. Family relations further illustrate meanings of modern patriarchy and shifting gender roles, particularly in family relations with unmarried women members, which are distinctive from unmarried men and married family members.

A second domain I focus on concerns the social and financial security of Never-Married Single women. On the social level, are Never-Married women included or excluded from the social securities provided for married women? For example, is living independently a

need and an option for the Never-Married women? On the financial level, two aspects are considered: Do Never-Married women obtain equal access to financial income, loans, facilities and securities as married women? Do they have equal financial privileges? Does that differ in the case of Never-Married women and men? I also explore whether the Never-Married have access to their own financials and property and what familial expectations exist regarding their financial contributions and behavior. This explains the relationship between marriage and different levels of financial autonomy and independence. Furthermore, financial factors are core in elucidating whether economic criteria stand as reasons, supportive elements or limiting ones for women's decisions in staying unmarried, in addition to the influences they have on adapting to, strengthening or weakening patriarchal structures.

Work comprises the third domain I explore. How much are Never-Married women included or excluded in certain work spheres? Do they have better opportunities or face more obstacles in professional growth compared to married women? Are they able to escape the conventional stereotype of the working women or not? In addition, are there similar or different expectations for married women versus Never-Married singles, especially regarding the amount of commitment, loyalty, priority, and devotion to professional life? How does family life impact their work choices?

Through women-women relationships as well as women-men relationships at work, I investigate: how being married or unmarried influences the different social relations at work, how social inclusion and exclusion are conceptualized in the case of Never-Married and how they constitute different layers of patriarchal structures and gendered roles.

Finally I focus on the intimate selfhood of Never-Married. I explore the apparent reasons behind not getting married as well as any attempts to change their status. I investigate Never-Married women's identities, perceptions and acceptance of themselves as unmarried. This also shows whether Never-Married women include or exclude themselves from the society due to self conflict, tensions and attempts to establish self-endorsed communities. The feeling of self exclusion stands as an indicator of the centrality of marriage to the Never-Married themselves and raises the question of why they have never been married.

The different domains and questions I examine help us understand the meanings of marriage as well as the meanings of inclusion and exclusion. I particularly focus on how they are defined and how they change within the triangulated relationship of individual, family and society and defined by frames of patriarchy and gender roles.

## 1-2 Literature Review:

### 1-2-1 About Jordan:

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a small country in which six million people reside (Department of Statistics-Jordan 2009). It was constituted originally from old villages and towns and got its independence in 1946. Both Bedouins and Palestinians composed its main population, in addition to other minorities from different ethnic groups like Armenians, Circassians, Shishans and Turks. Jordan has been through several transitions that influenced its stability, its economy as well as social structure. Bedouins follow tribal systems that dominate over Jordanians' public and private lives. In the same time, Jordan has been an important Arab state in the long struggle between Palestinians and Israelis. The history of unification and the strong bond between the two countries has always been

significant, sharing many common geographical and cultural aspects (Shoup 2007, 1-3). Palestinians compose a significant part of Jordan's population, their started arrival in the 1860s and their numbers increased due to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after World War 1 (Gubser 1983, 13). Jordan received Palestinian refugees once again after the defeat in 1967. They were highly skilled and educated. Palestinians have been concerned and until the recent days in education and work as first priority in their lives. This concern became stronger after Palestinians lost their land, and thus many considered education and work as a major weapon, a tool for defense, protection and are source of security. The move of Palestinians to Jordan led to the formation of an important professional class of educators, lawyers, civil servants and doctors there (Shoup 2007, Nyrop 1980). This professional class comprised the targeted informants of my study. As mentioned, Jordan has one of the highest literacy rates in Arab world for both men and women, as many sought university degrees as soon as the University of Jordan was established. As a consequence, women are found in nearly every field of work in Jordan. During 1980s, as a result of Lebanese civil war, Jordan became a vital center of trade in the Middle East. At the same time, Jordanians reached high educational levels and many of them worked in Gulf countries. This economic flourish did not last long. After the Gulf war in 1990 over 200,000 Palestinians and Jordanians returned from Gulf countries back to Jordan (the majority settled in Amman) causing unemployment and economic recession<sup>1</sup>. The following transition was in 2003 in the wake of the US invasion to Iraq which resulted in the move of more than 100,000 Iraqis to Jordan (Droeber 2005: 53).

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<sup>1</sup> "It has been estimated that 23 per cent of the Jordanian population was living below the national poverty line in 1997 (El Solh 1999)" Kawar 2000, P 57

Before Jordan's independence, its economy depended on nomadic and agrarian activities. The immersion in the modern world capitalist economy entailed, among other things, fast shifts in class structure. The urban middle class represents a large segment of the population in Jordan since the 1940s. Four classes were identified by Shteivi in which the structures are continuously subject to change: The upper class, Middle class, working class, and the dispossessed class. More details are provided in Chapter Two.

Over 80% of Jordanians are Sunni Muslims, while the rest are Christians (Shoup 2007, 29). Jordanians in general are known to be conservative, enforcing social restrictions between the genders in both religions, frowning on expressions of affections in public in the name of family honor, reputation and morality, which are more stringently explored in women. This is a common feature in both Muslims and Christians that are characterized as "Orthodox". These traditional practices serve to support family traditions and loyalty. This conservative environment is also reflected in the Jordanian media, which shy away from dealing with sensitive deals with social and political issues such as homosexuality (Shoup 2007, 38-443).

The several transitions that Jordan went through, other than the internal migration from rural to urban, have brought about major changes in Jordanian society, in its social, political, cultural and economic spaces. The transitions left Jordan and particularly Amman in mix of modernization and conservatism, but enveloped in patriarchal structures. An example of that mixture is women's professional life. While there has been a noticeable increase in women's participation in the work force due to economic conditions, conservativeness and gender segregation of social interaction still prevail. For example, the places where women go usually take into consideration the protection of a

single women and the avoidance of interaction with strange men. (Shoup 2007, 99-101. Nyrop 1980, 85, 86)

These facades of life in Jordan are reflected in my informants' experiences. Their way of thinking, beliefs, identities and cultures are shaped by the society of which they are and part of. I will present lengthier description of my informants in Chapter Two.

### 1-2-2 Marriage and Family in Jordan:

To get closer to our understanding, we need to have a clear image about what marriage and family mean in the Jordanian society and what beliefs influence the ways in which marriage takes place. This contextualizes the lives of the Never-Married women, understand their feelings and the situations they encounter.

Before Jordan got its independence and became a modern state, what is known nowadays as "traditional marriage" was not the way in which marriage used to take place among Bedouins and villagers. While they were flexible about love relations, the more recent urban society in Jordan at present is stricter in enforcing norms, traditions and values. Transgressing these norms is subject to society's punishment regardless of the legal consequences (Ubaydat 1986, 11, 21). A strong example of these values is the honor of the family "*Ird*" which is parallel to the individual's honor, especially women. If "*Ird*" is violated, the family honor will be "blackened" and has to be "whitened" again. In some cases blood is shed, which is called an "honor crime".

Sulaiman Ubaydat's (1986) book about the traditions of the Jordanian society held an interesting comparison between the recent society and the older generations- Bedouins and villagers. Love was a common natural way of getting married for both Bedouins and villagers. While it was normal in the Bedouin societies for a woman to meet the man she

loves, it was shameful for the villager woman to do the same. Ubaydat also clarified that love relationships are not encouraged in Jordan at present and that traditional marriages are favorable. In addition, remaining single in Jordanian society is not socially sanctioned due to beliefs about modesty and religiosity. What is described by Ubaydat raises several questions. How were both life styles and the absence of the state reflected in their religious and cultural beliefs, particularly notions of femininity and masculinity, gender roles and patriarchal systems? And how do these notions change with the emergence of state, modernity and urbanization?

Several authors and scholars analyzed marriage in contemporary Jordan, its importance and vitality, the cultural norms associated with it, procedures and ceremonies in different domains of private and public spheres (Khuraysat 1990, Ubaydat 1986, Awawdeh 2000). From the descriptions and explanations given, marriage is seen as central paradigm that is reflected in myriad of cultural forms starting from songs, proverbs, childhood stories to rituals, religious understandings and ending with legal codes.

In Palestinian and Jordanian literature, many old cultural sayings, songs and stories are written to describe women in their different roles in life: as a girl, wife, mother, widow and unmarried. These sayings reflect the society's embedded beliefs about women. When a woman surpasses the common age of marriage, without becoming a wife, she is labeled as "*Anes*" or spinster<sup>2</sup>, a condition is considered shameful for her whole family. In these attitudes are crystallized proverbs, some of the proverbs:

*"Eljoz rahmeh law ma bejeeb be'eedo fahmeh"* ( The husband is a blessing even if he doesn't buy a piece of coal ).

---

<sup>2</sup> Spinster "*Anes*": Are terms used to reflect negative connotations about the Never-Married women who passed the Singulate mean age of marriage. These terms used to be the common ones exploited, but at present time, it is more used in more conservative communities.

If a woman refuses a marriage proposal the saying goes as follows:

“*Sahhelha joz w kalat a’anno a’awar*”. She had a marriage opportunity, yet she said he is one eyed” (Awawdeh 2002).

Khuraysat (1990) described marriage in Arab and Muslim countries at present as considered a religious duty. He clarified the rites of passage of both males and females in Jordan with a description of how marriage is encouraged from the time the child is born. Furthermore, he discussed detailed procedures that show the man’s right to choose his bride. In traditional marriages, the man and his family take the initiative and propose to the girl, who is expected to be shy and silent (Khuraysat 1990, 85-93).

One of the main traditional procedures of the proposal in Jordan is called “*Jaha*”<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this ritual is to make the engagement known to community and to give prestigious position to the bride and her family. In some cases the girl’s family might not agree to the groom, and in that case gossip quickly spreads, presenting the girl as having a problem and chance with limited future marriage chances. They also look at her in a petty way, which leaves the girl in sadness and under stress, and can result in her approval of unwanted or unsuitable marriage. (Khuraysat 1990, 99-100)

The ceremonies that take place in preparation of marriage reflect the importance of that day and the concept of marriage in Jordanian society. Included in this, are traditional cultural songs that reflect the male’s emotions and desires, while they do not reflect the same for the girl as she is not supposed to express her feelings in respect of family reputation, honor and purity. (Khuraysat 1990)

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<sup>3</sup>*Jaha* is one of the most embedded and unchanged rituals. It has to take place without compromise regardless of the way the marriage takes place (traditional or not) The male part of the groom’s family invites all men from their side, friends, and invites prestigious male figures in society to propose to the bride’s family who also invite their male figures.

The examples represent instances of rigid structures of patriarchal society, of prescribed gendered roles that are informed by specific beliefs and understandings of femininity and masculinity. These understandings grant more rights and privileges to men over women, preserve notions of male power and domination, and work to reproduce women's weakness and dependence.

Reaffirming the centrality of marriage is not limited to cultural norms reflected in proverbs and rituals but also find expression in the meaning of marriage, the foundation upon which marriage relations are established, as well as in traditional law "*Urf*" and legal codes that regulate marriage. Marriage in this context extends to construct the structure and the frame of nuclear and extended family relations, gender roles, power and authority, and access to different life domains such as property and sexual rights. In this respect, Never-Married women are left out from accounts of social life, as unfitting in prevailing marriage and family structures, gender roles and patriarchal systems.

According to Sonbol (2003), marriage in Jordan includes a specific image. As a daughter and a wife, the woman is expected to be well treated whether by her father or husband. They both represent the source of protection, providence and comfort for her. Meanwhile, the woman is expected to be a cherished wife and a mother.

In marriage institution, the man is expected to support his wife financially, while the woman's own money is considered hers. Today, and due to the socioeconomic changes the wife contributes to the household's financial expenses.

The expectations apply to both religions; Muslims and Christians. In return for a man's support, the wife is expected to obey her husband. For instance, the husband's right to prohibit his wife from work is upheld if the woman does not fulfill her wifery duties.

As both Mary Kawar and Amira Sonbol clarified, the classification of households in Jordan (nuclear, extended, female headed, or single) is associated with identifying the household head who is the breadwinner and the decision maker. In the Jordanian patriarchal society, the household head is the father as the main authority or the brother if the father is absent, even though he might not be the source of income.

Another vital aspect in the lives of Jordanian families is the role of the extended families as well as forms of tribal control.

Regardless of the physical change with urbanization, and though the nuclear family prevails, the importance and symbolism of the extended family still dominate. In addition, and as more important authority in Jordanians' lives, family affiliation is defined by tribal belongings. In other words, the power of the father or the family male figure as a household head is still controlled by "*Urf*" (traditional law) where in social power of the patriarchal legal system and cultural norms of extended family and tribes are key (Kawar 2000, 10, Sonbol 2003, 6). Consequently women have limited access to legal self-representation as in Personal Status Laws. These women are treated as inseparable dependable parts of men, who are considered the women's guardians. An example of that is the access the woman has to her own property. Islamic law guarantees the woman her right to control her property and business, and guarantees her equal right to jobs. Yet, in practice, women in Jordan comprise a small percentage of total labor force, and have limited access to job opportunities that require work until late hours. Furthermore, there are social limitations on women to establish their own business, which can limit their progress and access to different domains of professional life.

I use this image and understanding of marriage and family to show how this institution provides a strong source reaffirming gendered roles, notions of masculinity and femininity and patriarchal structures. In this respect, the increasing numbers of Never-Married women can constitute a threat to prevailing gendered roles and patriarchal systems.

### 1-2-3 Never- Married in Jordan:

The increasing numbers of Never-Married is not only a local phenomenon, but a universal one that raises a lot of concerns. Articles that address the issues of singleness and spinsterhood –as expressed- in several Eastern and Western countries such as Spain, Munich, China were published<sup>4</sup> reflecting the risk those countries encounter regarding their social and economic structures, and the need for governmental solutions.

In recent years, Jordanian newspapers<sup>5</sup> published several pieces on the status of Never-Married singles in Jordan informed by recently released governmental statistics. In addition, there are many articles about “*O’nousa*” in Jordan that deal with it as a threat that is caused by either financial and economic crisis or by the higher education and job opportunities for women. The limited financial resources experienced by people in Jordan cause them economic crisis and excludes the option of marriage from their agendas since marriage requires financial stability. On the other hand, since women in Jordan are more involved in higher education and are having better job opportunities, many achieve financial independence that compensate their need for marriage. The newspapers juxtapose this to values, traditions, ethics, and religious perceptions.

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<sup>4</sup> *Alghad* Newspaper 13 Jan 2010, *Alghad* Newspaper 4 Jan 2010, *Alghad* Newspaper 5 Jan 2010

<sup>5</sup> Examples of the Newspapers: *Alliwa* ' Dated 23 June 2009, *AlDostour* 7 Match 2008, *AlShorfa Newspaper* 31 Dec 2009, *AlGhad Newspaper* 24 Nov 2009, 7 Jan 2010, 17 Feb 2010

According to Ministry of Social Development, there are over 100,000 women who exceeded 30 years old in 2007 and who remained unmarried. (Aljazeera News 26 Dec, 2008). According to the Jordan Woman Indicators-Gender perspective (2008) 7.8% of the female population, aged 35 and above has never been married, while Never-Married men of the same age group are only 3.4 %. In addition, the average age of marriage for females rose from 21 years in 1979 to 27 years in 2002 due to a variety of socioeconomic factors (Department of Statistics, 2003).The Department warned that these changes are influencing the foundations of the nuclear family:

“It is common knowledge that cultures seem to have different types of household systems. In Jordan as in other Arab countries, the nuclear family, ‘Father, mother and the children’, appears to predominate. Household types of Jordan have been changing with the increase of nuclear families and the decrease of extended families, during the period 1996-2003, with the increase of the unmarried families, divorced families and unmarried mothers” (Department of Statistics- Jordan, 2003)

The different articles written in newspapers as well as the article published by Department of Statistics do not only reflect strong cultural norms that revolve around marriage, but also have an extended influence on the state and laws practiced in Jordan. The articles stand as a confirming representation of marriage being the backbone of nuclear and extended families, hence, preserving gender roles and patriarchal structures. In addition, they facilitate better understanding about the reasons of considering the increase in Never-Married singles a threat for the society and patriarchal systems, hence, the reasons of excluding them from social and gendered life.

#### 1-2-4 Marriage and Family in the Arab World:

Understanding the meaning and critical role of marriage, gendered roles, and family structure in Arab and Middle Eastern countries is a core element in my research. In later

chapters I will discuss the centrality of understanding different family connectivity, patriarchy, cultural versus religious influences, the negotiations that are taking place in these concepts and the ways in which Never-Married navigate spaces in a society that consider family more valued than the person.

Suad Joseph wrote about the different selves in Arab families and their relationship to gender and identity. Through her explanation to the relationality and connectivity between family members, she outlined different kinds of selves, which are individualistic, familial, and spiritual. In Arab cultures, the familial selves have first priority in people's lives and identities, while the individualistic self is a last priority. The strong connectivity between family members is thought to be bounded by the structure of domination and patriarchy, by seeing the self in certain hierarchal level through the other. In other words, family connectivity in the Arab world stands as a support to patriarchal power. Daughter/Mother attachments are results of the mother's desire to see her daughter an extension for her own while the son builds his masculinity by the separation from his mother and by being more individualized. Joseph also emphasizes brother/sister relationships that are described by the love/ power relationship. In the name of love, brothers have authority over their sisters as protectors and guardians. Accordingly, the notion of femininity and masculinity are defined within social and emotional boundaries. Clear examples of this are in the roles of the Arab woman as a daughter and a wife, as well as her image as one of self sacrifice (Joseph 1999).

The power relationships among families was discussed as well by Yount and Rashad (2008). They explained that the guardianship of woman is always given to the father and brothers until the woman is married, in which case guardianship is transferred to the

husband. In this sense, how can these powers affect the lives of those who have never married? What changes have occurred accordingly and how can this leave positive or negative traces on the lives of my informants?

Judith Tucker addressed the sensitive and intimate dimensions of relationships in “Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law”. She highlighted the role of religion as a technique to enforce commitment in marriage to prevent illicit sexual behaviors (Tucker 2008). This is considered a main goal of Islamic marriage in classical jurisprudence. In Jordan, this continues to be the case; marriage is the only legally and religiously sanctioned pathway of fulfilling heterosexual sexual needs. What then are the experiences of Never-Married women in this regard? How does this dimension of sexuality influence their lives and identities? Is it the same for Never-Married men? Are the notions of patriarchy, domination, femininity and masculinity part of the sexual aspect?

The explanations given by Joseph, Yount and Rashad and Tucker about the different dimensions of family relations, connectivity, patriarchy and domination in Arab families clarify how norms, values, ethos, and traditions are embedded and built around these notions and serve as constraints in the lives of Arab women. Values of family and marriage are major ones as they constitute fundamental ground in preserving patriarchy and gender roles. They reflect examples of the symbolic power, structural and symbolic violence that were presented by Pierre Bourdieu. The symbolic power and violence describe how culture controls individuals and groups in hierarchal domination without the threat of physical power but with symbolic manipulation and taken for granted forms. Bourdieu clarified through this concept that the dominated accepts and legitimates domination. It is a two sided agreement process between both the dominant and the

dominated. This happens when the dominated misrecognizes the symbolic power considering it as a natural order of things or the "way of the world". Patriarchy and gender roles are clear examples of this notion of natural order of things (Swartz 1997, Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002). Considering the different aspects of family and marriage I presented above, I ask what dimensions of marriage and family still shape Never-Married women's lives? And what others are absent? With the increase of unmarried women, how can Never-Married women influence and get influenced by family structure and relationships, notions of gender role and modern patriarchy?

#### 1-2-5 Studies about Never-Married in Jordan and Arab World:

The above studies highlight similarities between Arab Middle Eastern societies, their culture and beliefs that constitute people's perceptions and influence their behaviors. This is specifically related to marriage, family, patriarchal structures and gender roles. From my research, I could not however locate any studies concerning Never-Married in Jordan. Few studies are available in the Middle East about unmarried women. One of the more relevant studies was done by Penny Johnson (2008) concerning single women in Palestine. Her focus was on the concepts of agency, choice, and responsibility. Her informants were highly educated, professional, and independent women between the ages of 35-66. Johnson discussed issues of identity and self-perception, as well as the constraints and challenges single women faced. In her research, she unpacked concerns relating to security, harassment, and the dream of freedom and mobility.

Another study by Sa'ar (2004) about unmarried Palestinian women in the occupied territories of 1948 focused on the life styles of these women, especially on their sexuality.

These women were shown to go through repression and frustrations, while others experienced sexual maturity, thus challenging the image of Arab Women.

In the Arab World, marriage and family are undergoing many changes. This was presented in a study by Rashad, Osman and Fahimi (2005) in which they argued that the average age of marriage for both men and women is rising, and that more women remained unmarried. They concluded that the increasing numbers of young people, in addition to the changes in economic and social realities in the Arab World “make this an important time to explore both changing Arab marriage patterns and their implications for people’s lives and societies as a whole” (Rashad, Osman and Fahimi 2005, P7).

I read the scarcity of research done concerning the Never-Married in parallel to the increase of articles written in newspapers and media as possible indications to the sudden threat surfacing in the society. This threat might have been caused by the substantial emergence of unmarried strata that need to fit in society.

#### 1-2-6 The Tensions of the Never-Married:

While the previous mentioned studies were done in Palestine and the Arab World, others examined marriage and family in the West and clarifies the tensions the unmarried might have.

Even though there are cultural differences between the West and the Middle East, such as the acceptance of sexual relations outside formal marriage relations in the West, some tensions are common ones between the Eastern and the Western Never-Married women such as: the social pressure and stigma of being a “spinster” and the concept of motherhood that is seen as natural instinct that can not be fulfilled in Never-Married’s lives.

In “Our lives for Ourselves” Nancy Peterson discusses the experiences of women in the US, of which some people lead their lives in “positive autonomy” (Paterson 1981, 20). Others felt it was an uncomfortable zone that people usually avoid discussing. An important conclusion from her interviews was the obsession with motherhood of Never-Married women. Their motherhood constituted a major experience and as an instinct they might not satisfy. Sexuality behavior varied greatly between extremely repressed to fully expressive. The social stigma was a common perception of the Never-Married women had about themselves; the negative implications were correlated with the word “Spinster”, rather than the more neutral use of the word “Never-Married” (Paterson 1981, 250-252).

Another book was written by Margaret Adams named *Single Blessedness- Observations of the Single Status in Married Society*. In this book the author shed light on single hood life, clarified the positive aspects and experiences of singles trying to promote more social acceptance for unmarried strata, thus challenging the dominant image of negative connotations and implications of being unmarried (Adams 1976, 3-7). She argues that economic and social independence are reasons for women not to get married but the social pressure varies in different societies and within one society. Some women said that there was no social pressure coming from their families to get married, although the case was different for others. This also results from the expansion of their experiences in other dimensions like work and professional life, which helps develop their social identity (Adams 1976, 202-211). These reflections on the lives of the Never-Married also exist in Jordan due to the mix between conservatism and liberalism, in addition to the influences of modernity.

On the other hand, Janet Cockrum and Priscilla White (1985) highlighted the psychological factors influencing Never-Married singles such as their self esteem, emotional loneliness, attachment problems, and social integration. The authors focused on the different experiences between the Never-Married and other categories of singles such as divorced and widows. Even though the experience of the Never-Married is more gratifying than it is in the case of widows and divorced who go through more complicated problems, one of the major problems of the Never- Married singles is the lack of social support provided to them to achieve self-satisfaction and well being (Cockrum, White 1985). I ask how do these psychological factors apply to my informants as Never-Married women in West Amman? And what does the society of West Amman provide them with or withhold them from?

#### 1-2-7 Meanings of Inclusion and Exclusion:

My thesis question investigates whether Never-Married single women are included or excluded from different social settings in West Amman. I focus on how my informants define inclusion and exclusion and what criteria shape its meaning to them. Therefore, it is essential to understand the meaning of inclusion and exclusion in scholarly work, and how this can be applied to social and professional life in Jordan.

Shami's work explores the concepts of inclusion and exclusion, private and public spheres, belonging and the production of the "Other". She connected these understandings within Jordanian society with its different stratifications of gender, age and social position. She asks: "Do men and women participate similarly? Do individuals from different ages within households benefit equally? How is modernity as well as maintaining identity translated into quality of life, to the physical and mental wellbeing?"

(Hannoyer and Shami 1996, 45). Inclusion is then related to freedom, rights, and equal opportunities among gender, age, and social position. Another analysis of the meanings of exclusion and inclusion is in a study by Kawar conducted in the early 1990s concerning female labor in Amman. The study raised questions about job opportunities for single women and how that can be related to the increasing age of marriage. The study also discussed how some employers prefer to hire single women due to the employers' assumptions that single women have fewer responsibilities at home and in their private spheres (Hannoyer and Shami 1996). I explore, are these incidences considered inclusion or exclusion for the Never-Married?

Conclusion:

This chapter presented my main thesis questions that I investigated through my fieldwork relating to the inclusion and exclusion of Never-Married women particularly from different social circles in West Amman, the politics of choice in their different life aspects, the tensions they undergo within their individual and familial selves and the navigation tools used to cope and obtain their rights in patriarchal societies. This chapter provided a brief socioeconomic background about Jordan, previous research on Never-Married women, as well as relevant literature concerning the cultural dimensions of family relations and marriage, not only in Jordan, but also in other Arab countries. This gives better insight for the reader to understand the dynamics, tensions, and changes that Never-Married women experience regarding different notions of masculinity and femininity, gender roles and patriarchy.

## Chapter Two: Methodology and Framework:

This chapter provides an account for the methodology and tools used in my fieldwork. I detail why I had key informants, how they were of use to me, how I found my interviewees, the types of questions I asked, the reasons of choosing specific methods and excluding others. In addition, in this chapter I outline description of West Amman as a social space, the interviewees' demographic socioeconomic criteria, why I chose the volunteering individuals and location, what were the ethical codes in fieldwork, and then finally what were the challenges and limitations of my fieldwork, and how I dealt with them.

### 2-1 Why Fieldwork?

My research deals with human, social, psychological, and cultural aspects that shape the daily lives of the Never-Married women and influence their social interaction. According to my explorations for the last year, the topic has not been recently investigated. Using only theoretical research provides few answers for my thesis questions but gives an intellectual frame that informs my research and analysis.

For this reason immersing myself into the field was a key tool. As LeCompte and Schensul argue:

*“Ethnography is an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions and other settings that is scientific, investigative, uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection, uses rigorous research methods and data collection techniques to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data, emphasizes and builds on the perspectives of the people in the research setting, and is inductive, building local theories for testing and adapting then for use both locally and elsewhere” (1999, P2)*

They add that ethnography helps in finding the different and variable meanings of people's behaviors, worlds, and lives.

### 2-1-1 In Depth Interviews

Ethnography may have been a useful exploration tool to investigate the lives of single women. However, due to time limitations, I used qualitative methods to interview a small sample of women living in West Amman. I used open ended, in-depth questions for the Never-Married women. My questions dealt with the difficulty of having certain labels, and the confusions entailed in defining one's self as "Never-Married". When does a woman consider herself as Never- Married? Until what point will she wait for the "right person"? Who is the right person? What does identity mean for her? What does pressure mean to her? Finally, what are the definitions and experiences of inclusion or exclusion for the Never-Married?

The questions also examined the Never-Married women's inclusion or exclusion from their societies whether among their families, social circuits, and professional lives, in addition to their self-perceptions. I relied on life stories and narratives of Never-Married women as key tools in my research.

Having key informants is an important part of fieldwork as they are knowledgeable about their own culture. They provide exploratory information of unexplored domains, narratives that are told from their own experience or from others around them within the frame of their cultural knowledge, experience and network of relationships (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, Toolkit 1, P86, Toolkit 2, P84).

My initial key informant was Dr. Amal Sabbagh, an experienced Never-Married practitioner-researcher of gender, policy and reform in Jordan and the Arab world. She is in her early sixties and has a professional background in conducting qualitative research. In addition to her familiarity with the topic and with the socio-cultural aspects of West

Amman, she helped me in developing and tailoring my interview questions. I met her during the summer of 2009, as she helped me at that stage in selecting and deciding on the criteria for selecting women, having a clearer framework, and later on finding my informants.

My interviews with Dr. Amal Sabbagh were very useful in different ways. She was a great support in helping me to map my fieldwork during my stay in Jordan and contacted three women for me to interview. She also provided me with her own perspectives about the lives of Never-Married women who are in their thirties and forties in West Amman, how she saw the transition happening, and talked very openly about her own experience as a Never-Married woman from a different generation than my informants, which shed light on some major differences among Never-Married women.

Dr. Amal is an example of an independent Never-Married woman who has inspired others by leading her life with a positive autonomy, confidence, pride, strength, and self sufficiency, particularly at a time when single women were labeled as spinsters, more than they are now. She believes that the Never-Married women nowadays care less than before about society. Some of them are still affected by their status of not being married, while others chose not to get married in spite of “stormy relationships” with their families and more familial pressure. The Never-Married women also are seen to be having better social opportunities than before. Dr. Amal explained:

*“Now there are more never married women & there are many public places that accept women alone or would accept a group of men & women, nobody asks, it’s much easier for this generation”*

Dr. Amal<sup>6</sup> also stated one major difficulty for the Never-Married today, is sexuality. She compared her generation and the interviewees', considering sexuality more of difficult issue for the Never-Married women now. About that she said:

*“In this part of sexuality specifically, it was easier for our generation than this generation, we accepted it ,it was clear cut that no marriage means no sex for all, it wasn't a big issue. But now it is more difficult; it is a conflict & is still a taboo..The previous generation was brainwashed, it was easier for me to cope than with somebody thinking should I or shouldn't I... it is my right but what would happen then???? I didn't have to go through that..”*

Dr. Amal provided a picture of the Never-Married women that was different and distant from the one given by the second key informant, Miss Zubayda. After I met with both key informants two different pictures emerged. The two pictures of the Never-Married helped in understanding the confusions that were touched upon conducting the interviews regarding meanings of “Never-Married”, the “Right Person”, “Pressure”, “Privacy”, “Independence”, “Identity”, “The role in the society”, “The politics of choice”, and “inclusion /exclusion”. Furthermore the pictures of Never-Married women that I got from my key informants helped to draw a comparison between Never-Married women in West and East Amman. Hence, to view the different reasons, factors, beliefs, and pressures that influences Never-Married women coming from different residential areas and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Dr. Amal's image about the Never-Married women is of a more independent, educated, working woman who in some cases makes the choice to remain single. While enjoying

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<sup>6</sup> Drawing on her study in 1989, she mentioned :

*“A note that I'd like to add from a study that I made in 1989s; at that time the percentage of the single Christian women was more than the married Christian women while the percentage of the married Muslim women was more than the never married Muslims women .But now from the women I know, the never married are mostly Muslims”*

their social life, they may also have some conflicts that result from living with their families and a partial degree of acknowledgment to sexual needs that leave them with internal conflicts.

Miss Zubayda, the second key informant<sup>7</sup> is a founder of an NGO that seeks just treatment for Never-Married singles. She is a veiled woman that looks in her late fifties or early sixties, wearing black and a green bluish veil. She has a bachelor degree and diploma from the Faculty of Education. She is a Never-Married woman who calls herself “*Hareera*”, a term that she is trying to promote for the “Never-Married” woman instead of “Spinster.” I contacted her for an interview trying to explore her view and feedback about the status of never married women in Jordan, the idea of establishing this NGO, and the possibility of connecting me with some people as informants for my research. The interview with her was useful. She gave me insights about more conservative religious women from socioeconomic backgrounds that differ from those whom Dr. Amal talked about. The Never-Married women she talked about are mainly Muslims<sup>8</sup> living in East Amman, which commonly include more conservative communities<sup>9</sup>. Many are deprived from good education or skills that can help in supporting themselves. The main reasons for them not getting married are supporting their families either financially or through being the care takers or being banned from marriage unless they give up their

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<sup>7</sup> I used an alias name for the second key informant unlike what I did with my main key informant Dr. Amal as the latter was so open and confident and did not mind at all revealing her identity including all what is said during the interviews. While the second key informant –as I felt- was more conservative, did not feel comfortable to record the interview- which I respected by giving her the flexibility of choice leaving it there and going for my handwritten notes. I had my own interpretations on the interview that are self reflexive and may not necessarily be correct or dealt with as facts.

<sup>8</sup> She indicated that she met with few Christians and that they usually prefer to be late in marriage

<sup>9</sup> Unlike the girls of West Amman as she said who are part of corruption: “*the way girls are dressing, all her body, breasts, bellybutton is revealed no traditions, new marriages like Mesyar, U’rfi, friendship exist...is that normal?*”

inheritance shares. They also have very high pressure from their families; their siblings are not anymore taking care of them<sup>10</sup>. However, marriage for them is vital, a religious duty and important step for their social recognition. Due to such pressures and experiences she finds them ashamed, shying away from social settings that might label them as Never-Married. Accordingly, the NGO's role is to "build social defense mechanism", trying to develop some skills to be more independent, establish a home for them, small projects in the future, and locate marriage opportunities for those interested. The ability to see the differences in these two cases helped me shape my questions and have a clearer vision about the two contexts shaping the Never-Married women's lives, the different causes, circumstances, pressures, and opportunities that the two categories might have. They also helped me to learn how the Never-Married navigate their rites of passage that addressed by Rashad, Osman and Fahimi when they claimed:

"In Arab culture, marriage is also a well defined turning point that bestows prestige, recognition, and societal approval on both partners particularly the bride. While young women and men generally choose their own spouses, marriage in Arab societies remains a social and economic contract between two families. Finally it is also a rite of passage to a socially, culturally, and legally acceptable sexual relationship" (2005, 2).

When I first met Miss Zubayda, she looked serious, but then started to be a little more relaxed especially after she learned that I am unmarried. This helped her feel safe considering me as part of the community of the Never-Married women and a chance to include me as a member of her NGO.

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<sup>10</sup> "The "Hareera" suffers from the way the society and family looks at her, the way she is underestimated even from her siblings ...the brother doesn't check on his sister, health, food, social needs...a week can pass without him checking on her.. She's not allowed to participate in decision making, her mission is to pay for and serve the family ... I know a doctor whose never married sister lives with him...his wife burned her. Can you imagine?" Miss Zubayda said.

Miss Zubayda first drew my attention to the linguistic nuances and meanings of the terms “A’ness” and “Hareera.” She said: “Do you know what “A’ness” means in Arabic?! It means the female camel whose udder got dry and a palm that its fruits are cut”. Then she added: “exactly like the Never-Married when she goes to weddings for example, you can see people pointing to her saying: Poor woman, she is a spinster”. She moved to explain the meaning of “Hareera” that the NGO is promoting. She gave several meanings and then focused on one and said: “It means the pure refined sand...pure in a sense that the man never touched her...”

She then elaborated on the different societal interpretations of the Never-Married women and explained<sup>11</sup>:

*“We want to deal with the Hareera as a human...in our societies she’s always looked upon as an unattractive, not sexually desired or ungiving woman. The parents also have a hand in that, in keeping her “A’ness” spinster to be the family caretaker financially and non financially but they are ashamed to say that they have a never married daughter. We are reattributed (rewarded) from God”.....The objective of the NGO is to regulate the social behaviors of the society, we have to find a social quota to the family and society. Men maintain women “Alrijal Qawwamon A’la elnisa” this is how God created us.I met the religious figure “AlSheikh Noh leqdah and I asked him his opinion about marriage. He said: “La rahbaniyyata fellIslam-no monks or nuns in Islam; the girl has to marry, but the parents’ expenses and the girl and her high requirements all play a role”.*

This interview helped me consider the ethical and analytical conflicts of fieldwork with which I am still struggling. What should I include or exclude of the confidences expressed during interviews? I will protect the private and confidential content of each interview, but how to maintain this and still tackle the question of gender, self and single-hood is a challenge that I hope to overcome. In this thesis, I will convey the reality of

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<sup>11</sup> Miss Zubayda gave an idea about how the never married woman is perceived among Bedouins, she said: “Once we met a Bedouin man who says” well the Hareera eats drinks and sleeps. What does she want more than that?”

intimate and social lives of individual women; I will therefore often quote my key and other informants and provide a framework with which to analyze these reported words and deeds.

Miss Zubayda offered me an application form to join her NGO towards the end of the interview. I agreed because I felt embarrassed to refuse, but I had an ethical conflict in doing so because I was not convinced with their path and perceptions. I shared my ethical concerns and reflections with my advisor expressing how I differed in my approach to single-hood and worried that I may have misled the key informant into assuming that I concurred with her principles and concerns. But I was advised to make clear my identity as a researcher, and to maintain the identity during my fieldwork.

As a researcher, I learned a lot from this interview, which helped with the interviews that followed. I appreciated the time and valuable information given to me regardless of my own beliefs and started to raise questions trying to understand more, I sensed the identity struggle through our chatting between promoting change of views about the Never-Married and the need for marriage as a religious duty. In addition, I was asking myself whether it was a good idea to create closed communities of the Never-Married. Aren't we in this way maintaining part of their exclusion? Then I realized that I am thinking about it from my own experience which is a totally different from the ones mentioned by Miss Zubayda. As mentioned earlier, the Never-Married whom Miss Zubayda talked about have limited financial resources. Eventually, their education and skills are limited as well. This constitutes a main reason for them not to be married. That is why an important part of this NGO is providing the Never-Married singles with certain skills to help them be independent, which could be as important for them as having marriage opportunities.

I had initial criteria for selecting my informants ( Women's age group 35-49, men's age group 45-55, Muslims and Christians, some living with their parents and others not, some living under high pressures, others do not). This criteria included few changes as I had my first interviews with my key informants and as I entered the field. For instance, I lowered the age group to 30-45 for females and 40- 50 for males; only one woman was living alone but in the same building with her parents.

As for the data collection, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews along with my observations. In-depth interviews allowed the interviewees to express their thoughts and build interpersonal trust, meanwhile it allowed me to explore the topic in details and observe the environment and the body language of the interviewee which has very important value that added to my understanding.

Semi-structured interview “Combines the flexibility of the unstructured, open ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level” (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, P149). (See Appendix B for a guideline of interview questions)

In order to identify potential informants, I used the snowballing technique. I networked with few informants initially and they provided me with contacts to possible interviewees.

#### 2-1-2 Observation:

Observation was not a separate tool that I used on its own; rather, I used it in conjunction with the interviews. Observing my interviewees during the interview was useful in adding to my understanding of their responses. Conducting face-to-face interviews helped me realize the points of weakness, tensions, and comfort of my informants. These

issues cannot be sensed except by observing the tone of voice, eye contact, elaboration or ignorance of certain points, the body language used that reflect either the discomfort or being at ease about certain personal perceptions. According to LeCompte and Schensul (1999, P115) the more complete, accurate and concrete the observations and field notes are, the easier the use of data and the better analysis the researcher can get. Because of this, I was committed to writing down my notes, reflections, and observations, description of the setting and diaries on a day to day basis with all the minor details of it.

#### 2-2 Ethics, Confidentiality and Consent:

I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research after they reviewed my proposal, interview questions, consent form, and the ethic at considerations I proposed. One of the core ethics of ethnography is being a trustworthy person who can fully respect, protect and assure the informants' privacy and confidentiality. I prepared a written consent form (Appendix A) that was read out orally and was signed by the interviewees before I began my interviews. I clearly stated my intentions for undertaking these interviews, the way I will conduct them, and the tools to be used for recording as well as protecting identity. I also assured them the right to stop me at anytime during the interview from recording.

Throughout my fieldwork I used coding of my informants whether in the process of writing notes, recording or drawing conclusions. The coding system was kept private with no one accessing it except me. In addition, I retained any identity devices or tools that can be revealing during the tape recording process (e.g. real names, the place of work...etc) and as I guaranteed them, I deleted the audio recording after the notes were written down.

It was essential to be clear about the topic and the goal of my research, and it was also as important to respect what the interviewee wanted for example in revealing some information off record. After I was done with the interview, I preferred to double check with the interviewee if s/he still comfortable with how the interview went and with being part of the study. If in any case they expressed their discomfort then I deleted and canceled the whole record.

### 2-3 West Amman: The Social Space

Due to the several transitions Jordan went through, Amman had rapidly grown to become the capital of Jordan in addition to the emergence of other smaller urban cities. The main cities like Amman and Irbid expanded into larger communities and the distinction between town, village and city became blurred (Shoup 2007). The population of Amman, the capital of Jordan, comprises 38.7% of the total Jordanian population, while the rest are distributed among the other governorates (Jordan Department of Statistics, 2009).

According to Shami (Hannoyer and Shami 1996) to understand the city as a social space, we need to understand, who makes the space, and how it is used. Furthermore, we need to study the accessibility, closeness and transgression that constitute the definition of the “Other” in that space. In that sense, urban space constitutes “Contested domains” that are shaped by power relations, practices and identities, and with globalization and mixing of people, individuals, groups and spaces formulate new identities (Ghannam 2002). For a better understanding of this research, it is vital to draw a picture of Amman as an urban city, not only for its physical materialistic characteristics but also for the socio-cultural process of change and adaptation.

Amman witnessed several internal and external immigrations from different geographical locations, rural areas and countries (e.g. Bedouins, villagers, Palestinians, Iraqis, refugees as explained in Chapter One). Tribal life shifted towards the forms prevailing in cities and towns, more involvement in trade and industry also meant less agricultural engagement.

With the improvement of education, technology, communication and economy Ammani people reworked cultural repertoires based on previously acquired cultural norms which were preserved, while simultaneously adapting to the new society. In other words, it is the mix of modernity, changing notions of authenticity, and social integration that mark Amman. (Hannoyer and Shami 1996)

Hence, intermarriages between Jordanians and non-Jordanians spread widely. People holding different characteristics are molded into one place that is the city of Amman, with its created cosmopolitan features that shaped their new culture.

As the economy grew in Jordan, more job opportunities started to open for both men and women. This resulted in more expectations for social openness and changes in gender inequities. However, despite the change that happened in Jordan, tribal patriarchal relations in state and legal systems still hold. In the private spheres, conservative gendered relations dominate marriage and family life.

Social change also happened due to change in class structure (Moghadam 2003). The increasing access of women to jobs, the large percentage of urban employed women who are found in the service sector and in professional positions meant that an increase in choices is exercised mostly by upper middle class. This resulted in less rigidity in traditional gender relations and less dependence on family and marriage, eventhough

women still struggle between the desire to work and the fixated gendered ideologies of the women's family role.

Professional middle class women in West Amman is the locus of my research. According to Shteiwi: "social classes are defined as an aggregate of individuals who share a similar structural position in the production process hierarchy (cited Wright 1985). That means that classes are identifiable sets of people who have relatively similar amounts of power, privilege, and prestige. Classes are more than just population categories; they are organizational units within society, displaying some amount of social ordering and a shared class culture" (Hannoyer and Shami 1996, 414-419).

Shteiwi (1996) identified four classes in Amman: upper class, middle class, working class, and the dispossessed class, though the structures and boundaries of these classes are continuously subject to change. In 1991 the "middle class" included professionals of all kinds who composed 15.3% of total population, semiprofessionals 9.3%, clerks 6.7% and small business owners constituting 12.2%. The total approximation of this class is between 25-32%. This class is relatively large and becoming more differentiated.

According to Shteiwi it might not be true that the entire middle class is shrinking, rather the decrease is mainly in respect of the bureaucratic segment.

In addition, West Amman is an area that used to represent the middle class initially, and then was home to upper classes as well. My own observations and those of my key informants provide some added insights as to how class and society play out in Amman today due to the rapid and continuous changes happening in the Jordanian society.

Many of these transformations occurring in Amman are usually characterized by "Westernization." Amman's society is influenced by the western values, not only

economically but also in social spheres. This is exemplified in the difference between West and East Amman. While the people of East Amman represent less privileged economic classes and are known to be more conservative, West Ammanis are more of a Middle and upper class and known to be more Westernized , less religious and more liberal. Meanwhile there are still common social patterns among people in both locations. The general prototype of West Amman is the nice stone brick buildings, three to five floors high, villas, financial districts, and industrial commercial zones. Until the 1980s Amman was known to be a quite city with no night life: by 10pm the streets used to be lifeless, all shops closed, and no social outlets used to open for long hours at night. This has changed with economic booms of the 1980s-1990s and the increase in population. West Amman now is a suitable place for summer vacations for the Middle Eastern people.

West Amman today is a more lively city. The Western imprint is clearly seen on its social life style, the way its people are dressed, the social outings available; International hotels, restaurants, fast food stations, cafes, bars, shops, amusement as well as cultural centers and the like. However, Jordanians find ways of keeping traditions and values while adapting to changing times. An only women coffee shop opened in Amman in 2004 trying to preserve the uncompromised value of family honor and gender segregation (Shoup 2007, 87-97).

Furthermore, mosques and churches are widely spread, and some business owners try to keep the past's cultural identity in their businesses by maintaining the old cultural architecture and accessories, and playing old songs. Such places are of interest to West

Ammani society which stands as an indication of their passion and struggle of both keeping their identities and following the wheel of modernity.

People are not able to explain what type of city Amman is, its clear identity is confused, similar to its nation's identity (Hannoyer and Shami 1996). There is a diversity of people's world views from conservative to liberal; modern to traditional. This leaves Jordanians with continuous uncertainties and frustrations. The state of confusion is reflected on gendered life, family and marriages in Jordan, young women are negotiating gender roles and stretching their traditional boundaries (Droeber 2005).

#### 2-4 Challenges, Obstacles and Limitations of the Fieldwork:

##### 2-4-1 West Amman And the "Native" Researcher:

The site of my research is West Amman. Since I am a Jordanian resident in Amman, Being a "native" researcher and ethnographer is a strength that supported my work through out my research process. The advantages of being native were crucial particularly as this was my first experience in qualitative fieldwork. My native knowledge helped me overcome some of the difficulties of fieldwork including the relatively short time I had to conduct my interviews. The "Native" researcher is familiar with the culture which can be an asset that helps her/him in translating and analyzing the work done whether through interviews, observations, body language, and colloquial terms used in the specific context of the culture. This eventually results in more reliable results and constitutes important criteria of a good fieldworker (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, P168). Even though being a native researcher and a member of the community has their limitations of having some struggles of bias, presumed interpretations in which few can be learned about the community, yet as mentioned by LeCompte and Schensul:

*“Ethnographic researchers hold an identity that is never fully coterminous with the individuals who are members of the community or research setting in question....The process of ethnographic research demands that the researcher learn how it is to “not be Me” in a physical setting that is “Not mine” with rules and guidance for verbal and physical behavior that “I don’t know” and may understand only in a limited way.”*  
(1999, toolkit 2, P71-72)

I belong to the middle class and my residence is in West Amman. This makes it possible for me to visit and interview women in the area. Finding interviewees outside these neighborhoods and visiting them at home would have been difficult. East Amman is a difficult environment full of social pressure in which it would have been hard to build trust and establish rapport with women.

The fact that the fieldwork took place in Amman raises two important points:

1-Amman is my own local community, so doing my fieldwork there could have created several other difficulties such as limiting access to potential interviewees from family and friends’ networks. This might have caused embarrassment and reservations, and can be a factor that limits the genuineness, spontaneity and validity of the researcher as well as the interviewee, and eventually have an effect on the answers given. An exception of that was Maya. I was confident that both of us would be so open talking to each other and that would not be a barrier<sup>12</sup>. LeCompte and Schensul (1999, P193) said:

*“The boundaries between friendship and professional research conduct become blurred. In such situations, ethical conduct in research interacts with ethical conduct in the context of personal relationships.”*

2-Amman is a small city, hence people can easily get to know each other, and as I was expecting, people were alert if by any chance during the interviews we discovered that any of us knows the other’s family network, and hence how this might affect our

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<sup>12</sup> Maya is a family friend, my relation with her started years back. Accordingly I had enough background about how open she is, how she takes things seriously when it comes to work, and how to separate between personal relationship from professional ones.

discussions of sensitive topics. In a couple of cases during the interviews, we got to know that we have common networks, either through work, friends, or family members. The interviewees got slightly reserved and made statements in a joking manner indicating their worries from that. Eventhough I talked about informed consent, provided the hard copy of it, and assured the privacy and secrecy of their identities, I still owed them the choice of deleting the recording and forgetting about the whole interview if they felt pressurized, which I did and assured several times during the interview and after finishing it, making sure that it went well without causing them any pressure.

Along the same lines of the idea that Amman is a small city, which results in more intense interactions, another major challenge is the sensitivity of the topic itself as well as my lack of prior field research experience. The researcher's experience and skills are essential in giving confidence, trust and motivation for people to open up.

#### 2-4-2 Fieldwork Context:

Once I arrived, I started to arrange for my work plan. Many issues that I encountered during my fieldwork, I had to make ambiguous decisions, then consider how this situation would affect my research. For example, the difficulty of my first interviews, the fear of failure, the need to absorb people's emotional reactions and confidences were all difficulties with which I had to cope and resolve.

Some of these situations are related to choosing my informants, like including some or excluding others and why. Some of the contacts I had were non-Jordanians (e.g. Iraqis) who have been living in Jordan for about twenty years, or even Jordanians who lived their lives for along time out of Jordan and came back 15 years ago. It was hard for me to decide whom to include in my sample and how these differences will affect my results. I

often resorted to my key informant and advisor. They explained for me the flexibility of the fieldwork according to the field's requirements and environment on that specific time. They also added that I need to be aware of the justifications of this flexibility and be sensitive to the interpretations that might arise.

The point of confusion emerged from the fact that the Jordanian population has different background and lived in different cultures as clarified earlier. Meanwhile they have been living in Jordan now for minimum 15 years, which means that they are both affecting and affected by the Jordanian society. I decided then not to include the non-Jordanian people because in this case not only the factor of living abroad that counts but there can be several variances due to the different origins. While in the case of the Jordanians who lived abroad, it is different; and that what the interview showed later on in Maya's situation as her father still holds the Palestinian Jordanian traditions and values tightly. The time factor was a major concern for me that stood as both a challenge and a limitation of the study. I started my fieldwork the third week of December 2009. My fieldwork lasted until the end of January 2010. The fact that I did it in Jordan, limited in a way the flexibility of the time needed for my fieldwork as I had to be focused and consistent in my appointments, in writing down fieldwork reflections and diaries, and doing initial analysis on a daily basis.

I expected to have some difficulty reaching interviewees during Christmas and New Year vacations, especially Christian people. To avoid that, I spent much time scheduling my interviews in advance to make sure that the interviewees will be available to come and avoid placing undue pressure on them to participate in the interview and accommodate my tight schedule. I started with the Muslim women who represented the

majority and I waited for the Christians until they went back to their regular working life after their vacations.

Building trust with the interviewed women was a major challenge, but one which I overcame. This is because of two reasons. First, because of my stay in Egypt for my studies I could not meet my informants earlier or break the ice in preceding meetings. The average length of my interviews was around two hours during which I had to make participants feel comfortable and allowing them the space to open up. Second, building trust was challenging because the questions I asked included intimate experiences, emotions and personal family stories that are usually not shared with strangers; this also varied according to the personalities of the interviewees, how much they were willing to open up, how comfortable they felt with the researcher, as well as their enthusiasm to talk about their lives.

Usually the first part of my questions that talked about family and social life used to take the longest time. People got into it, started talking about many things, and sometimes went off topic. Realistically speaking, this was also a useful thing even though it resulted in much harder time in the process of gathering knowledge and analysis. Most of my informants were interested in the topic and the questions. They were passionate to talk although the passion had to do more with a desperate need to speak out, and to discuss both positive and negative experiences, as well as the need for acknowledgment of the Never-Married in the society.

Most of them commented that in my research, I was raising questions that they have not thought of, and did not have time to think about in their daily lives. These questions created and gave them an opportunity to talk about things that they do not talk about.

Dalia and Alia were excited about the interviews, both expressed this excitement by informing their friends that they were selected as participants. Dalia said jokingly and maybe after 15 minutes of the interview: *“I have to pay you by the end of this session...I feel myself in therapy.”* Then by the end of it she commented: *“Now I guess you have to pay me... you know a lot now about me so I have to kill you after we finish...”*

This passion did not apply to all my interviewees equally. Few of them were indifferent, accepting to be participants out of social courtesy towards the people they know. All these reactions affected me personally; I felt chemistry with several people I talked to, as if I have known them for a long time. They boosted my positive energy with their simplicity and peacefulness, while other interviewees were draining, as some were difficult to talk and unwilling to open up. In ethnographic toolkit 2(P 76), LeCompte and Schensul wrote an interesting unexpected statement, which is good to be considered while going through the frustrations of fieldwork:

*“Members of the group who are more reserved, ask more probing questions about the researcher’s work, and are initially more reluctant to offer information may later become important members of the researcher’s network of key informants”*

My informants’ passion and attitude during the interviews stand as an indicator for certain points of analysis. Some of them were clear about their issues, others were confused, and a third group were having peace with themselves, or even can not see a point of bringing it up.

The sensitivity of the topic was clear in several situations that I faced during my fieldwork. Since I met the NGO founder, and later I met my first interviewee, they both told me that it will not be easy to find a sample and to be open about it as it is a sensitive

bold topic and questions. “This is a challenge” Shereen said. And this turned out to be part of my worry but did not linger as I completed my second interview that went well. Another thing that caught my attention related to how some interviewees got more comfortable when they knew that I myself am a Never-Married. Accordingly, I have made it a point, to mention this piece of information on the phone when asking for appointments. Some times I used to say jokingly and to break the ice: “I am a Never-Married myself but unfortunately I can’t interview myself. Maybe we can switch roles after the interview.”

As an indication of the sensitivity of the topic for some people, I faced several cases through my snowballing, in which people either avoided asking the nominated interviewee to conduct this interview, or the Never-Married refused completely to be interviewed, like what happened with Mona’s friend who is a teacher in her early forties. Her parents passed away few years ago and she lives alone. Mona said:

*“She refused completely to be part of the informants, she got so tensed and I think I triggered the core of her issues... She always had issues with her status of not being married since she was 30 years old...can you imagine?! Last summer her sister got married, the normal thing is that she must be happy for her sister...but she got crazy about it...yes...to that extent...”*

I planned to conduct interviews with parents of the Never-Married to introduce different voices and views to my research, but I could not do that except for one family that I met informally and for a short time. The reason is that several parents refused to be interviewed which reflected their unwillingness to intrude onto their discomfort zone and the distress and concern they have towards this issue.

Including focus groups was one of my intentions that I could not achieve due to the time limitations and to the lack of practicality and difficulty of getting this group on a specific time.

A continuous process of decision making is required from the researcher throughout the fieldwork. I had to be very careful in the terms used in my interviews, in the way of writing my notes, in the ways and the how of questioning to be able to get the best results and concluding the ways in which single people substitute for the lack of marriage in their lives. All this implied many ethical questions.

I made sure to refer to my advisor and key informant as experienced people in the field to consult them in the detailed process of the interviews and writing notes.

As mentioned, the ethical issue is a major challenge that emerges from this type of qualitative research. Moreover, trying to achieve certain levels of objectivity as well as neutralizing personal judgment and perspective were essential issues to be considered in all the steps of research starting with my questions, writing down the notes and needed translations from Arabic to English. In all this process, I had in mind the possibility of being influenced by my own experience as a Never-Married. It is difficult for the researcher to separate one's own experience, one's self and one's professional conduct when it comes to informants' similar experiences. To be realistic, I have to say that as a human, there were moments when I thought about my own experience, how does it differ or resemble others', but I think as I started my first interview, I became aware of this point, I was alert in the following interviews about it, and I was even more alert about when to add my comments or share similar experiences with my informants in ways that do not influence their answers.

Doing fieldwork for this topic involved touching upon taboos, private family aspects, and intimate feelings of individuals and their families, this meant the necessity of knowing the limits of the interviewer, the ways in which the questions were asked and how to turn the interviewees into participants. Furthermore, the fact that this research is done for academic purposes, but not for an official institution that could take actions could have been disincentive for the people to participate.

## 2-5 Recruiting Informants:

### 2-5-1 Snowballing:

Dr. Amal Sabbagh introduced me to three women whom she knew; I continued my initial snowballing process from my own network including family and friends as each one provided me with some nominees to be interviewed and giving me the general socio-economic backgrounds of them to assure the suitability to their inclusion in my sample. Most interviewees indicated that they have friends who would not mind to be interviewed. Nevertheless, I chose not to have my informants from the small groups of friends, as they are expected -and from what I have heard from my interviewees- to have more or less the same socioeconomic and cultural ideas, ways of thinking, and contextual factors which will not represent the West Ammani society. Due to that I selected my interviewees from different sources to reflect the diversity that prevails in Amman. My second key informant, who is the NGO founder, was not able to introduce me to possible participants. She mostly deals with people from East Amman, who are ashamed of being Never-Married, and shying away from being spotted and labeled.

I met my informants in different locations, as the priority for me was to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable. Accordingly, I always gave them the choice of where to meet. Some preferred meeting in their homes, while others preferred cafés. When given

the choice myself, I tried to choose cozy and quiet settings that were not too far from where they live or work so as not to burden them with a long commute. I met women who had flexible working hours in the morning or during the day we could chat in the open air, while I met others who had fixed working hours mostly during the evenings between 6pm to 11 pm.

#### 2-5-2 My Informant's Demographic Profiles:

The detailed specifications of the informants were concerns for me. The sample included eleven Never-Married women whose ages ranged of 32 – 45, three of them are Christians (Ruba, Rawan and Maysam)<sup>13</sup> since they are minorities in Jordan<sup>14</sup>, while the rest are Muslims. Interviewing people from the two main religions in Jordan helped in understanding similarities and differences among the different groups (See Appendix C: Quick guide for the Interviewees profile). In addition, I interviewed two men to unpack possible gender differences. One of them is a 46 years old Muslim who works as a gym manager, and the other is a 42 year old Christian who is a business owner.

According to The Population Reference Bureau, early marriage is not a standard anymore in Arab countries:

*“The average age at marriage for both men and women is generally rising, and more Arab women are staying single longer or not marrying at all. While these trends are part of general global phenomenon, they are also introducing new issues into Arab societies;- issues that can confront deeply rooted cultural values and raise legal and policy challenges.” (Rashad, Osman & Fahimi 2005, 1)*

The young Arab single women now are marrying in their late twenties or early thirties, while the majority of people worldwide marry and start their families at the age of

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<sup>13</sup> Fictitious names are used for all my informants to protect their identities.

<sup>14</sup> 6% of the population according to the country profile 2008 published by Naseej, a community youth development initiative

twenties (Rashad, Osman & Fahimi 2005). As I mentioned in Chapter One, in Jordan the SMAM is 29 years for males, while it is 27 years for females.

Based on these statistics and definitions, I decided to have the female interviewees falling under the age group of 30-45<sup>15</sup>, and 40 -50 years for men, as this age is the one at which alarm bells start to ring. The goal of having this age span is to study the lives of the Never-Married singles of this generation in particular. The inclusion of participants from older age groups might lead to studying a different generation with different historical, socioeconomic and demographic factors (A clear example of that is the life of Dr. Amal Sabbagh, my first key informant as mentioned earlier in this chapter).

As I planned to examine the social inclusion or exclusion of the Never-Married professional women, I tried to vary the careers and professional backgrounds of my informants. They are all university graduates from good universities outside Jordan; some of them have even Masters Degrees. Heba was the only one who is not a university graduate and holds a certificate in secretarial work. All informants are working and professional women, they started their careers once they graduated. Work for educated women in Amman is an unquestionable or negotiated factor with their parents, it only becomes negotiable when the woman gets married or in some cases if the type of work challenges predominant cultural norms. Accordingly, all my interviewees had the chance to choose their careers except for Shereen as her father pushed her to have her Masters in the field of Gender Studies. Meanwhile my informants went through previous relationships parallel to their work but the relationships have not worked. This indicates that career was not a barrier for them against marriage. The different careers they practice as well as the change to different fields give indications that my informants have the

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<sup>15</sup> It happened coincidentally that the youngest of the participants is 32 but not for an intentional purpose.

space to choose career life including the jobs that might be considered less traditional. Two of my interviewees are currently switching their careers; Alia is a pharmacist who used to work in a medicine company, and is establishing her own business as a pharmacist. Maya used to work in management, and is moving now to fitness industry. Three work in development projects as either employees or consultants (Shereen, Reem and Ruba). Mona is the head of a kindergarten, Lamis and Dalia work in management, marketing and public relations. Heba retired six months ago from her work in the Royal Hashemite Court. Rawan is a music teacher and Maysam used to be a conference planner but she has not worked for the last three years. It was enriching to see how different professions influence the participants' lives and play vital roles in Never-Married women's lives and status.

The women I talked all live in West Amman<sup>16</sup> and represent mainly the different levels of middle class professional people. They live in the neighborhood of Jabal Amman, Shmeisani, Abdoun, Sweifiyyeh, Der Ghbar, Jubeiha, Gardens St. The only one who lives in East Amman is Dalia, and I decided to include her since all her work and social life is in West Amman. In addition, interviewing Dalia added an important insight for an independent woman who is the only one having full financial responsibility towards her family, is successful in building her career, yet acknowledging having several conflicts with herself that might be affecting her life decisions. All my informants live with their families except for Reem who has a separate apartment in the same building of her family. Meanwhile, almost all of them expressed their preference and passion to live separately. They referred to their inability to take this step mainly to the parents' refusal

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<sup>16</sup> Except for Dalia who spends all her day-work and social life- there but goes back at night to her home in East Amman.

of this idea, while Lamis claimed financial limitations as the main reason. Others like Rawan and Shereen wanted to avoid the hidden responsibilities of living alone as well as the feeling of loneliness. There was also diversity in the ranking of the interviewees among family members, family backgrounds, parents' professions, number of siblings married and unmarried, and the family members who are living with them.

This diversity of family backgrounds was not an intentional one as this could have made finding the samples harder and limiting. Meanwhile, it was vital to include this diversity as it reflects the complexity of situation, yet provides a context for interpreting and analyzing my findings.

#### 2-5-3 My Informant's Social Profiles:

My informants are part of the socioeconomic context as well as the social space formulating West Amman. The confusion of West Amman's identity, the mix between modernity and preserved cultural norms are reflected on the informants' identities, perceptions, aims and goals, as well as the paths they walk through their lives.

Being victims of the society is not an exiting thought among interviewees, they do not consider themselves as victims nor do they see themselves obliged to take the paths they are in. My informants are mostly secular, their decisions and behaviors are not dependent on their religious believes except for two of them. Religion is an inner self relation with God but for them, it should not be a way of controlling one's life or influencing decisions. They have choices in life, conscious and unconscious ones. Some of these choices are made out of real beliefs, while others are practiced when social and cultural norms weigh more than the true individual convictions on the scale of choices and values

my informants have. In this last case, they are not always aware if their beliefs conform to cultural norms or not, which results in self-confusion.

Higher education and professional life are core aspects for the women I interviewed; they find fulfillment in this educational professional part since it provides them with independence, self-esteem and financial security. Given that the income the Never-Married women earn is still not enough to secure them in the future; their families support them financially when needed. In addition they live with their families, passionate to get their independence but not able to have it mainly because of social and familial pressure. The interviewees have a strong connected life with their families; their behaviors are tied to both the family's acceptance in most cases (mainly the male family figures) as well as the emotional fulfillment role they play towards them, particularly mothers. In other words, family constitutes both a burden and a source of protection, security and emotional fulfillment. Furthermore the Never-Married are having independence but still incomplete one that has limitations. On the other hand, my male informants experience full independence and identity clarity in different life aspects. The striking common feature among these women is their perception of marriage, its meaning and the effect of gender roles on the marriage institution as well as the patriarchal structure. Even though the Never-Married are still not rejecting marriage, they are not striving for it.

In a study done in 1999-2000, Jordanians were found to hold a great value of the marriage institution, but only 42% support the wife's obedience to her husband (Moghadam 2003). In my research though, my informants convey different perception that is less patriarchal and less dependent on marriage as a life pillar.

Marriage for some is a settlement and a way of fulfilling motherhood. However, for most of the women whom I interviewed, marriage is about companionship, it is a choice but not a fate. Marriage also is neither a “wifery image” nor social and religious duty. They turn down limiting the notion of marriage to a contract or a bargain for allowing sexual relations and having children.

What constitutes a factor of the Never-Married women’s perceptions is the negative reading of marriage experiences whether from family or married friends, in addition to the noticeable increase in divorce rates in Jordan. Marriage is seen as a failure whether it happened in its traditional way or as a result of love relationship. It is seen as a main factor of limiting personal freedom and space and a way of restricting a married person from living their lives by revolving it around the husband, kids and home requirements. The mentioned notions did not stop my informants from getting involved in relationships. Yet, two of them failed to continue with it due to religious differences, while the others expressed their frustrations from the continuity of patriarchal mentalities among Jordanian men as well as the continuity of cultural norms particularly in gendered relationships such as dating experiences that are unacceptable for women even from the men they date.

Conclusion:

To understand the reason of choosing West Amman as a location for my research, I explained the social space of West Amman and how it is reflected in my informants’ identities and confusions between modernization and cultural norms. In addition, several fieldwork challenges were clarified and the effect of being a native researcher was presented.

The methodologies and tools that I used for my qualitative research fieldwork were: snowballing tool to find my interviewees through my key informants, family, and friends. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews along with observations for my interviewees. This choice of methods succeeded in yielding evidence of how marriage and single-hood affect and shape identity, social roles and daily lives. In the next chapters, I will be presenting how I was able to get answers for my thesis questions by using these tools and portray the narratives of the Never-Married women regarding three main dimensions: family commitments and decision making, their professional life, and their narratives about selves and identities.

### Chapter 3: Family Commitments and Decision Making:

This chapter provides an analysis of the choices Never-Married women make, or have the space to make. It describes their autonomy, independence on certain life decisions, constraints that limit their choices, and the navigation tools they use. The chapter also portrays the hidden roles and commitments of the Never-Married as caretakers, and describes how these roles influence their lives in different ways. Explanations are given about the two aspects of choices and responsibilities, through narrations of family relationship dynamics that discuss patriarchal changes, and/or reaffirmations of fathers and brother's roles and rights, and gendered roles; in addition to the informants' understandings to the meanings of inclusion and exclusion in family spheres.

Accordingly, I start with describing the different family relations, and the Never-Married commitments as that helps the reader to understand the space of choice, autonomy, and constraints my informants are entitled to or lack.

#### 3-1 Family Relationships

##### 3-1-1 Patriarchy and the Father Figure:

*“Dad is not only the father figure but he is the “king figure”,* Maya said laughing.

Several scholars discussed families in the Arab world in general, and Jordan in particular (e.g. Shoup 2007, Yount and Rashad 2008, Khuraysat 1990, Joseph 1999). They discussed power relationships, father's role, patriarchy, males' guardianship over females, and brother sister relationships and connectivity. Several factors play a role in constraining the Never-Married women's choices and autonomy (such as their role as caretakers, financial constraints, and patriarchy). Patriarchy stands as one of the major constraints. It is defined in the Arab context as “The prioritizing of the rights of males

and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion” (Joseph 1996).

Shoup talked about patriarchal families in Jordan, he explained that even though there have been clear changes in people’s attitudes such as to dating, Jordan is still a strongly conservative society in which the family is the foundation. Shoup characterizes Jordanian society as patriarchal, where the senior male is the head of the family as well as the public decision-maker, while the woman can have an important say only in private spheres. In general, males have superior status over all women and females at home including elder sisters (Shoup 2007). Similarly, Yount and Rashad discuss the power relationships inside families, explaining that the guardianship of a woman is always given to the father and brothers until she is married, upon which guardianship is transferred to the husband (Yount and Rashad 2008). In addition, the role of the family male figure, whether a brother or a father does not stop here, but also includes providing the security and protection for the females. This contributes to what Joseph refers to as the “Reproduction of Arab Patriarchy”. It does not refer only to structural and cultural aspects of family relationships, but also to the psychodynamic processes and connectivity in Arab families (Joseph 1999). Naila Kabeer noted “Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honor through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection- and dependence- of women” (qtd. in Moghadam 2003, 122). Moghadam linked the notion of patriarchy to class emergence and economy, considering that the emergence of the modern middle class within capitalist economy would seem weakening to the patriarchal order, and produces demographic changes including marriage patterns (Moghadam2003). The emergence of

the middle class is also compounded by women's work and independence, which minimizes the gap between public and private spheres. Not only is patriarchy related to the economy, but also to politics since patriarchal kinship is central in political system (Joseph 1996). Women have lacked "political personhood" in their countries and have become more dependent on men, who are seen as "individuals" due to their direct relation with the state (ed. Joseph 2000, 23,159).

During my fieldwork, I was interested in exploring the politics of choice, in other words, the tactics deployed, and navigation tools used by both Never-Married themselves as well as their families, to expand or minimize the space of choice the former can have. I explored thus how these characteristics of Arab and Jordanian families influenced the lives of the Never-Married, and how the Never-Married bargained their independence and selves in these changing societies.

From the interviews conducted, I argue that the patriarchal family pattern still exists. Eventhough the direct impression that things have changed is dominant, when trying to figure out the dynamics taking place inside the families at different levels of decision making, I realized that the father figure clearly predominates in most families as the one making the final major decisions. As a form of justification, several of the women interviewed used expressions like: "Dad knows better" or "We like the way he thinks". Almost all the participants had the space to discuss many family decisions. However, when it came to major issues or disagreements, they reported that it is the father who made the final decision, even without consulting other family members, while the mother was hardly mentioned in talking about major decisions.

Patriarchal hierarchies and double standards practiced at home are reflections of wider social practices that take place in the society as a whole. A brief example is found in what Samer (one of my male interviewees) said at the end of our interview. We asked for the bill in the café we were sitting in. I told him: “It’s my treat”, but he insisted on paying saying:

*“No way, no way, in this part, I am the man and you’re the woman”* (laughing).

The example translates reassurance of the masculinity of the male figure, as the one having the power and guardianship over females. Even though patriarchy in this example might not be very clear in its common concept, the situation represents a different way of reconstructing patriarchy, guardianship, and the power used to maintain division between public and private spheres. Samer presents an example of few social groups that exist in Amman. These groups cannot get the point of discussing the Never-Married situation because they do not have major life pressures; they seem to have less patriarchal structures and corresponding gendered roles within their circles. Yet, Samer’s very last comment about paying the bill is a gesture that reflects his notion of masculinity. It also indicates the privilege of men as men rather than men as fathers. In other words, not only the male family figure has the privilege, but also the man outside the kinship circle, the male figure who dominates the public spheres. This affirms what Joseph talked about regarding patriarchy as part of the psyche of the self, which is a profound reason for its endurance (Joseph 1996). Gendered cultural norms are very strong in Jordan, the man is dominant while the woman is subordinate. The man is the master of the family who has full control over its members especially the females while “Womanhood is often equated with motherhood” according to Asma Bishara (cited Knudsen 2006, 192).

Talking specifically about the Never-Married women and their role in family decisions; like other family members, they are involved, and their views are taken seriously in most cases except for the ones who happen to be either the youngest, or the ones who have “extreme views” as they described their ways of thinking. In this case, their opinions are still heard, but are the last members consulted in the family.

### 3-1-2 Brothers and Sisters:

The brother/sister relationship also seems to be changing. Brothers are becoming more supportive and understanding of their sisters’ agency, but their superiority over the female figure is still visible, particularly in being the source of protection and security. When I discussed security, safety, and harassment issues with the participants, they all assured that harassment in public spaces has to do with being a woman. Two women said spontaneously: “*We really feel safe in public spheres because we know if anything happens we can call brothers, male cousins and friends*”. This is what was mentioned by both Ruba and Alia.

That again confirms what Shoup argued, namely that the female not only counts on the protection of the father or brothers even after marriage, but also male family members, whether the father or brothers are considered responsible and protectors for mothers, sisters and daughters equally. Furthermore, the harassment or indirect messages conveyed to Never-Married women at work relate to patriarchy, in addition to the vulnerability of the Never-Married who has no man to protect her.

Joseph described the brother-sister relationship in Arab families as the connective love/power dynamic. Women are taught to accept male power and control in the name of love. This does not apply only to sisters but also to mothers and younger siblings. This

relation is characterized by the fluidity and the “Need of the other to complete the sense of selfhood” (Joseph 1999, 113-121). Joseph discussed the need of the Arab woman for the male figure in her family to satisfy her need for security and protection. She also referred to the “fluidity” of the brother sister relationship that is characterized by the woman’s acceptance of her brother’s intrusion in her life in the name of love. In spite of the Never-Married’s beliefs in their need of changing patriarchal structure as ideal notions, moving this idea into practice differs when it is related to many family issues and strongly connected with their love of their family. This is the symbolic power that can be described as the “family love syndrome”. It keeps women in the ropes of patriarchy perceiving themselves as secondary and less autonomous and tied with prescribed gender roles

The patriarchal structure then is still strongly influencing most but not all family relations. Maya described the cultural perceptions in two words saying “It is the Man’s world” that is still controlling the beliefs of both men and women. Nevertheless, Maya described her brother as supportive, unlike how he was when he was young. She said:

*“ My brother who is in his forties is so supportive now but earlier he was very strict with us; this was because he was scared from dad as he was considered responsible for us me & my sister as a brother”*

While Maya was more aware of meanings of patriarchy and gendered roles inside her family, Rawan was trapped into the symbolic power. Rawan’s relationship with her brother is different from Maya’s. Even though Rawan’s brother uses flexible lenient ways in dealing with her, he sends her not only implicit messages about acceptable behavior, but also that reflect the authority of the male figure he has at home. This stands as a clear example of love/ power relationship that I explained earlier. Rawan elaborated:

*“ We all discuss and agree but sometimes mom & my brother take the final decisions ,me and my sister do not object because we trust them, my brother is understanding , he always agrees and says to me: “Do whatever you want as long as it is something not problematic that can cause us bad reputation.. he is more of a Western mentality”*

Shereen, who is 33 years old, talked about her brothers and the ways in which they reflect their masculinity. She explained:

*”Even though my brothers don’t impose things on me but I can see it in them when they say I’ am a man and you are a girl”*

In another direction, Reem Awad explained the difference she sees in her family compared to other Arab families. She said with clear assertiveness, that eventhough her brother is becoming more religious, he never interfered or pressured her in anyway. In Reem’s family, patriarchy seems to be less a dominant factor. The different beliefs of family members do not constitute an element influencing their gendered relations starting with her dad and transferred to other family members; hence, she is more autonomous and her individualistic self is more fulfilled. This was clear when she explained her passion, practice, and studies in dancing while her grandfather is a religious figure “*Sheikh*” in Jerusalem and her brother tends to be more religious. She talked about that saying:

*“We don’t have these typical rules of the “father” which I used to see at friends’ homes. My dad is not a typical Arab man, he’s progressive. My grandpa is a “Sheikh” & his granddaughter dances??!!!; this says a lot... regardless of the differences in our beliefs as a family but everyone has his own choices & way of life & all are supportive of each other”*

### 3-1-3 Mother/Daughter Relationship:

From the fieldwork done, my informants talked very little about their mothers. The relationship of mother-daughter reflects another kind of power/ love relationship. It is seen through the attachment of mothers and is reflected more in the role of the Never-

Married woman as a caretaker. It represents the most powerful factor in the family love syndrome due to the emotional tie and the strong bond of this relationship. Yet, mothers are not mentioned as often or as influential as the father or in some cases as brothers. This explains and confirms the strong patriarchal structures in Jordanian families. The father in the first place then brothers, are the family members seen to have a say in all family decisions, they are the only ones mentioned as sources of security and the ones who set rules and restrictions in the house. Even when the family is less patriarchal and gendered such as the case with Reem, this is because the father applies this structure while the mothers are not mentioned to begin with as influential members and almost equal to their daughters in all cases. This image of family and marriage is reflected in Never-Married perceptions and influence their decision of getting married or their criteria of the “right person.”

The interviews present the reality of conflicts and struggles in West Amman. Even though the participants are intellectuals and some of whom lived abroad for years, they still face a lot of pressures stemming from cultural norms and relating to ideas concerning “woman”, her “security”, and her “weakness”. This is also passed on to the Never-Married women some of them are aware of these tensions more than others. The two men I interviewed, Bassam and Samer, do not have similar problems regarding patriarchy and security, as men are known to be strong and brave. When I asked Ruba if she ever had to say that she is married in any situation that she went through, I aimed to know if Never-Married feel secure being single, and to what extent she can be assertive in stating her status. Ruba’s answer went to a different direction, in addition to her feeling of insecurity as a single woman, her answer revealed the amount of pressure the Never-Married

experience in Amman. Ruba needed to use the excuse of marriage while she was out of Jordan as a security factor. In that case, the amount of family and society's pressure and mentoring were lifted up. Yet, if the same situation could have happened in Amman, she would not be using the same excuse of being married as she mentioned. This is not because she feels more secure in Jordan, but because the rumor of "Ruba is married" will easily spread all over Jordan and can reach her circle of relatives and friends.

Accordingly, Ruba's reputation and social status among the Ammani society overweighs her need for security. Ruba said:

*"In Lebanon, a guy in a coffee shop tried to approach me. I told him I was married.... kind of protection ...but I don't think I can do it in Amman.. Because it will be soon a rumor that is spread all over Jordan that you're really married"*

### 3-2 The Knotty Silenced Area: Financial and Non-Financial Commitments:

There are two types of family commitments in the lives of the Never-Married women: the financial and the emotional. The former is the more acknowledged factor in newspapers. *Alliwa*' Newspaper on 23 June 2009 and *Aldostour* newspaper on 7 March 2008 wrote about this. It is mentioned that family circumstances can play a major role in the girl's delayed marriages as she prefers to support her family, which results in missing marriage opportunities. A public relations officer of an NGO said: "this NGO tries to raise the consciousness of the religious sanction. This is specifically intended for fathers who stop their daughters from marriage to maintain control over their work and support". She added that the Muslim should understand that God detests the person who does not obey him- referring to the father (Cited: *Alliwa*' Newspaper, 23 June 2009).

### 3-2-1 Financial Commitments:

Financial commitment is not a clear factor in my interviewees' lives. They all have full control over their "daily financial" income, most of them do not have any financial commitments towards their families since they represent the middle class. On the contrary, their families support them if needed. The exception to this case was Dalia, who is 33 years old and works in public relations as an account director. Dalia lives at home with her mom and Huda, a younger sister – 6 years younger than her-, who is also working now. Their parents separated during their childhood and their dad passed away later. Dalia talked in length about her role as full financial supporter of the family, and she explained as well that her role extends to include the emotional caretaking and results in intensive attachment issues with her mother. In the name of love she commits herself to her family as the only financial and non-financial supporter while her sister also works. Eventhough she is taking the "father's role" in supporting the family, her privacy is missing due to the mother-daughter relationship in this case. When it comes to family decisions, they all discuss it but Dalia takes the lead, while when it comes to her own decisions, she is still pressured by her mother's love She said trying to justify it:

*"As for the personal decisions.. She took a deep breath and said: there are aspects that parents don't understand..& they have this part of the "possessive love": I want my daughter beside me..& if I finish at 6pm..Then why you're late? as you just heard now before we start the interview. But I think I'ts out of love.. I think all parents have this love. They'd love to keep their children beside them."*

Eventhough she did not express very openly the amount of pressure she is having regarding the relation with her mom, from several narratives and incidents, the situation is causing her major attachment problems, and high commitment as a caretaker. As she

mentioned later she thinks more before taking any step in her life whether related to marriage or other decisions:

*“I am responsible for my family from now till forever... there is a superpower that created me to take care of my mom” .*

Dalia expressed the difficulty she has due to the double standards of her mother. While Dalia is taking the “father’s role” at home, she is still treated as a kid. The parents always see their children as kids regardless of age, sex, and social status. However, she clarified that this situation can cause more pressure for the Never-Married, since they stay at home and live with their parents. Dalia commented on the conflict she has and the importance of confrontation with parents in some cases searching for privacy. She reflected a self confusion between what she wants as a person, naturalizing her love and responsibility to her mother and family that limits her choices of life, and the culture of Jordanian society.

Dalia said how she would like to see herself doing:

*“Ok...I love you guys ... however ...I’d love to have my privacy”... “I think this is out of the parents understanding or perception”. It is because of the A’eb I don’t do it; not the A’eb because of the society but because mom doesn’t accept it, it is part of the culture to say: crazy people, why does she live alone? I don’t have the courage to do that now...mom is extremely attached to me, sometimes my mobility & social life can affect her and make her feel lonely... but you need to be alone as well”*

This expression that Dalia used the “father’s role” reassures the patriarchal reproduction through the pre-tailored gender roles and to the extent these roles are subconsciously embedded as Shoup mentioned, the children (males and females) are brought up to know and learn their tailored roles. The man is the one who is responsible in the public domain, including income, and the woman is responsible for managing household needs, such as shopping, cleaning, cooking, child rearing, and being a good wife and mother.

Dalia's case raises questions of patriarchal and gendered role limits and the differences when they are practiced by men or women in cases which the man is absent from home. The example of Dalia highlights incomplete patriarchal role that is transferred to her. But the question is: What are the limits and why they are set? Is it the possessive love to kids as Dalia explained? Or is it the society's resistance to stretch the limits of patriarchy and include Never-Married women within? Are these processes weakening patriarchal structures?

### 3-2-2 Non Financial Commitments:

Even though the role of a caretaker and the emotional supporter is highly noticed in the lives of Never-Married women, it is part of the black box and a knotty area that is ignored, silenced and less acknowledged in the press and media. This is due to the assumptions that Never-Married do not have family responsibilities. The informants talked about their major roles, and how their professional and social lives are affected by these roles. Partially, they showed in other locations their satisfaction with the role of the "good daughter" that comes naturally with the division of obligations and commitments for members of the family. This is because the Never-Married are the ones living at home with their parents and presumed not to have other life needs and roles, while married siblings live separately and have their own lives. Not all the interviewees were able to state that they do not like the excessive load of responsibilities they have, but in many occasions, they tried to give excuses to their feelings thereby, justifying the symbolic power used by their families. In all cases, this issue in particular is not subject to change by Never-Married women since it is perceived as part of their love to their families.

Emotional support and the care taking responsibility is a common factor among all Never-Married women. They have this role in varied degrees according to the status and circumstances of the family. Meanwhile, and regardless of the amount of this commitment, it occupies tangible parts of their daily lives, and is delegated to them more than other members of the family. The case is different with men participants. Bassam does not have any role or commitments towards his mom, while Samer plays this role with his parents, but he does not feel pressured since no restrictions or constraints are imposed on him from his parents. Hence, women's roles in private spheres continue to be prioritized over other roles. Never-Married women are either taken for granted by their families, or used as an entertainment tool for parents. Ruba expressed this, emphasizing her mother's attachment to her. The two roles result in limiting Never-Married's freedom, privacy, social interaction, and job and life opportunities. The entertaining tool emerges in the form of mothers' attachments to their Never-Married daughters. Ruba expressed her frustrations clearly saying: *"Mom is more emotionally attached and has more expectations... you're a toy for them."*

Heba, talked about her commitments at home, being trapped with her family obligation out of the love she has to her family, as well as her belief in her obligation. Unlike Ruba, Heba expresses fewer frustrations from her obligations towards her family eventhough she has a Never-Married brother at home, but does not share this responsibility with her.

She said:

*"I have obligations towards the family. I do all housework .My mom has a lot of medical issues. I am her emotional support & these commitments are my responsibility more than anyone else.. all my brothers feel comfortable when I am at home because my mom is in good hands ...But it is also a pressure; I cancel my plans a lot for that...by the way, I also raised my nephew because his mom got divorced then remarried...so I was having full responsibility even financially"*

I again got curious to know more and I asked her, was it that you volunteered for this commitment for your nephew or was it imposed on you?

Heba said: *“Well its neither this nor that...it just came this way...but with all that I still feel I have my privacy and independence a lot...”*

The presumed image that Never-Married Woman does not have her own acknowledged family obligations, yet she has more free time, is not only limited to private spheres but exceeds that to the public ones such as the family business, like in the case of Ruba. Ruba owns a business with her brother. He counts on this idea of her free time, as she said *“They expect me to be there more because I am not married but they have their families, they take you for granted”*

In spite of that scenario, the Never-Married women do not try to react or make a change. They themselves justify the prioritization of other married members' responsibilities towards their own family, and they believe it is meant to happen for them not to get married to have the role of a caretaker for either old parent, sick ones, or even the nephews and nieces. *“God wanted that for me to take care of my parents,”* as Mona said. Ruba explained when I asked her about her role in the society: *“It is supporting my family, siblings and friends”*.

Maysam is another woman who talked about her major responsibility at home due to her dad's severe illness. Since I started the interview with her, I felt she was very conscious and alert not to reveal her identity. She did not mention her full name and she felt hesitant and sensitive revealing her age. Maysam lives with her parents after she came back from the US three years ago to take care of her parents. She is an event planner; worked earlier in one of the big hotels in Jordan, then she pursued her Masters in the US where she had several good job opportunities. She has a married brother and a married sister who live

abroad. Yet, she was the one who had to come back to Jordan three years ago, leaving behind her career and future opportunities to be the one taking care of her very sick dad. Maysam provides an example of an independent woman being the caretaker of her old parents and the one responsible about her home, meanwhile she lacks privacy and independence due to unemployment, lack of choice and family obligations. Maysam said she has been unable to find a good job that fits her circumstances. Nevertheless, she feels it's a fate that can not be escaped and the idea of looking for alternative solutions is unquestioned or even thought of. She argued expressing her frustrations:

*“I manage financial and non financial matters at home,, but I have high pressure, I am not satisfied, I have no independence and privacy ...my social life is limited because of my responsibilities, but I can't leave dad alone at all..Its sickness...this is a responsibility that you can't escape, you don't like everything in life but it comes with it ...”*

In many aspects discussed during the interviews, family expectations, commitments and obligations are not thrown on the Never-Married shoulders because of the direct correlation with their status as Never-Married, but it relates more to how the family is constructed and how they perceive women in general. It is the naturalization of the different roles family members have. In other words, the reason that the Never-Married have higher commitments towards their family more than other members does not go back specifically to the idea of not being married, but to the presumptions that the Never-Married does not have other acknowledged commitments as wives or mothers, being the one staying with her family.

In other cases where the parents are either separated or the father is deceased, dynamics take place in an opposite direction as the Never-Married becomes fully responsible for

the family adopting the “Father’s role”, yet, they do not have full independence since they make their life decisions as Never-Married according to familial priorities.

This kind of the familial selves is central in Never-Married women’s life and in some way can be either an influence or a result that might affect or get affected by certain decisions, and minimizes the emotional free space that Never-Married can have. This idea clarifies what Suad Joseph wrote. Joseph (1999) mentioned the different kinds of selves: individualistic, familial, and spiritual. In Arab cultures, the familial selves have the first priority in people’s lives and identities while the individualistic one comes last. This is not the case in the West, where the individualistic self comes first. According to those priorities for Arab people, and to the ways in which connectivity with the self and others are built, many norms, values, ethos are embedded in them and serve as constraints to the frames of lives of Never-Married women. A clear example of that is the role of the Arab woman as a self-scarifying daughter and wife.

As noticed earlier, there are bigger responsibilities thrown on the shoulders of Never-Married women as members of their families. These responsibilities reflect to a certain extent Never-Married’s personal choice regardless of the overload they carry. This was a pattern and a common factor with the unmarried women in Palestine according to the studies done by Sa’ar (2004) and Johnson, characterizing it as a familiar pattern, and articulating a combination of different feelings of insecurity, resentment, love and the fear of loss ( Hilal & Johnson 2007). Patriarchy in that sense is still strong, it articulates different levels of its notion that does not only include the authority and priority of men over women, but also of married women over Never-Married women.

### 3-3 Choice, Decisions and the Tabooed Boundaries:

One of the very interesting people I interviewed was Heba Bader a 41 year old woman. Heba took a one-year secretarial certificate, worked in several places, and resigned six months ago. I visited her at her home in Jabal Amman, where she lives with her mom and Never-Married brother; her dad passed away three years ago. As I entered the small open yard into their place, Heba greeted me. Then I found an old woman who said: “*A’ahla wsahla yakhalti...Keefek ya habibti?*” (Hi Auntie, how are you doing darling?) Heba told me that this was her mom. I went to her to shake her hands; she was wearing a “*Dishdash*” (a wide long traditional dress), and sitting in the sun taking out the *Molokhiyya* leaves. I greeted her back and I went inside their old home. I came into the reception room; the furniture and the decoration looked very simple and traditional. The home was very clean. Lemon fragrance oil smelled all over the place very refreshing and relaxing. I complimented them about it and Heba told me that she loves to do this all over the home. I felt so comfortable there, very friendly simple people.

Towards the end of my visit, Heba’s mom joined us for a short time. I asked her what she thought about her daughter being unmarried. She answered in a manner that seemed very genuine:

*“I have nothing to do with this issue, it’s her life and her choice...then she continued: I can’t understand why the people interfere in others’ issues.....so what if they are not married? Why are the people so nosy...?”*

Then she started her prayers for me:

*“Allah yerda a’leki ya khalti weywafkek w yustor a’aleki.. W yorzokek be’ebn elhalal elli yestahalek....”* Means: “*God bless you; bring you success and marriage with a good guy who deserves you*”

She repeated that several times till Heba told her: “*Mom...Dana is 39 now*”.....

Then, the mother changed her tone immediately and commented:

*“God Bless you auntie...there is a saying in our homeland that says: “e’eesheh haniyyeh wala zeejeh radiyyeh”... meaning: having peaceful happy life is better than having a bad marriage...”*

The short informal talk with the mother illustrated several important ideas. First, she expressed a core belief in marriage as a natural step that has to be taken. This led her to draw on the very common prayers that describe the woman’s image in both Palestinian and Jordanian culture in their different roles. They reflect the importance of marriage and in other contexts the image of spinsterhood<sup>17</sup>. The conversation also reflected societal assumptions about age limitations for getting married as well as specific understanding of the term “Never-Married”.

Deriving from the importance of marriage in the culture, the sensitivity of the status of not being married is revealed in how the mother dismisses society’s intrusions as a way of protecting her daughter. Her use of traditional sayings, changing her tone, is an attempt to surround the Never-Married with emotional protection from being hurt.

On the other hand, the mother’s flexibility and her affirmation of her daughter’s choice is a sign of the role gender plays in this family. From Heba’s narrations, her mother as well as her siblings- single and married males and females- provide a space of a choice and mirror less degree of patriarchal behaviors, particularly regarding the marriage issue.

Regarding the personal decisions of the Never-Married women, there are some variations depending on the types of decisions made. I realized that they are given the space of having the final say- regardless of using indirect pressures. While in others, there are red lines that cannot be crossed (migration, living in a separate residence, and dating). Most decisions do not have fine lines; there are limits in most cases. The choices of education

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<sup>17</sup> For further examples of the cultural sayings about women: see Awawdah, Amal 2000 *Surat elmara’a fi Aladab elshaa’bi Alurdoni wa alfalastini.: Amthal, Aghani ,Hikayat*

and type of work are more flexible than other decisions and have fewer restrictions. Yet, the choice of whether to work or not after graduation is not negotiated; it is considered a natural step to be taken. Marriage is a choice, but when it comes to marrying from different religion then it turns to be a taboo. Another example is having mixed groups of male and female friends, it is a choice, but the moment socializing starts to include dating, many restrictions are set in place. A third example is having a separate residence; my informants cannot have the choice in this matter except if the residence is in the same building of their families where it becomes more acceptable. All the mentioned examples present the confusion the Never-Married have in the ways their families deal with them, being dependent and independent depends on the patriarchal structures, gendered roles and the predefined notions of masculinity and femininity. Thus Never-Married in their family circle are bonded to the power/ love relationship and conform to patriarchal structures of the family. They are included within the frames of gendered roles.

Ruba gave an example about the constraints she has in dealing with her financial assets. She said that her dad takes decisions on all financial issues and real estate whether it is related to the family as a whole or her specifically, and whether they like it or not: *“It happened earlier that I wanted to sell real estate and he refused, I don’t discuss it because he gave it to me and because also he knows more..It’s his work...”*

The previous example illustrates the limited access Ruba has to her assets and confirms the notions of patriarchy, limited space for women’s autonomy. It also raises the question whether this limited access is related to her as a woman or to her status of not being married as she is denied to have the title of “Woman” in the society. In both cases, and as

a working woman, the question of autonomy and independence imposes itself in which confusion and the gap between ideas and practices is wide.

One choice that is not discussed in this chapter, yet presented as part of the self and identity (Chapter 5) is sexuality. The reason why I discussed it in chapter five is: First, because sexuality is considered a big taboo (outside marriage context) that cannot be discussed or negotiated with parents; accordingly, it is excluded from the circle of choices. Second, due to this situation, sexuality talks more to my informants' selves and identities, they have intense struggles and tensions about their beliefs in it, about bringing their ideals into practices and have it in their circle of choice. Further discussion is provided in Chapter 5.

### 3-3-1 Autonomous choices

As mentioned above, education and work are not negotiable factors to the informants, while this is not the case for other types of decisions, as presented below.

#### 3-3-1-1 Marriage:

As for marriage decisions, parents do not generally pressurize the Never-Married women for marriage or even for the choice of a specific person even though the interviewees expect that their parents would like to see them married mainly for security. The pressure in some cases comes indirectly as parents keep embedding the importance of marriage as something that cannot be escaped. Marriage in Jordan has symbolic and emotional value, not only economic, political and social one. Jordanian mothers start at an early age imagining the boy as a groom and the girl as beautiful bride. Almost from the moment of birth, traditional songs for babies confirm this idea. In social visits between families, it is

also very common to use these expressions as prayers for marriage: “Wishing you to see your kids as brides and grooms” (Khuraysat 1990, 41, 51).

Marriage in Arab and Muslim countries is considered a rite of passage. Most of the Muslim countries have strong cultural norms derived from Islamic heritage, which considers marriage a religious duty that completes half of the religion. According to Khuraysat (1990), the masculinity of a man is not completed without marriage and having kids. In addition, a single man is less respected in the society considering him as not normal. These ideas –as Khuraysat noted-were originated from Qur’anic text interpretations that talk about marriage and consider the sexual urge as an instinct that cannot be satisfied except by marriage. Therefore, marriage is considered by religious figures as an obligation (Khuraysat 1990, 17-23)

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they faced few direct pressures for marriage and curfews from the extended family like uncles for example. This happened with Heba who said that her uncle is very conservative and considers her odd. However, this has not affected her as her parents imposed the respect of the family and did not allow relatives to interfere in family issues. Dalia talked similarly about her paternal uncle who does not have great relationship with them since her dad passed away but allowed himself to ask her about it, with a serious upset tone blaming her of having unrealistic expectations. In some families, the context in which marriage exists is still fixated in specific meanings and patriarchal structures. Yet, Never-Married moved beyond these perceptions to include companionship as main goal from marriage, thus attempting to challenge patriarchal structures.

Parents use indirect ways of pressurizing and imparting their own beliefs to their children, trying to maintain the same strict gendered norms and patriarchal structures of marriage. An example of that is Shereen whose father always says “*AlZawaj Sharron la bodda menho*” means that marriage is an inevitable evil.

In some cases, women try to deny marriage opportunities to avoid pressures. Mona, a 41 year old teacher is a veiled Muslim woman whose father is a doctor and her mother is a nurse from Sweden. She explained how she denies marriage opportunities without informing her parents. This is due to the strong patriarchal domination of her father who has the upper hand in family and marriage decisions. Nevertheless, Mona justifies her father’s authority and accepts it. She said:

*“With age, I am scared from making marriage decisions, and dad is more experienced in life, he knows better and has an unbelievable vision about people”..*

One of the obvious reasons for not pressuring the Never-Married woman is the patriarchal norm that does not allow women to initiate a relationship. This idea was clear when I interviewed one of the men who is Christian. He indicated that his main problem and the only pressure he has is the pressure on him to get married since he’s the one as a man who must take this step.

Men have clear limitless rights to practice their autonomy and independence without the confusion between ideals and practices, thus, clearer identities. Bassam Jamal is a 42 years old Christian who lives at home with his mother. He works in real estate. His dad and brother passed away a long time ago, and his sister lives abroad. Bassam is self-employed, and has his own graphic design company besides his real estate business.

Bassam's narratives represent men's rights and commitments towards their families. Yet, his relation with his mother is not patriarchal since they both have the same space for their own life and decision making. He said that his mother usually makes home decisions, but he and his sister approve. He respects her right to decide as long as she does not interfere in his own issues. By that, and as a man, he has a right to set his own limits and fully practice his independence and autonomy without getting pressured by the family love syndrome that is common among Never-Married women. He elaborated that he lived separately for a while but returned back trying to escape the hidden responsibilities of having his own place. In addition, no restrictions regarding dating or social life, and no commitments are expected from him

*“The only pressure I have on marriage. I understand from where they are coming especially that I am the only boy..& they want to see the continuity of my father.. it is out of love & I respect this.... it is a taboo not to get married or have kids ,if you don't do that it's like a sin and the next question will be: what's wrong with you?”*

In a way that is not very common, parents avoid putting this pressure due to their fear of being blamed in case of failed relationship. A few parents believe that not getting married at all is better than having a bad or failed marriage.

Religion does not play a role in the status of Never-Married women as no major differences exist between Muslim and Christian interviewees. Cultural norms are the dominant factor influencing their families, except for the idea of the mixed religion marriages about which both Muslims and Christians agree. Examples of that are Heba who is a Muslim and wanted to get married to a Christian man, and Ruba who is Christian and had the opposite problem. Both Ruba and Heba question why when it comes to marriage from other religions, their families become so religious, while this is

not the case in other life aspects. This idea of mixed religion marriages becomes a red line that cannot be crossed, but explains why the two interviewees are Never-Married.

### 3-3-1-2 Curfews:

As for the curfew, it is never a problem for the men informants but rarely a problem for women as long as the parents are informed about the outing and the time of going back home. According to Ruba, their questioning is to assure security. An interesting example of deep embedded cultural norms is what Maya goes through. Maya is 40 years old. Her family lived in Brazil and later in the US before returning to Jordan. Her father as she mentioned laughing is “*the king figure*”. He makes the major decisions and can not be questioned. He is very strict in curfews, with having male friends, dating, living abroad; all these domains are not negotiable. She related that to the culture of “*eib*” (shame) in Arab societies that relate this notion to women in particular.

According to Maya the independence and privacy that she has is very limited.

Nevertheless, she is adapting and finding her ways to live but still experiences her fears from her dad. She says:

*“I sneak out when I go out at night and come back without him feeling it”.. and added “ I take decisions but I am scared to announce them to my dad-e.g. if I want to go for vacation; I stay scared for two or three weeks before I have the courage to tell him, it is very difficult and it has to be the right moment to do so otherwise you’ll get a big NO”*

Different dimensions in Maya’s life cause her confusion about her gendered role, independence and life choices. Although they lived in the West for most of their lives, got her education and worked in her professional careers, beside her interest in dancing and fitness industry, her father strictly controls the women of the family including the

mother. As he lived in the West, he kept his old conservative cultural norms concerning patriarchy, femininity and the power of the society as a way of protecting his identity as well as embracing them to his daughters. These concepts stayed with him after he returned to Jordan, and became reaffirmed by the strict prevailing patriarchal structures.

### 3-3-2 Choice Constraints:

#### 3-3-2-1 Migration:

Since Amman is a small society, people are more aware of their behaviors and decisions, and tend to conform to cultural norms of the Jordanian society. Some interviewees expressed their disagreement with the way their parents make decisions and interfere in their lives describing their parents to have double standards for the same aspects in and outside Amman. This applies to the women of the family while the men are free to choose. The parents' flexibility towards Never-Married daughters and approval of certain decisions is a little more lenient when they are out of Jordan; in this case they have less pressure from their own society and culture. Examples of these difficult decisions are those related to migration. In some cases, the Never-Married women get job offers abroad or would like to immigrate looking for better future. The parents do not accept this idea, even though most of the informants had their graduate studies abroad, which sometimes result in missing good job opportunities and possible better life, freedom, and independence. I argue that parent's position regarding studying abroad reflects the value of education as the most important one, while when it comes to immigration for work, it is something that can be substituted (and is preferred) in Jordan for the purpose of keeping women under the patriarchal gendered norms, maintain their role as caretakers as well as providing them with suitable marriage opportunities.

### 3-3-2-2 Separate Residence

A major constraint on the Never-Married women's choice is the residence. Many of them would like to have a separate residence from their parents, but as the female interviewees mentioned, this idea is totally rejected because of the stigma that comes with this from West Amman's society, while the two men have no problem in living alone. This stigma-according to me- fights the notion of women's full independence and the gradual change in gendered roles that influence patriarchy and marriage institutions.

Unlike the case of Palestine, and according to the study done by Johnson about unmarried women in which the majority of her informants lived alone "*although several had spent a long proportion of their adult life living with an elderly mother, an unmarried sister or other family members*" (ed. Hilal & Johnson 2007, 50). When I asked whether the Never-Married women are living with their families, I got several responses saying "unfortunately yes".

This idea is totally rejected from the families in almost all circles I interviewed, but it is a desperate need for most of the participants who want to live alone. Full independence is a value that my interviewees believe in but unable to practice in real life. It is more accepted though to have a separate floor or apartment in the same building where the parents are living. This does not give the Never-Married complete privacy and independence as mentioned by Reem, but partial solution regarding their financial situation. Eventhough Reem lives in a much less a patriarchal family relative to other Arab families, she still feels trapped by the power/ love relationship in her family. Due to the good relations with her parents, she finds it harder to disappoint them. She added:

*"I think this link continues to be there with our parents...am not sure if we can ever get rid of it."*

Maysam who was desperate to live alone was a little different in her answer. Maysam and Reem both had the passion to live independently, Reem can not take the step due to the love she has to her parents but she is still fighting for it gradually. On the other hand, Maysam lives in a more patriarchal family; she is more alert about the society's acceptance and meanwhile not putting an effort to fight it. Maysam told me:

*“Actually I wish so but the whole point in traditions for my parents, what will people say if I do that?”*

Ruba who was also desperate to live alone commented on this part. She shares with Maysam the common factor of the family pressure and the society, in addition to the double standards of her parents dealing with her and her male brother. She expressed her confusion in defining her home. Ruba said:

*“My private & Independent life is zero in certain things...have it and don't have it... it is my home but also not mine... I wish I can have my own place..I prefer not to be in Jordan.. ....to get out of Amman & to get out from all pressures around....But parents don't accept it..& also my financial independence is not great...”*

On the other hand, I talked to Dina<sup>18</sup> as a single woman who has been living alone for 8 years, since she got divorced and did not have good relations with her family since then. Eventhough she is divorced, she went through the experience of finding an apartment long time ago. She described this experience and the difficulty she had then from the owners and how she sees the change happening not only in her experience but also in her single women friends. This narration reflects another part that is an exceptional one among my other informants. When Dina searched for an apartment back in 1994, the

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<sup>18</sup> I used the example of Dina even though she is divorced only to shed the light on another experience of living alone, and not only her but also all her single women friends live alone in the same building she is in. Interviewing her was totally not intentional as she did not state that she is divorced except in the middle of the interview.

owner kicked her out three times before he agreed to the rent since she was a single woman while today four of her single female friends live alone in the same building. The owner today finds it a normal thing to have more single women in his building. Then Dina clarified how parents reject this idea of independence and how they plant the fear in their daughters, the security notion of the female and the need for protection. She said:

*“The parents always put you in a shape where you fear to do this...its not safe...when I lived alone no one annoyed me at all .. but the fear they wash our brains with is bigger than the truth, you know? Parents always put exaggerated fear in you”*

Two of the Never-Married interviewees (one male and one female) represent the minority among the participants in their life style, beliefs, and practices. They live in their own bubbles and closed communities; within their communities (family, friends, relatives, work, and social circles) they do not face any pressure. The idea of not being married is just normal for them and their male and female friends. They have full freedom to live alone and to have sexual relations; there are no limits or taboos to stand as barriers and no fixed limits exist. This bubble they live in does not allow them to see the need for discussing or searching the status of Never-Married. Amman for them is limited to the community they live in. Another group of Never-Married (three) expressed their preference for staying with their families as they do not like to live alone and at the same time they do not like to have extra major home responsibilities including the financial one. Living with their families reduces the burden of taking care of the home, cleaning, cooking, etc. In addition, it saves them the money that they would have spent in the rent of a separate apartment since they would be fully responsible for themselves. This group does not have high family pressures, strict patriarchy and gendered role. Accordingly, the return Never-Married get from staying with their families is better than living alone.

### 3-3-2-3 Dating Vs. Mixed Groups:

Dating and inviting male friends are other aspects that I looked at in the lives of Never-Married. These aspects represent part of the Never-Married's need to privacy, space and freedom, yet their families still pull the strings strongly. In general it is not seen as a problem to have mixed groups of male, female friends but the problem arises in dating; when it occurs, dating is either totally unacceptable or can be accepted with certain limitations such as the number of outings or the time span, then "action" should be taken. In one of the cases an interesting and different comment was made. Rawan stated that there are no restrictions from her mom about dating when she was younger, but she said jokingly: *"At this stage parents push for it, mom wishes that to happen and she keeps waiting for it hoping it happens one day, but parents can't control you at this age"*. The variation among interviewees regarding the choice of dating can be explained through connecting it to patriarchal relations inside families as well as the tensions around the meaning of woman's body, her virginity, and the family honor. Even when traditional patriarchy is less practiced at home, the modern notion of it still dominates. The symbolic power is the alternative shape of traditional patriarchy, and the male figure is the one who at the end sets its limits. Heba started her conversation proudly saying that her mom and the family are very understanding even though her mom is illiterate. She added clarifying that she has flexibility of going out, mingling with male and female friends, travel, wearing the outfit she wants. Nevertheless, when I asked her if she has the option to date; her answer explained the authority of the male brothers even over the mother's. She answered:

*“Well dating is hard ... to go & tell them that I have a boyfriend...doesn't look so good ...maybe I can go tell mom that I got to know someone & I want to know him.....but for a brother, its hard to go & tell him such a thing honestly...”*

The case is easier for the men; it is not a problem at all for them or their families to date or have a girlfriend. This was the case for both Bassam –who was a little conservative about his private issues- and Samer who was very open in his interview clarifying that he has a girlfriend and he made his choice of not getting married as the case with his 11 male and female friends. Samer added:

*“For me now its hard to include someone else in my life ..I don't want anybody to come & control my life... its over; I reached 46 years old now.. I knew a girl & I have had her in my life 11 years...but the relation didn't work to reach the stage of marriage..& we decided to stay like this. ...but to get married now? No way”*

The question of dating presented more the conservative side of the Jordanian society. In addition, it reflects the double standards in gender issues; while dating is a normal thing for men, it is still questionable for women. Khuraysat (1990) wrote about the influence the double standards might have on females. Khuraysat said that one of the essential issues of girls' upbringing is the tight supervision and control over their behaviors. Words as the common belief of “*eib*” (shame) is embedded in the society and causes feelings of discrimination between males and females as well as psychological burdens and discriminations that can result from repression of feelings. Women have to obey families, fathers, and other male family members blindly.

#### 3-4 Class, Gender Roles and Personality:

Looking at the whole picture, I explored how class differences influence identity, satisfaction, double standards, and gender roles. A Country Gender Assessment of the Economic Advancement of women in Jordan 2005 by the World Bank presented a study

about gender stereotyping in Jordan in textbooks and teachers attitudes. The study shows that “The higher the class, the higher the use of gender language and roles, and the greater the references to male roles” (World Bank 2005, 28)

According to the interviews I conducted, it was difficult to trace the link and come up with conclusions. According to the ethnographic narratives that are presented through this research, no clear pattern can reflect the correlation between class and identity, or explains this ambiguity. This can also translate what Shoup described as the striking feature about Amman, which is the association between modernity of life and the conservative cultural values of the nation (Shoup 2007).

In some interviews, I was able to sense the importance for Never-Married to have strong personality and character, to be able to navigate their own life and put limit to the society. Rawan talked about this part in a genuine and assertive manner; she said that because she is shrewd, people do not dare to interfere or make direct comments on her life and status. Nevertheless, the family structure is core in their lives. Even if the Never-Married has a strong and shrewd character, family consideration still takes over.

While this is the case for the participants, the ethnography that was written by Saba Mahmood in Egypt about mosque movements, supports this notion. Mahmood had a chat with a Never-Married woman who indicated that the Never-Married woman should have strong personality to help her ignore the society’s perception of having a defect. Adding to that, she reported the necessity for the Never-Married to be patient and believe that it is God who wanted this for her. It is about learning patience as a virtue in both happy & difficult times (Mahmood 2005, 169-170).

This conclusion that I obtained from the interviews completes the picture that was mentioned earlier by Shoup. West Amman's middle class society adheres more to cultural norms; it is conservative more than religious, but I disagree partially with what Khuraysat explained about the religious importance of marriage in Jordan. This research shows that the vitality of cultural norms is a major factor that exceeds religion. These norms have major effects on the Never-Married women's perceptions of the meaning and feeling of inclusion among their families, yet the politics of choice and independence they deploy and the naturalization of modern patriarchal structures practiced.

As this chapter presented the image of Never-Married women living with their families as both dependent and independent, the following chapter portrays their professional life, and examines their dependence and independence within this domain.

#### Chapter Four: Professional Life of the Never-Married:

This chapter explores the professional life of Never-Married women, what work means for them, how it shapes main parts of their identities, the impact of work on the lives of the Never-Married, and how work influences and is influenced by different life aspects of the Never-Married (The patriarchal structure, their independence, commitments, caretaking, social life and the choices they make). Through the narratives of the participants, a clear vision came into sight about the space for choice that the Never-Married have as well as their independence and autonomy in professional domain. In addition their narratives explain whether they experience dependence and independence at working spheres in the same way they do at home, and whether their working spheres intersect or conflict with familial lives and influence their choices.

The participants are mostly professional women who work in different fields. All of them started their careers upon finishing their education (all of them have university degrees except for Heba, who has a certificate in secretarial work). Seven women out of eleven were at the top of their careers, two (Maya and Alia) were in-between jobs, and two (Heba and Maysam) quit work to take care of their parents.

Shereen got her masters degree in Gender Studies and is working in development projects. Reem used to be a dancer but for financial security had to make it secondary to her main career in development projects. Ruba is a free lance consultant for development projects in Yemen, which requires her to travel between Yemen and Jordan. In addition, she supervises a candle shop, which she owns with her brother.

Mona is the head of a kindergarten and conducts private tutoring after her working hours. Dalia was originally a vet but changed her line of work and now is the account's director

of public relations in a reputable company. Lamis is a marketing director in one of the big companies. Rawan has changed her profession several times. She first worked in one of the big hotels until she had to quit for political reasons. She then tried to have her own business that failed in the end. Now she is a music teacher in a music institute.

Alia is in between jobs. She is a pharmacist and used to work for a drug manufacturing company. A year ago she quit the company, to work on opening her own pharmacy.

Maya worked for years in managerial positions in development projects. She has since acknowledged her passion for dancing and fitness and has decided to make the shift in her career. Now she is in between jobs, building her future opportunities by taking miscellaneous courses abroad in dancing and fitness.

Work is a major aspect of my informants' lives. Similar to education, it is seen by both the Never-Married and their families as a source of security. I read that and link it to the Palestinians' concerns since they lost their land. And thus education and work became the second security and defensive tools in their lives. Another remarkable aspect in the Never-Married women's professional profiles is the space they have to choose, change their careers or have their own business, whether the choice is related to their passion or to providing them with good opportunities and regardless of the cultural perspectives on certain professions such as dancing.

The case was different for both Heba and Maysam who quit their jobs to take care of their parents. Eventhough they had the choice in education and work, the familial obligations afterwards overweighed their choices to more limited ones. Maysam and Rawan used to work in the same hotel in mid-nineties until Maysam quit her job and went to continue her master's degree in the US. When she finished her studies, she had

several job opportunities in the US but she had to return to Jordan to take care of her sick father. That was three years ago. Since she moved back to Jordan, care taking has been her main responsibility and she has been unable to find a good job that does not contradict with her family commitments. Heba used to work in the Hashemite Royal Court, but she retired from work to take care of her sick mother. However, she says she wants to go back to work because she can not stay at home for the rest of her life.

The two men Samer and Bassam hold higher managerial positions. Samer worked in the business his father owns and now he works as a gym manager. Bassam also is self-employed, owning a graphic design company.

#### 4-1 Is it a Choice?

Work for the Never-Married informants has always been necessary. This aspect cannot be ignored or negotiated from the moment they get their university degree. Within the different levels of the middle class and circles of my informants, work is not an issue to be discussed within the family; it is a natural result of university studies. It only becomes an issue for the groom when the woman wants to get married.

All the participants agreed that the differences are very clear between married and Never-Married regarding income, the amount of money they spend and save, and the way of their spending and saving. Married people have more family commitments and their considerations and channels of spending are different. While Never-Married participants in this study have full control over their money, except for the Never-Married women who carry financial responsibilities towards their families. In this case, Never-Married women can have more financial burdens than married women.

In general, the Never-Married women are seen as trying to save money for future security while trying to enjoy their life. Yet, at an earlier age they were more focused on spending money on their social lives and fun, specially since their salaries were low as new graduates and their parents were supportive in that sense. The case is different with married women, as my informants stated, the huge family commitments for home and kids limits the money spent for self-enjoyment, rather married women try to balance their budget and money to meet the children's needs.

When my informants first worked after graduating, they aimed at utilizing their degree and build professional as well as personal experiences. They convey the image of the successful professional working women as the ideal. Meanwhile it was not the only target of their lives as they had parallel personal and social lives. Their work goals started to change. As they reached their late twenties and early thirties, and parallel to their passion of being professional autonomous women, they had in their minds the importance of future financial security considering their status being unmarried.

There were different views about the importance of financial security for the Never-Married and how this is reflected in their work life. Some women believe that work is more important for them than it is for the married women due to the fact that work is the only source of finance. Due to that, they dismiss the choice of not working. Although my participants have supportive families who are capable and willing of supporting their Never-Married daughters in need (e.g. Reem: her father bought her a car and paid for an apartment), this factor is not stated in the accounts of my informants regarding future financial security since this is not part of parental obligations. In addition, the informants are aware of the realities of life and death. They sometimes think about the future when

their parents will pass away. At that time, they will be left alone and have to be the ones supporting themselves. Siblings are also seen to support each other, but the difficulties of life and responsibilities can always be an obstacle to this support. Due to that, my informants experience more independence in their professional lives while still perceiving marriage as a patriarchal institution in which the man is the one responsible for home's income while the married woman's work is her choice but not an obligation as Rawan commented.

Some interviewees had a different perspective. They looked at it differently because the Never-Married do not have the responsibilities of home and kids, so they can easily move from one job to another or can even stay without work for a certain period, while married women do not have the freedom of this choice. In that sense, Never-Married women are more independent and autonomous than the married women. A few of them, like Dalia, while thinking out loud, acknowledged that work is vital for both married and Never-Married as marriage doesn't necessarily provide financial security.

#### 4-2 Work and Family limitations: Culture and Caretaking:

In research conducted by Linda McDowell (1999, 128) several participants talked about the unseen black box of married women's domestic work and child care both being unpaid and at the same time limiting the amount and effort put forth toward professional life. In that sense, McDowell's research failed to consider the situation of Never-Married women and their care taking roles and responsibilities towards their families. In my research, the Never-Married informants are affected by their role in care taking in three ways that are parallel to the wives. First, the Never-Married quit their work to take care of their parents (e.g. Heba). Second, they forego job opportunities and living aboard for

caretaking commitments (e.g. Maysam). The third is the difficulty working women have in finding balance between their work and care taking responsibilities. Both sides of work and family assume that Never-Married women have no other commitments. There is a clear ignorance of their own space whether from the family's side or work that leaves Never-Married women in an ambiguous position (explanations are given in section 4-3). In the case of Heba, she was responsible for caretaking eventhough her Never-Married brother lives with them in addition to her other married male and female siblings. This confirms the patriarchal family structures as well as presumed gendered roles of women in private spheres.

Regardless of how important work is for the Never-Married women, their families can be limiting in some cases and this can be a reason for missing a good opportunity that can open a new horizon for a different life. An example of this is Maysam, who missed numerous job opportunities abroad because her parents do not allow her to live abroad. Two clear factors were identified from the interviews I conducted. One is the conservative cultural norms especially the patriarchal structure of the families. In this scenario, the parents prevent their Never-Married daughters from living and working abroad even if they did so earlier for education or other reasons. At the same time, it is acceptable for their sons to live abroad, which is mostly due to the perceptions concerning women, and the numerous "dos" and "don'ts" associated with norms. In some cases, the parents' refusal can be a result of strong attachment issues especially from the mother who may want her daughter to be beside her all her life.

The second factor is related to the Never-Married Women's additional commitments toward their parents that are on a higher level than other married siblings. This can result

when aging or ill parents take on the Never-Married women as their caretakers. This role is either expected of them as they are assumed to have fewer commitments. And in that sense patriarchy is practiced on a deeper level among married family members towards unmarried women family members. Or they themselves chose to play this role due to their own belief in the obligation they feel towards their families. Maysam's case presents a clear instance because she was the one who moved back to Jordan to take this responsibility for her family, while her married male and female siblings still live abroad and are not asked to share the care taking responsibilities.

All these consequences on Never-Married's women's lives do not exist in the lives of the Never-Married men informants. The role of caretaking is not part of their responsibilities according to Bassam and the notion of living abroad is not an issue for them. Samer was a little different as he has a role as an emotional supporter to his parents, yet this is practiced by Samer himself as a choice without being obliged as part of his responsibility. In addition, no expectations from his parents limit his social and professional life. In other words, the strings are not pulled in the case of Never-Married men.

#### 4-3 Meanings of Inclusion and Exclusion in Professional life

In this section I will present the different forms of inclusion and exclusion that the Never-Married experience in their professional lives and their understanding of the two key terms "inclusion" and "exclusion" in this social circle. This includes the arguments regarding financial issues, responsibilities, workload and expectations at work spheres. Other vital aspects discussed in this part are relations with female co-workers and harassment that Never-Married women face.

In earlier studies done in Jordan and Palestine, both Ka'war and Amalia Sa'ar (2004) argued that unmarried single women have better work opportunities than married women and that employers prefer the former due to the presumed assumption that the unmarried have few domestic responsibilities. Ka'war added that single women in the labor force are in higher percentages than married women, while the opposite is true for men. This raised the questions whether singles have more work opportunities in Amman and how can this be related to the increasing age of marriage (Hannoyer 1996, 235-238; Sa'ar 2004).

According to the Multi Purpose Household Survey in 2003, marriage causes female labor participation to drop: "Marriage has a (statistically) positive effect on male labor force participation, but not on female participation. The reason for these differences is different norms and expectations governing the places and types of work that can be considered 'acceptable' according to sex, age and social status" (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Department of Statistics, 2003, 118).

In the interviews I wanted to investigate how different professions are sensitive to the needs of Never-Married women. In other words, I wanted to find out if Never-Married women are included or excluded in working spheres, if they have equal opportunities, what obstacles and spaces do they carve out as married women whether financially, socially, professionally, or security-wise.

#### 4-3-1 Financial Inclusion / Exclusion:

The interviews have not shown financial differences between married and Never-Married women concerning the amounts of basic salaries given as this is related to the personality, quality of work, and on employees' professional qualifications regardless of

their status. Nevertheless, Dalia considers in her calculations another layer of financial income which is the income tax. Even though tax percentages were not brought up from other informants, the case was different for Dalia. She explained the difference it makes for her and the importance it has for her since she supports her family. The difference of taxes paid between married and Never-Married are based on the assumption that Never-Married women do not have financial responsibilities. The case of Dalia clarifies that this assumption is not true in all cases and that Never-Married are left out from some financial privileges given to married women.

Samer, one of the male interviewees, works as a gym manager. As a manager who is familiar with the system of bonuses and taxes, he affirmed that the married employees get marriage and child bonuses while this does not apply to Never-Married. This does not apply only to the gym he manages, but also to all work in Jordan as this is part of the labor laws that also confirms the state's ignorance to the Never-Married's case. On the other hand, Samer did not agree with the idea of having higher expectations from the Never-Married employees regarding working hours.

Some indicated that differences between men and women have nothing to do with marital status, such as the case in the hotel sector as Rawan and Maysam referred to the patriarchal structure that differentiates between men and women in general.

The Never-Married women may be more hireable in some sectors than married women. This is because hiring them can be a way of minimizing the cost of benefits given by the organization to married women. Mona who is 41 years old and works as a head of a kindergarten in a good school says about that:

*“The school prefers to hire not married because the latter will not use the benefits of the married couples like the discounts for children education....so it's less cost for them”*

#### 4-3-2 Workload, Responsibilities and Work Expectations:

The same concept of financial inclusion and exclusion is reflected in the possibilities for professional growth. Most of my participants said that they personally did not feel differences at their work places but they believe that the Never-Married are more focused on their work, have different priorities in their lives, and when they look for jobs or careers their concern is how much they can learn, what they can get out of it (e.g. training, workshops...etc). They have more time to develop their skills, while the concerns of married women are mainly the income and privileges that come with the job. One said that because of married women's need of income, they have better motivation to develop in their professional life. Heba talked about a different reason for married women to be less professional. The meaning of marriage is connected tightly to patriarchal structure. She said it is not about the opportunities but about women themselves and the patriarchal structure that influence spouses. It assumes the husband always has to be in a higher ranking position than his wife, while this case does not exist for the Never-Married women's life with their siblings. Heba said:

*“Married woman can also have this growth opportunity but that depends on her husband... usually the men don't like their wives to have better positions at work. so she doesn't try to reach this point..If she wants settlement & not to get divorced”.*

Shereen finds the correlation between marriage and work achievements different from other informants. Referring to her insecurities and her need for stabilization, she indicated that getting married will help her have her own family, companion and kids and stabilize herself. She believes that this can bring her more into work and give her the opportunity to excel. Shereen's comment explains that her parents and siblings do not provide her with stability. She feels there must be a transitional step to be taken in establishing her

own family to feel complete. The importance of the family for her is a stabilizing part of the self that cannot be achieved by some Arab women from within themselves.

An article in *Alghad* newspaper reported two studies conducted in Germany and the US regarding the benefits of marriage in both social and economic situations. The results show that with low incomes, married couples get more motivated to work and put more effort into work, which results in better salaries. For example in Ohio, the income increase of the married women is 16% while it is 8 % for the singles.

In addition, the studies show that the benefits of the marriage status are not confined to direct financial issues, but also being married results for more stability and less poverty. It is concluded that marriages and divorce affect poverty levels and that the percentage of people who are below the poverty line in the US increases by 2.6% due to divorce rates. This shows that married women have better working opportunities with better incomes than unmarried ones. (*Alghad Newspaper* 17 Feb, 2010)

I argue that the studies mentioned ignore gendered patriarchal perspectives in their analysis. Several studies discuss patriarchy at work, which influences wages, positions, access to certain lines of work, as well as security at work place. The wage gap between males and females in almost all sectors in Jordan is large with higher salaries for men (Hannoyer 1996, 240-243). In all Arab countries according to Joseph, men receive better wages, advancement, and positions due to the embedded patriarchal beliefs of men's superiority and the secondary role of women (Joseph 1996). In addition, McDowell explained the status of work worldwide and addressed what is called "Horizontal segregation" as well as "Vertical segregation". The former describes the concentration of women in certain sectors and occupations while the latter describes women in lower

positions than men in occupational hierarchy. This segregation is not according to job characteristics, rather it is about how the job is socially constructed and valued.

Meanwhile studies lack comparisons of men and women doing the same jobs (McDowell 1999, 126-138).

Bassam, one of my male interviewees and a business owner clearly stated that he prefers to recruit Never-Married men than married men. However, in real life he cannot have preferences because the market of the graphics field is limited, making the opportunities for choice much less. He justified this by saying that the Never-Married men are more productive than the married men because they have less issues to worry about and at the same time they are expected to spend longer hours at work.

For Bassam, the gap of productivity is less between married and Never-Married woman since the latter still has to take care of her parents. Bassam said:

*“Never-Married females still say that they have to go home for their parents...etc”* then he continued jokingly: *“But Mama doesn’t want anything from me & Baba doesn’t want anything from me either”*

Bassam’s view reflects the self-perception in Arab families regarding both the patriarchal influence at home as well as how the family overshadows the individual. Accordingly, these familial priorities clearly apply to women in different ways than it applies to men. In spite of Bassam’s perception that Never-Married women are less expected to stay at work for longer hours, women interviewees narrated their experience that assures the opposite view. As Never-Married women, they are expected to spend longer time at work than married women to such an abusive extent. These working hours are additional ones that are not imposed by law as formal required times. Yet, it is expected from Never-Married women as fully independent people who are similar to men. In that sense, it is a

cultural norm that constitutes a pressure and can influence their progress at work.

Maysam expressed her discomfort with this idea saying:

*“The married woman has a” Medical excuse” if we can name it so. She has to go for her kids & she is respected for that, no one talks to her. But if Never married wants to go home then the comment is: Why? What do you need to do at home?!!! They take you for granted”*

A second example is seen in Ruba. Ruba works as a freelance consultant for a company in Yemen in addition to supervising a candle shop that she owns with her brother. This example clarifies that the expectations about Never-Married’s working hours are not only limited to public domain but also when private spheres become part of the public, the same presumptions apply. In addition, it reflects the meanings of inclusion and exclusion at work and the reasons for it. Ruba said:

*“At work you feel more included because you’re single...more involved, you have more time...sometimes this becomes abusive ... this is the case also in the shop that we own.. They take you for granted & expect more form you”*

The two examples confirm two notions: first, hierarchal unequal rights that are given to married in comparison to Never-Married women. Second, the meaning of marriage in the society is associated with and limited to the woman’s role as a mother and a wife, while other roles in life are considered extra or secondary ones.

As for the social relations and interaction, most of the participants indicated no problem with the atmosphere they are involved in, but this was not the case for all of them. Alia said that her experience in the drug company was different and interesting, the employees and even the managers were from different social classes than hers, and they considered a twenty- two year old woman a spinster if she is still single. They always looked at her as someone from a different social class, coming from a wealthy family. Eventually they

thought she has many requirements, and for them this is the reason of her being not married. She does not consider this situation as one of exclusion but rather it exhibits social differences which she overcomes by avoiding confrontations and creating her own atmosphere.

What Alia mentioned gives indications of how she considers herself included or excluded at work and that even though she was labeled a spinster, the dominant factor that affected her inclusion at work was her efficiency, work and qualifications. This complies with the answers the rest of the interviewees who acknowledge unhesitantly that they are included at work, or to be more specific, it is one of the places where they feel most included due to their productivity, commitment, and the extra expectations of time devotion for work. According to these examples and what I have heard from the participants, part of this inclusion/exclusion status at work is related to the type of work and the social class of employees as Rawan relates inclusion to good professional positions. Reem and Maya were more able to separate their own identity as women from work. They analyzed this issue from a business perspective. In certain jobs, managers plan to have men but not women, since the women get married and have children. Accordingly she can not be perfect mother, wife, and working woman at the same time, which is unrealistic as Reem said.

In the same vein Maya expressed the constraints for business owners in hiring females being aware of cultural meanings of marriage:

*“We are women & they value men more.. men have more stability ..they usually take care of the household financially so they don’t leave easily.. but women is a cost for them – business point of view- because it’s the culture here that women get married, have children, get pregnant.. take a lot of leaves & might leave easier...I understand from where they come from..”*

#### 4-3-3 Women-Women Relationships at Work:

One vital factor that was also addressed by different women participants is the labeling of Never-Married at the work place. This tension is more tangible in workplaces where a lot of women exist. The patriarchal pattern is apparent even in women-women relationships, whereby the married woman is considered in a higher ranking position and is entitled to more rights. Several women, such as Alia, argued it is not convenient to be in these atmospheres where there is jealousy and unhealthy women-women relationships.

Reem also elaborated about women-women relationships inside the work place. Her view came from her experience while working at an NGO. Her colleagues were mostly women, and women were always the ones that made other Never-Married woman feel incomplete and underestimated to the extent that they can be “nasty and mean to each other” as she expressed. Nevertheless, Reem believes that the space the woman gives to others as well as the woman’s perception of herself are determining factors of how others perceive and deal with her. It is the way you talk, let others talk to you and give them space. Reem said clarifying how some Never-Married women think to ensure the importance of being independent and positive about oneself:

*“Its all about you.. if I keep thinking that shoot; am not married.. How can I go in this place, all are couples.. All are married...I guess I’ll have panic attack shortly”*

Both Reem and Heba referred to women’s physical attraction to men as a factor that either influence the way men deal with women or as a factor used to interpret good relations between some men and women at work. Particularly in this issue, women are dealt with according to notions of femininity, unlike in other situations when it is expected from Never-Married women to work as men. Reem compared women’s

relations with each other to men-women relationships indicating that men are always attracted to women regardless of social status.

At the same time Heba, who obtained a one-year certificate in secretarial work and then worked for the Royal Court, has different experiences of exclusion that emerge out of jealousy of other women

*“I was excluded...the females around me were all married...they always looked at me in different way out of jealousy...monitor how I dress and behave in certain way..& believe that this is why the manager likes me & always talks to me...but its jealousy”*

#### 4-3- 4 Hovering Men... Around Attractive Vibes

My interviews reported that there were more susceptible cases of sexual harassment among the Never-Married at work because they are single and seen as more vulnerable. As indicated by some women, there are indirect signals or gestures that take place at work, intentionally carried out by both married and unmarried men towards Never-Married women in particular. In this sense, this type of harassment differs from harassment in public spheres as the latter target women in general regardless of their status. The explanation given is that at work this happens usually with colleagues who are familiar with you and your status and who are aware that there is no man in your life. Maysam said that she went through this experience. She was harassed by her manager because she is unmarried. She continues to say that this happened at the hotel she used to work in, which is a large institution and she was firm enough to set limits. However, Maysam explained that the major problem with harassment usually arises in small businesses and offices. The financial situation plays an important role in the ways in which Never-Married women deal with such situations. If the woman needs her work and

does not have an alternative, she might have no choice but to submit to the situation.

Maysam said about one of her colleagues:

*“Sometimes people can’t leave work, I saw something like that at work, harassment and abuse from the manager to his secretary and I was always wondering why she would allow that to happen and doesn’t take an action or leave the place...then I was informed that she can’t quit for financial reasons and responsibilities.”*

Alia also talked about her experiences with men at work because she is unmarried. She confirmed the correlation between harassment and being unmarried since her married female colleagues did not experience similar harassment. She also mentioned another factor that encourages men to harass, which is that she does not wear the veil. This can be seen for some conservative religious people as a sign of openness and vulnerability.

*“Because I am not married, the young married & unmarried men were hovering a lot around me; one of the managers feels that I am free... not veiled...Not married..etc those were attractive vibes for him”*

Dr. Amal, my main key informant, talked about different aspects of the working life for Never-Married singles, how important it is for her in terms of social and financial security, and yet the Never-Married can face more harassment and be less secure. This is due to the feeling that there is no man to defend her. I interpret that as reinforcement of the notions of femininity and masculinity and limiting them to woman’s body and sexuality.

#### 4-4 Gendered Norms and Work:

Respectability and honor are parts of gendered norms that are not limited to private spheres but also include work and public spheres. Some of the main aspects in judging woman’s respectability and honor include staying at work for late hours, interacting with male workers, and the types of work practiced.

The absence of this connectivity between honor and type of work and working hours in my informants' values is mainly related to the class and area of residence. My informants are professional middle class women who live in West Amman. This reflects certain types of professions that to a certain extent do not require working late hours. In addition, the financial status of their parents plays an important role as essential support, which means that Never-Married women are not obliged to work in such types of work. Another reason is that my informants are practicing some independence and autonomy; giving them more confidence and self-esteem that do not come from the society. The last important factor is that my informants are shown to have their parents and family support in different life aspects which gives them more strength to face social pressures and is a priority for them considering the close familial ties they have.

In *Alghad* newspaper 17 February, 2010 an article was written concerning women's work, and it presented interviews with young women and men about women's work. Men stated that if a woman works in a place that requires her to stay late due to financial need, men would judge her disrespectfully considering this is inappropriate behavior, especially in a mixed environment where males and females work together. In addition, in some cases the family reputation would be influenced.

These reflections of young men and women presented an important issue that is taking place in Jordan, but did not really apply to my interviewees, with the exception of Dalia. The article confirms what Dalia stated concerning her previous work in a multinational pharmaceutical company, when she used to travel and would come back very late from work when she lived in East Amman. Nevertheless; she and her mother were not affected much because they do not conform to cultural norms and did not care about what people

would say.

Type of work also can be a factor that influences women and how society looks at them in their social surrounding. There is always a gendered segregation in different types of professions where women are not expected to be seen (As expressed in earlier section by Maya)

According to the World Bank report, female public roles are seen more in teaching, library work, and unskilled labor but are realized in politics, engineering or law.

References of strength, bravery, leadership, and independence are associated with males, while sensitivity, love, and the role of the family care taker are linked with females and private spheres, as mothers, daughters, and wives (World Bank 2005, 28). These references extend to work spheres and job specifications to assure and preserve gendered roles.

Johnson argued in the case of Palestine that work opportunities are not limited to the job market alone but also to what is considered respectable. As an example, teaching is considered an acceptable profession, while secretarial work is not preferred due to the proximity of male staff and fear of harassments (Cornwall and Edwards Ed 2010, 110).

This was not the case with the participants of my research except for two- Dalia and Shereen.

Dalia had a different experience at work -as someone who lives in East Amman- just because she and her sister were young when their parents got divorced. Her mother's work was in East Amman, thus, she rented their home to be close to work. Dalia described her situation between West and East Amman as a cause of self conflict. She portrayed that by saying:

*“I think if somebody draws us a caricature or a picture will find it odd”*

Dalia described her work at that period saying that she used to return home very late (12:00am or 1:00 am), and a car would pick her at 3:00am. This was not acceptable for people, especially those living in East Amman as they are more conservative. Yet she and her mother did not care. The reason for them not to be concerned as I read it is their independence. The mother lived an independent life years ago since she got divorced, had her apartment, worked and raised her daughters. She raised Dalia to be independent as well. Their home did not follow typical patriarchal rules which helped them resist cultural norms in the society and set limits for people around from interfering in their private lives. This caused Dalia to have the conflict that she talked about as she could not mold in the society of East Amman.

Shereen also had a similar story at her job. She works in development projects and travels for fieldwork with her male colleagues, who sometimes are foreigners. An older male colleague advised her not to go around with the stranger (who was Canadian) and followed with assurances that Shereen comes from a good family with a good reputation. These gendered cultural norms still dominate working environments including the ones that advocate for change. The important aspect that influences these women is that they get affected by society and gendered cultural norms tangibly. The more they experience patriarchy at home, the more they get influenced by society's pressures.

Another example of gendered cultural norms is in the type of career. Some women have to change their careers or leave the ones that they like most and are passionate about because these jobs are not well appreciated socially or monetarily. This does not affect the Never-Married alone but also every one who goes through the same experience. The

Never-Married informants I interviewed are concerned about their financial security as they need to secure themselves financially and have more independence. As Reem expressed, she wants to have the choice of retiring when she gets old. Reem had to change her career from dancing to work in NGO's and development since the economic situation for the dancers is a tough one. She elaborated about her fears from the future as a single woman and how important it is to plan for it and to be totally independent and solid. Hence, the financial status was a reason to quit dancing even though it is her passion and her source of balance. Reem provided an example of her injury to explain the importance of financial status of the Never-Married. In her case, her siblings were able to support her while their support is not an obligation that she should count on. She said:

*“I had leg injury.. all my life stopped for 6 months.. my siblings supported me.. So definitely I must think about financials at this age... This strengthens the human in our materialistic life unfortunately”*

Reem's experiences of moving to work in a different field raise a deeper concern about the effects on their lives as humans, how this supports or discourages their passions and creativity, and eventually their productivity in the society. Reem considered this as something that really makes her feel victimized in the society, as she is not able to practice what she loves to do.

#### 4-5 To Marry or to Work?

The link between work and marriage status continue to exist. Assumptions that the successful career woman is a single woman while the married woman is the good wife and mother are dominant. The combination of the two- marriage and successful career- is rarely acknowledged successful. I ask, what constitutes a successful career woman? Is it

her professional position, financial income, independence and self support, work devotion, or being content about her work?

Some women state that some of the interpretations about the reasons of not being married are that they got busy with their work and success.

In Arab countries, women's roles are defined as wives and mothers. Since single women fail to meet these criteria, their position, place and function in society are not delineated and consequently they face dilemmas of financial independence when they do not have a job. However, according to the studies done by Rashad, Osman and Fahimi (2005)

Never-Married women are viewed as successful career women who impose their existence on the society:

*“Increasing numbers of Arab women are single, forcing their societies to grapple with a “new” category of women. ...*

These Never-Married women articulate to other social changes that reduce sex-based segregation and female isolation. The social changes are supported in the emergence of independent middle class women who are no longer dependent economically on family and marriage for survival according to Moghadam (2003, 19).

The society does not only perceive education and work as important factors of women's independence but exceeds that to consider them as a cause for women to stay unmarried. In *Alghad* Newspaper (23 July 2009). an article that cited *AlKhazai* , a sociologist says that the delay of women's marriages and the increasing numbers of Never-Married women is due to changes taking place in society which is turning women's priorities to her education and work as main aspirations. Numbers and statistics published support this idea. According to official statistics, unemployment in Jordan reached 12.2 % in the fourth quarter of 2009. However, difficult economic conditions are not the sole reason for

the increase in unmarried women. Jordan boasts one of the highest rates of female literacy rates in the Middle East at 89 %. Women participating in the labor market stand at 13 %. (*AlShorfa* Newspaper 31 Dec 2009)

Similarly, a working paper by an European training foundation regarding women and work in Jordan states: “*The figures reveal that women between the ages of 20 and 39 years old are most likely to be active, they are most likely to be employed. ...Moreover, the activity rate is twice as high for unmarried or never married women (20.5%) than for those who are or have ever been married (11.8%)*” (Majcher A., Ben Slimène T,O .July 2009).

Supporting the readings of Rashad, Osman & Fahimi, I argue that more research should be done regarding the relation between work and marriage. As the example of Reem shows, being a career woman is not the reason for her not to get married since she can not practice the profession she is passionate about. But it is more about finding the right person who is able to break the rules of patriarchal gendered norms and accept the change in traditional frames of marriage, wifery and motherhood. In other words, it is not about failing to find a partner but it is either choice or “*because of a limited pool of suitable candidates*” (Rashad, Osman & Fahimi 2005)

This raises the question of which comes first: education and work for the increasing numbers of Never-Married women or the need for Never-Married women to have a sustainable, independent identity and life.

The case with my informants does not indicate that the reason for them not getting married are their professional lives. Since they started their careers they have had their

social life parallel to work and went through relationships exploring possible partners.

Many stated they would still explore possible partners if they feel a prospect of success.

#### 4-6 The Value of Work:

A professional life has shown tangible influence on the lives of Never-Married women in different aspects, especially in occupying long hours of their daily life. It's vital role emerges from the need for financial security (especially that they usually do not have access to their own assets), independence, the capability of making certain decisions (e.g. living alone), and the need to fit in and be molded into a particular identity. A

considerable number of the interviewees perceived their role and contribution in society through their work and professional life. There was an obvious trend among the non-working interviewees who were unemployed or changing careers to feel that they lacked a positive role in the society (e.g. the narratives of Rawan and Maysam). The perceptions concerning a "good woman" always included a scenario of an ambitious successful woman who is working in addition to juggling all her traditional roles.

The Never-Married non-working women are less satisfied and happy in their lives, A couple of participants were even more frustrated and could not see any role for women in society due to the dominant roles of patriarchy. Heba who resigned from work six months ago and who is now her mother's caretaker at home says:

*"I want to work again, now I don't have any role in the society, it is zero and I think at older age I will feel dead in life" .Then I asked her: " Have you ever got engaged into voluntary work?" She answered laughing: "No... the voluntary work I have at home is enough for me".*

Even the women in between jobs appear less happy than the ones who have long-standing jobs. Alia quit her work in the pharmaceutical company and is now establishing her own

business as a pharmacist. In spite of her work plan of establishing her business, which requires necessary permissions and lots of bureaucratic work to get a license, she feels unproductive. In her own words Alia said:

*“Now I don’t feel myself that I am achieving anything or have a role but am working to have my own business so I can do something and help others through it”.*

My informants are similar to others elsewhere in expressing the link between work and happiness as shown in other relevant studies. The vitality of work for the Never-Married and its link between happiness and professional life was an apparent point in the study done by Johnson about the Never-Married women in Palestine (Cornwall & Edwards ed. 2010, 113). This link is related as well to the financial independence that working woman can have. Johnson said:

*“Almost all agreed that another key to happiness as an unmarried woman was stable employment”*

In a similar vein, Sa’ar (2004) explained that the more financial independence an unmarried woman has through more savings and less free work for the family, the more freedom, respect and agency she has. On the other hand, the unmarried woman’s yielding to familial exploitation, results in more marginalization, less independence and agency.

A study that was conducted by the World Bank about women and labor in Jordan reaffirms that the Never-Married women participate more in the labor market than married women. According to Sattar et al., 1995 (cited Flynn and Oldham 1999,4):  
“In the World Bank’s 1995, 41 percent of single women in Jordan ages 36-40 fully participated in the labor force whereas married women from all age groups never exceeded about 18 percent”. In addition, studies show a noticeable improvement in

gender equity in education<sup>19</sup> while the female labor force has not kept up at the same pace (Flynn and Oldham 1999). This shows the continuity of patriarchal concepts that consider the man as the main breadwinner and the primary source of income while the wife has the choice whether to include work in her life or not. In addition, this raises questions about how this situation affects Never-Married women, what patriarchal rules still apply to them, what other rules are left out and why, and whether Never-Married women have or can ever have the choice of leaving work while assuring themselves the minimum security needed.

Conclusion:

Work constitutes a vital part in the Never-Married informants' lives and stands as one of the most positive aspects in creating their financial and non-financial autonomy. Yet, other factors might constrict their work opportunities such as their role as care takers and other cultural norms that are grounded on patriarchal structures. The presented narratives and analysis raise a question about the meaning of inclusion and exclusion in this case. Does the portrayal of the professional life means that Never-Married are included since they have more job opportunities? Or are they excluded since the reason for having better opportunities is minimizing cost as well as the assumptions of more time devotion at work? Does inclusion means always better opportunities, spaces and rights or it has to include equality and exclude discrimination based on specific criteria of qualifications and devotion?

Patriarchy and gendered identities are created and recreated at work, the meanings and understandings of social relations and interactions among employees, gender and

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<sup>19</sup> Jordan has one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab World including both men and women (Shoup 2007)

sexuality attributes are embedded in individuals and organizations as a whole. McDowell (1999, 134-136) affirms this notion. He considers sexuality in the work place as not limited to sexual relations and harassments, but also to the idea of domination and power that is reflected in management practices, job specifications, and evaluations.

The case for the Never-Married women is further compounded with different patriarchal levels that specify their professional advancement and their inclusion and exclusion in work spheres. Applying this to the case of Never-Married women in particular, I read confusion even in dealing with them as sexual identities where they are expected to play the role of men in work and time devotion, same time harassments they face are indications of the feminine sexual identity.

In the following chapter, representations are provided regarding Never-Married women intimate selfhood and autonomy that are informed by different life aspects of family, work, selves and society and constitute the final product that shapes Never-Married women's identities and lives.

## Chapter Five: Self, Identity and Society:

In this chapter, I investigate some layers of selves and identities of the Never-Married women I spoke to, their mechanisms of coping with their single lives, their self-inclusion and exclusion from different social groups, and the harassments they face. I also questioned the Never-Married's beliefs and hopes about marriage, companionship, motherhood and sexuality, how their beliefs and hopes differ or resemble the society's beliefs and hopes and finally how this can influence the Never-Married perception of self, space, social and emotional outlets, satisfaction, and happiness.

The self and personal identities are delicate dimensions of gender that are addressed in this thesis and which influence the women's dependence and independence. They are informed by the different life aspects of family, work, self and society. In addition they are shaped by different forms of patriarchal structures, gendered roles, and notions of masculinity and femininity. My informants' narratives uncover the internal denied weaknesses and strengths of personality and the ignored conflicts between feelings and thinking patterns, ideals and practices, between one's beliefs, values and cultural norms.

### 5-1 Fluctuations of Coping:

Several women stated during our interviews that they are emotionally fulfilled through their families and very close friendships. Accordingly they do not feel lonely. As Alia mentioned, she has close friends and family and no pressure at home. She also added that if she does not have close family and friends, she would have had more insecurity and pressure to work on getting married.

This idea was also presented in a short article in Viva magazine in January 2010 with quotations used from Never-Married women in Amman naming it as "The single tax".

Meanwhile the magazine used “The rebate” that was talked about by writers about the lives of Never-Married. These women mainly talked about loneliness in outings, social events and occasions and their exclusion from couples’ outings. One woman complained that she hates it when people keep asking why she is single, which always include the indirect indication of spinsterhood.

During these conversations women felt that such personal questions were tough and hard to answer. The answers and reactions that represent the hardship of dealing with the questions, loneliness as well as satisfaction through emotional fulfillment of friends and family are signs to few major issues. The meanings of marriage for Never-Married women translate to companionship that is not based on patriarchal structure, traditional gendered roles and notions of masculinity and femininity. However, they are trapped with the modern patriarchal structures practiced in their families that are based on symbolic power, power/love relationship. Accordingly they experience attachments, satisfaction with their roles in their families, gaps between their ideals and practices, thus, ambiguities that result from their own double standards.

#### 5-2 The Never-Married and the Different Social Groups:

In some interpretations and answers that were given by the interviewees, they were trying to find a way of a relief for some issues that they find hard to acknowledge. For example, when I asked one of the interviewees about the type of friends she has: males, females, married, singles, etc, the direct answer was “Yes, I have couple friends and they invite me.” However, when I pursued it more, I discovered that the ones she was talking about were only two couples. One of them was her sister and her husband, while the other was friends of her sister whom she meets when she is at her sister’s home.

According to both Shoup and Nyrop, while there has been a noticeable increase in women's participation in work due to economic conditions, the barrier of conservatism and gender segregation of social interaction still exists. For example, the places where women go usually take into consideration the security of single women and the avoidance of interaction with strange men (Shoup 2007, 99-101. Nyrop 1980, 85, 86). The social interaction in Amman usually takes place in social clubs in which there are considerable opportunities for marriage possibilities and checking for prospective partners. In addition, coffeehouses that were known usually as males places are also common for women (Shoup 2007, 104-107).

The social atmosphere of gender segregation might apply to some social circles but not all. As for my interviewees, no one acknowledged intentional conscious segregation in their social circles, but at the same time, having female friends is the most common case for my interviewees.

On this same question, others answered that their friends are mostly females. This takes place due to the common perception in Amman that having mixed groups of males and females reflect more openness, while the opposite case of having same sex friends only reflect conservatism. The interviewees spontaneously followed their answers justifying limiting their friends to females only "This is not because of anything, it just happened to be this way". In some cases, it reflected a defense mechanism of their situation. Shereen said describing her circle of friends:

*"Most of the time the group I socialize with are females, sometimes there are males but they can be one or two while the others are females (e.g. 6 females & 2 males)"*

Then she assured that the group is mostly girls not because of an intentional decision but because the males are usually a minority when going out.

Eventhough Dalia and Alia socialize with female friends most of the year, I do not refer that to intentional gender segregation from Dalia and Alia. The nucleus of their friends started from university, males and females. Many of them are married, live abroad, and visit during the summer. On the other hand, social life at work includes more gender segregation. Work stands as a sign of the beginning of matured womanhood stage and an introduction to the following step of marriage for women.

Another image I got from Mona El-Jameel, who is a veiled religious woman. Mona conveyed how veiling can be limiting sometimes for her socializing according to how she sees it. After she has had her veil on, her outings got less since many places serve alcohol at night which contradicts with the veil as Mona believes it. Hence, she has limited circle of friends (three married women). Unlike other informants, socializing with couples for her is limited to relatives.

When I asked her if the married couples invite her to their outings or social hangouts, she immediately answered that she has no relatives in Jordan, most of them are in Palestine. Because her mom is not Arab, her circle of relatives is even more restricted.

While I was writing the notes down, she continued thinking of the question from marriage perspective in a way that indicate that marriage for her, holds religious meanings as well as traditional ones in its form and the way it takes place:

*“At the end of the day “kollo nasib” everything is a destiny .. It’s not about how many people you know or relatives you have.”*

Both Maysam and Heba Badr have the responsibility of taking care of their parents. Each one of them deals with her situation and interacts socially in a different way, yet both of them are influenced by their responsibilities:

Maysam has more frustrations towards her situation than Heba since the latter has more space for her social life. She referred to her circumstances at home, the serious illness of her dad and her role as a caretaker, in addition to the fact that she has not been working for the last three years when she returned from the US. Due to this, her circle of friends and her possibilities of socializing are so limited because she spends a lot of her time taking care of her parents.

Heba Badr is another example of a woman who left her job lately to take care of her mother. Heba is coming from a simple family, yet she was one of the women I interviewed who conveyed peace and confidence not only with her inner self but also with her family. Heba has four female friends who she goes out with and share her private issues frequently. In addition she has mixed groups who she socializes with and receives at home. They are married, unmarried, and in relationships. Heba is more acceptant to her situation than Maysam. I refer this acceptance to the indirect patriarchal power practiced in the name of love, while in the case of Maysam, the patriarchy practiced at home is enforced and imposed by her family.

Eventhough Maya's father is strict and patriarchal, Maya had her decision to live her life. Her social circles involved different mixed groups and variety of untraditional activities such as dancing, exercising, outdoor activities (e.g. hiking, juggling). Similarly, Reem practices different types of activities. Her openness, her interests in different arts and

literature, as well as her self-clarity are reflected in her life and reflect her self-fulfillment that does not depend fully on her family.

These were the main answers about the mixed gender socializing, but the gap was different and clearer regarding the socializing with married people. The participants indicated that they rarely socialize with married people due to the latter's commitments and due to the different interests between the two groups.

When I asked how the socialization with married men and women takes place, and whether married people invite the Never-Married to their social gatherings, the answers varied. In some cases, the Never-Married women are invited, while in others they are not. The Never-Married themselves do not participate in some social events with their married friends. This is because they either feel out of place or do not like the types of conversations. These interests are limited to their family, kids and home which do not constitute interesting topics to my Never-Married informants. Sometimes Never-Married women have to put limits on themselves as they are considered many times a threat to married women.

Reem has married friends; she is not only a friend with them but also with their husbands and kids. She goes out alone, attends weddings without waiting for anyone to be with her. Yet, in some events, she decides not to be part of the social circle of married friends due to the different interests. She belongs more to singles community. She added:

*“When we hangout as a big group of singles and married, unconsciously we singles get together without planned thing and married sit together”*

Rawan was spontaneous and clear about her views regarding socializing with the married friends. She expressed openly her position from married people and their interests in more assertive tone than Reem. Rawan portrayed an image about the lives of married

women as she sees it. For her, at the beginning of married life, the woman is more active and alive since her dream of marriage came true. Yet this excitement gets less gradually as she starts facing the reality of married life that is full of responsibilities and problems, husband, kids, schools, cooking...etc. The married woman then gets drained and frustrated with her life and whenever she socializes her issues are the only topics she talks about as her life is pivoted around them and has nothing else to share. Rawan added

*“When there are married friends, the setting becomes boring..so I start to avoid going out with them . Gradually & eventually she starts getting away”*

The difficulty of socializing with married couples, as mentioned above is due to two factors. First, the different interests in the topics chosen for socializing between married and unmarried singles. All the Never-Married women indicated that they do not like to be involved in conversations about children, spouses, home, and responsibilities while this is the main topic that is usually discussed among married couples. Until today, the Never-Married's insight concerning the meanings of marriage conveys fixated unchanged cultural norms and understandings. It represents marriage as a dream and priority for the woman, it puts her in her Pre-designed role as a woman, wife and mother in private spheres. Thus, very soon her life becomes devoted to her family members placing herself as last priority and limiting her freedom. This perception of marriage is still constrained with patriarchal gendered roles and can be one of the reasons my informants have not got married.

While this was the case for the women I interviewed, the two men expressed other opinions. Bassam reaffirmed the idea that was mentioned by women participants. He explained how he prefers socializing less with married couples. He also elaborated about how sometimes he excludes himself from social circles of married couples, especially

when they are a large group. He feels different being single and out of place since he has different interests in the topics discussed. In some cases, Never-Married men, similar to Never-Married women, do not feel comfortable with their single status and exclude themselves from some social circles. As Bassam said, the favorite topics of the married couples are always about their kids and schools, which he does not relate to. Bassam said: *“I’ll be the odd one... & all the talk will be different; schools & kids... etc”*

Samer did not see oddness as a factor in his social relations. He reflected a total molding in different mixed groups of males, females, married and unmarried. He even said that when his best friend got married, people started telling him that his relationship with this friend would change and become more distant, but the opposite is true, it even got closer. The second explanation of less socializing with married people is about the sensitivity of the woman-woman relationship. The Never-Married woman is considered a threat to the married woman. If the former has an attractive outfit or approaches the husband in an informal, casual and close chat or relationship, the married woman feels that her territory and space is intruded upon and endangered. This assumption made by married women or even by the Never-Married women result from the unconscious vital value of relationship and marriage. It reflects the perceived beliefs regarding the vitality of having a relationship and marriage in women’s lives as well as the emotional fulfillment. In addition, it reflects more space, completeness and prestigious position given to married women in the society that is seen to be pursued by Never-Married women. Similarly, Sa’ar (2004) concluded from her research in Palestine that there is a strong belief that marriage is the natural trajectory of a woman’s life. Accordingly, it is seen that the main goal of the Never-Married woman is to find a partner. Maya talked about her social

circles as well as the threat she feels and makes her back off some social activities in woman-woman relationship, she said:

*“I am invited from couples, I haven't really gotten that distance much, but I am always careful, usually when I am around married people I tend to be more reserved unless I am very comfortable with them. Married women are always threatened by single women, so you have to be a little bit careful, your approach to her husband, the friendship between you & her. If they pull me in, ok I come in. But still I try to give her indirectly the security of: “look, am not here for this”*

### 5-3 Harassment and Insecurity in Public Spheres:

The social life of the Never-Married does not stop only at friends and social groups.

There are other aspects that were discussed with my interviewees such as their social securities and influences on identities.

Harassment was a minor issue as far as the interviewees are concerned. Some said that Amman is a safe city, while others agreed on its safety but also mentioned the protection they get from male family members when they go out. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, this reflects the patriarchal family perception considering the male figure a source of protection and security.

Notions of femininity are clear in my informants' answers about harassments. Woman's body and sexuality are objectified. All participants indicated that the harassment that happens in public spaces has to do with being a woman regardless of the marital status. Nevertheless, Alia made an interesting comment that reflected the link between the marriage image and security in the society. It shows the perception of woman's weakness and dependence on men to assure her security. Alia said: *“Sometimes if you're married you feel stronger”*.

The sense of insecurity was clear including the women who seem to be more liberated from patriarchal structures and gendered roles. Reem talked about her feeling of safety at night, and how she is always alert about how to protect herself, she said:

*“Sometimes if I come back very late, I don’t feel safe, I feel it when I am getting into the building entrance, I feel that someone can attack me. But that’s it. I’m always alert & cautious, having the mobile beside me. So if something happen I can call”*

Then she talked about the idea of having a man protector with the female referring to the manly look and physical strength perceived in men. On the other hand, Arab men always identify women as fragile and tender. Eventhough Reem’s ideals differ with this image, in practice she still feels insecure.

*“When you’re with a man, they will think before they try to approach you. But I think it’s the way you carry yourself & present it; you have to look stronger”*

Objectifying woman’s body continues today in West Amman’s society. Some interviewees talked about pivotal idea of how the woman carries herself, and how this affects the possibility of harassment. This shows that the woman is always seen as the one responsible for the harassment and the one to be blamed. It also points to the importance of confidence and comportment she must have to prevent harassment from happening. At work the case is different, as explained in Chapter 4. ‘Harassment at work happens specifically because you are not married since the people around you are familiar with your social status.

An example of the general views about harassment is what Rawan and Maysam said:

*“The incidents happening have nothing to do with marital status, but with you if you were in the wrong place or time. Sometimes people say that you as a woman ask for it like when dressing in a sexy way or so.”* Rawan added trying to think out of the society’s box:  
*“It is related also to the status of the guy, if he’s educated, frustrated or so...etc”*

Harassment is a specific concern for women and one that is not relevant to men.

Consequently, I was not comfortable asking men about physical harassment. Both Bassam and Samer pointed out that they have never faced harassment. Samer also added spontaneously that harassment has nothing to do with the marital status even for the girls in his circle.

Even though harassment was not a factor in the lives of Never-Married interviewees specifically due to their social status, the fact that the Never-Married have more possibilities of being alone in public spaces without a man raises the possibility of the Never-Married experiencing more harassment incidents.

The domination of cultural norms of propriety influences the mobility and social lives of women. Her confinement in the culture of “*E’ib*” (shame) in Amman, as explained by Shoup (2007), stands as a limitation for the Never-Married against protecting herself from possible harassments.

This was made clear by Ruba, as mentioned in Chapter 3, when she said that once in Lebanon she had to say that she is married as kind of protection while she cannot do the same if she was in Amman. This also confirms the strong belief of the correlation between marriage and security.

Another example is Shereen who explained her conflict clearly and assertively regarding harassments. Eventhough raising awareness about harassment and how to deal with it is part of her work, she herself is trapped in the culture of “*eib*”. She said:

*“Its interesting to see how much I talk about this issue & I “blablabla” a lot, but I don’t deal with harassment if happens with me. It happened to me earlier but I didn’t talk –I feel intimidated to go complain. I advise people but within myself, I get trapped with the culture honestly, the culture of “E’ib””*

These understandings of harassment and the way women deal with it raise questions about why women do not take serious steps towards living alone although they are desperate to exercise this choice. In addition, it raises concerns about single women and the need of having a husband in their lives not only as a companion but also as a source of protection.

#### 5-4 Motherhood, Companionship and Family: I can't See the Alarm.

Some girls are passionate about having children and have a strong desire to become mothers. They see motherhood as a source of happiness and fulfillment (e.g. Lamis, Mona, and Alia). A few even talked about adoption although Jordanian law prohibits singles from this option. Others do not give much attention to the issue of motherhood. They do not have the patience nor does the responsibility appeal to them. Despite the tendency to “idealize” mothers and mother’s love, and which views women’s reproductive tendency as an innate drive for motherhood (Sa’ar 2004), the answers of my interviewees regarding their passion and desire to be mothers challenge assumptions about motherhood as a “natural” desire.

The interviewees clarified that the biological clock does not count for them. Heba explained her responsibility and attachment to her nephew as a satisfying mothering experience. She believes that the mother is the one who raises. Thus she considers herself a mother. In addition, the age gap between children and parents is an important factor for Heba, the big gap results in negative relationship with children. Dalia on the other hand believes in having children for security, her mother’s experience added to her insecurity and is vital for her construction of motherhood. Dalia said:

*“Sometimes I look at it as a way of security “possibly”. Who is there for my mom? It’s me & sister...otherwise she would have been staying completely alone.”*

Eventhough Dalia believes in the importance of having children for security, she is not desperate to have kids. Her concern is not out of the motherhood instinct fulfillment. For her having a family is important to have a unit and reference in life. Then she explained why she can not find the right person in her life and how she feels about being unmarried. She said:

*“My life style now doesn't fit any man; I can't go for traditional marriages. So as long I am thinking this way I won't be able to fulfill the equation”* Then she continued: *“The opportunity is getting less.. Is it bothering me??? No. & this is the problem.. I can't see the alarm, I can't see the risk & danger that people talk about.. I can't see the one whom female friends get married & she's not”*

Dalia's answer is an indication of the conflict she has as a professional woman with the society's understanding of marriage embedded within patriarchal structure that maintains division of gender roles in private and public spheres. At the beginning she said that she does not feel there is a problem within her, but when I pursued it more asking her what is the problem of not feeling the problem, the conflict and confusion was clear. She took sometime to find the right words then explained the cultural influence on her and how she conforms with it not having enough strength to face it. Eventhough she acknowledges that all her actions are her choices, Dalia believes in certain ideals that she is not able to apply in all her practices due to cultural norms.

*“No...am not having problem. Anything that happens with me is my choice. But the culture controls certain things where you have to abide & I am not a rebel person to walk the opposite direction or even to announce that I want to do that, even if I have this chance. I sacrifice & compromise but not to face or confront.”*

While this is the case for some, others believe that having a partner and companion is vital for their happiness. It is the loneliness and frustrations that most affects them. Ruba describes the pressure she has from the society by saying that she feels the need for

marriage for the stability it gives. This need becomes clearer in Jordan because of people's perceptions as she said. Hence, I find women either try to conform to people's practices seeking society's acceptance or they struggle with being different. Rawan, unlike others in that sense, says that after the age of 35 you start appreciating your freedom as a single. Rawan elaborated explaining her negative perception about marriage, seeing it as a boring responsibility that limits one's freedom and causes lost opportunities including love and relationships. As a Christian, divorce is not an option for her if marriage fails which makes a marriage decision hard and requires rational thinking. The two men had different experiences, yet they have many things in common. Being men gives them more space and less pressure to practice patriarchy and gender roles through the known notions of masculinity. Samer has complete freedom and almost no pressure from the family. When he thought about marriage earlier it was only for companionship but not for kids.

On the other hand, Bassam explained the only pressure he has is the taboo of singleness as well as not having children in his family. The pressure Bassam has exceeds the pressure on the women informants who are given the choice of marriage. This is due to the belief that the man is the one who takes the first step. Bassam said expressing frustrations:

*“If you're not married as if you've done something wrong.. a sin..then the next question mark becomes: there is something wrong with you”*

#### 5-5 The Taboo of Sexuality:

Most interviewees found it difficult to discuss sexuality. This was the most sensitive aspect of their single status and is a topic they tried to avoid and evade. Most of the

participants have clear opinions about having a choice of sexual practices and consider it a right for all regardless of their own practices and religious backgrounds and affiliations. Sexual practices should be dealt with as a personal choice (e.g. Lamis considers it a right but explained the taboo part of it to an extent that you do not know with whom to share your thoughts about your sexual needs). While Shereen presents an example of traditional cultural perspectives that limit sexuality only in so far as it relates to motherhood but not to instinct and desire that need to be fulfilled by women, both Alia and Mona do not believe it is a right for the Never-Married to be sexually active. While Mona as a veiled religious woman believes that this is religiously forbidden, Alia even added to her belief in the religious part, that she sees it as inhumane element if practiced outside the frame of marriage, it includes part of humiliation. In that respect Sa'ar (2004) described how the young girls at an early age are taught that sexuality is scary and disgusting. This same idea is induced from what Alia said when she used the words "inhumane" and "like animals". Maya gave another example about her circle of friends and said:

*"I have some friends who do manage to be active sexually though it's not easy and I think their parents choose not to know."*

From these examples, the secular tendency of the West Ammani women is clear, religion was not part of their agendas but it is more about the cultural norms. Meanwhile the parents whom Maya talked about are instances that explain two issues: One of them is the conflict that the parents have in their beliefs and in the double standards they practice. Second, the way the parents choose to ignore the sexual practices of their daughters along with their daughters' sexual behaviors stand as an indication to Never-Married women attempts to acknowledge and enjoy their sexuality, thus, get more independence, bargain their right for choice as well as negotiating patriarchy.

Two of the informants were so clear and assertive in their explanations, one of them is Heba as she answered my question from the first time showing no hesitation. She expressed her future fear from loneliness meanwhile she has doubts about the success of marriage institutions according to what she gets from her married friends. She sees sexuality as not a problem for her since she has not experienced it before. Heba acknowledged sexuality as a right and as something can not be ignored; nevertheless, she tried to make her position clear about her personal feelings and differences between people regarding this instinct, she justified it using common cultural perceptions. She first talked very clearly about her Never-Married brother that he is sexually active without trying to hide it since he is a man, while she finds no problem in being inactive sexually. According to her this is not one of the criteria she searches when getting into a relationships but that does not necessarily apply to all women in the same way. Eventhough Heba has certain ideals about sexuality that she can not deny, she is not able to acknowledge them when it comes to her own experience, she still has embedded believes about masculinity and femininity. She elaborated in this point as a woman giving examples and then used a common saying in Jordanian Palestinian culture that shows how the women are taught to repress her feelings. Heba said:

*“2a3zab daher wala 2armal shaher” ..Means single forever better than a one month widow-do you know why? Because the married likes to have sex..but for the never married no, it doesn't cross her mind or just very slightly” .*

Reem talked about her views very clearly and courageously, unlike Heba, she indicated her belief in the importance of sexuality and shows the change in beliefs happening in the society and acknowledging its positive influence. Reem deals with less patriarchy at home, which I find a reason for her to be able to express herself more freely, on the other

hand, still can not practice her ideas fully, mainly because of the power/ love relationship that still controls her relationship with her parents. Reem believes that sexuality is a right for the Never-Married woman, she described it as a blessing, and stated that she has it stronger than motherhood. She elaborated on its importance not only as an instinct but more of spiritual need for the soul. Unlike other informants, her elaboration reflected her clarity and confidence about her understandings of sexuality in a different way than culture presents it. Reem says that sexuality completes both men and women, but in our societies things happen undercover as people can not say it clearly. It is not about the physical biological process but for her, it is about love, feelings, nourishing the soul and she links it also with sharing life in general including chatting ,eating ,drinking, cooking with the partner. Then she clarified accepting and respecting individual religious differences and questioned the patriarchy of the society and the less space Never-Married can have regarding their sexuality:

*“If the woman is not married, does that mean that she can’t love or be loved? I think it’s her right. Ofcourse religion plays part & that depends on how close or far you are from religion, how religion controls your life, what are your values, where are your limits. It depends & varies from one person to the another, but I think also culture influence all of us”*

Dalia explained her acknowledgment of the importance of sexuality, yet she was very clear about the society’s ignorance and denial of it and their expectations of the Never-Married woman to be naive while the same is not expected from Never-Married men. In addition, she was conscious about her own internal conflicts with it. Dalia said:

*“As long as you are not married, you’re supposed to be the small kitten who doesn’t understand anything .But God created us as humans, we can’t keep ignoring things just because the society requires that. I admit that I am an oriental person who faces and deals with Western ideas, I have conflicts, I myself am not settled or clear about”*

As for the men, Bassam and Samer cannot see any problem regarding sexuality due to their personal experiences as well as their social circles. They see that the society is accepting it. I asked Samer about his beliefs regarding sexuality. Similar to the explanation given by Reem, he was very assertive about its importance and the joy it brings. Meanwhile he was clearer about his own practices that are more tuned with his ideas than women informants. He said:

*“Well.. let me tell you .. I am having a relationship with a lady for 11 years now– he laughed & said: ya3ni.. What can I tell u? we are married & more”*

Then I asked Samer about his family’s position about this as well as his friends, he commented describing the comfort that his family has saying that they know how far his relation with his girlfriend, they accept it, they respect, like and invite her. He added that even the women from his same social group, have close relationships with their boyfriends and their families know about that. In addition, their other friends accept it fully. Samer and his girlfriend are together 24hours as he expressed, eventually as he said they know *“for sure we are not praying”*. Samer has a certain community that he deals with who are minority in Jordan. This group seems to be less patriarchal, it naturalizes all personal freedoms and sexual practices. Accordingly, Samer reduces the importance of patriarchal culture and pressures as he says: *“I think the society deals with it normally.”* Press and media in Jordan as well as other countries are starting to acknowledge the importance of sexuality in the lives of singles. By discussing this issue in newspapers and talk shows, they try to break the thick shell of the taboo surrounding sexuality and raise vital concerns about the physical and psychological consequences caused to singles by sexual frustrations due to the different societal pressures as well as the religious and cultural conventions.

Sexuality has been discussed lately in a few articles in newspapers in Jordan. One of the articles talks about virginity tests that are being imposed on some girls before marriage.

This practice illustrates a crisis of trust, which is insulting to women's dignity.

Humiliating her purity according to sociologists and religious figures who consider this practice outside the frame of marriage as a sin. Similar statements have been made about the TV program "*Qesma wnaseeb*" on LBC. Watching this program is considered by Dr. Hamdi Murad as "*Haram*," forbidden religiously as it presents and encourages illegitimate sexual relations. The two mentioned article and comments about TV program represent conservative and religious views that pivot and diminish female's purity and honor into her virginity and condemn the practice of sexual relations outside the frames of marriage.

On the other hand, another article that can be described as daring according to the religious, cultural and societal norms, presented the sexual repression as a factor that should be taken into consideration especially with the increase of "Spinsterhood" phenomenon as the article described. It talked about the sexual taboos for both "Spinsters" and divorced referring to the serious ignored problem as a major one and as a main factor for both the status of spinsterhood and divorcees that are results of wrong socially inherited concepts (*Alghad* Newspaper on 24 November 2009).

Raising discussions about sexuality of single women is not limited to the Jordanian media. Oprah presented a show about marriages around the world, life before marriage, and premarital sexual practices in different parts of the world focusing on Middle Eastern Islamic countries (MBC4, Dec 2009). Cairo was one of the countries she talked about in which she had Dr. Heba Kotb, a 33 year old Egyptian girl called Heba, as well as a journalist. The three were her guests in the show. The three of them explained how the

issue of sexuality is completely different in Egypt from the West (Denmark was the case), and that there is a lot of sexual frustration in Egypt because of religion as singles should not have sex before marriage. These acknowledged frustrations are due to the economic situation of many men that hinder them from getting married. Accordingly, their sexual satisfaction cannot be met until they get married in their mid 30s or even after that.

The disagreement between Heba and Dr. Heba Kotb about the sexual practices of singles in Egypt reflects the differences that prevail in Egypt. Many people still adhere to the tight religious norms ignoring their frustrations, while others try to find alternative ways by being secular and satisfying their sexual needs. Heba said that having sex before marriage in Egypt is common nowadays except for the people who are extremely religious, while Dr. Heba Kotb disagreed explaining that premarital sex is a sin in Islam and that it is not a widespread thing in Egypt. This reflects what was mentioned in Caravan newspaper on 21 Feb 2010 about the same show that “Religious and conservative communities frown upon premarital sex” and that talking about it is a big taboo that has a lot of disagreements”.

This conflict coming from cultural norms, religious believes and exposure to an open world leaves the Never-Married searching for alternative tools of emotional satisfaction such as unhealthy emotional family and friends attachments or maybe looking for different solutions and new forms of marriages as possible outlets. This results from much confusion, frustrations, and ambiguities of their rites of passage to sexuality and womanhood in general.

## Conclusion:

In this chapter I explored Never-Married women's selfhood and identities as a result of multi-combinations of different life aspects of family, work, selves and society. Through the narratives of coping, social groups, harassments, beliefs and understandings of marriage and sexuality; identity confusion and conflict were clear with most of my women informants while men do not have the same conflicts. This results from the wide gap between the women's ideals and practices due to cultural norms' as well as power/love relationship with the family. Patriarchy and modern patriarchy practiced at home, gender roles and notions of femininity and masculinity shape the struggle the women have and reflect on their understandings and definitions of their self inclusion and exclusion as well as the society's inclusion and exclusion of them as Never-Married women.

In the following chapter, I will draw on the different narratives and analysis of the previous chapters in different life aspects to arrive at conclusions about the meanings of inclusion and exclusion, patriarchy and gender roles practices, which particularly apply to Never-Married women in West Amman.

## Chapter Six: Conclusions:

My research focused on investigating the inclusion and exclusion of professional Never-Married women in West Amman from different social circles (family, friends, work, etc). It examined the reasons, meanings, forms and tactics they deploy in navigating their rights and spaces, in the bargain between the individual and familial selves and in dealing with their inclusion/exclusion. The research also relayed aspects of women's lived reality and described the freedoms and restrictions experienced by single women living in urban spaces as factors shaping their wellbeing. Through focusing on the case of Never-Married women, I argued that changes in marriage and the nuclear family constitute a vital part of the changes happening in the meanings of the two terms, inclusion and exclusion, in gendered relations and wellbeing and within the triangulated relationship of individual, family and society that is surrounded by the frames of patriarchy and gender roles.

### 6-1: Inclusion And Exclusion:

Defining inclusion and exclusion in literature is mainly related to the space of the "Other" as explained by Shami. She explained the terms through the use of the public and private spheres, the feeling of belonging and integration. In other words, inclusion is related to freedom, rights and equal opportunities among gender, age, and social position (Hannoyer & Shami ed. 1996, 40-45)

Shami connected the different characteristics of the space as being private, public, sacred, closed, and accessible with how the space is reproduced and reframed, how it is protected or transgressed through violence and how this affects and formulates or eliminates the space of the "Other". That can be specified according to class, consumption, the way of dressing, and the use of public and private spheres. Specifically, what is called inclusion

or exclusion for society or from certain spaces, indicates belonging and integration (Hannoyer 1996, 40- 43). The author also raised very important questions that clarify the concept of inclusion or exclusion: “Do men and women participate similarly? Do individuals from different ages within households benefit equally? How is the modernity as well as keeping identity translated into quality of life, to the physical, mental well being?” (Hannoyer1996, 45).

The way of understanding the two terms “Inclusion” and “Exclusion”, causes confusion among the participants of my research. The participants-such as Dalia- explained their exclusion and how personality can play a role, as she said:

*“The origin of the Never-Married status is exclusion while the personality plays a role in changing this status”*

Meantime, in several life situations, the Never-Married consider themselves included as they conform with the territories of space of the “Other”, but not to the individual self.

The binding indivisible connection with the familial self as first priority and the inability to balance, separate, and recognize the difference between the individual self and the familial self, in spite of the changes in independency and choice issues, is still dominant.

As the previous chapters illustrated, the layers of the Never-Married’s inclusion and exclusion contain: direct family, relatives and friends of the family, a small circle of friends, and wider circles of friends and society. The most assertive answers I received about inclusion are related to the immediate family, work and close friends. Yet, in some cases, Never-Married exclude themselves from social circles such as couples. Bourdieu (2001, 39) explained the self exclusion as an observed behavior when external constraints are removed. In this case, self exclusion acts negatively and takes over from explicit

exclusion. I refer that to the process of gradual and accumulated learning of the different meanings of selves, autonomy, independence and freedom. Individuals perceive meanings and concepts as they have learnt them through their lives. Whenever a change occurs, they stick to their previously learnt understandings maintaining what they know within their comfort zone, unless they start acknowledging new concepts and search for their new selves on the long run.

The feelings of inclusion and exclusion-according to my research-work under the umbrella of patriarchy (work and family) and symbolic power, while the inclusion of close friends fulfills an important part of emotional and social belonging in the lives of the Never-Married women.

According to the different aspects of patriarchy and connectivity, I argued that the definition of inclusion and exclusion should include the space of the self within.

The space of the “Self” is ignored in the meanings of inclusion and exclusion. Their meanings are mostly looked at according to the space of the “Other”, and under the umbrella of patriarchal frames, gendered roles and notions of masculinity and femininity that objectifies women’s bodies. In addition, inclusion and exclusion are defined according to the priority of the familial selves dominating Arab families. This leaves the Never-Married women conflicted about their identities, conflicted about understanding the different meanings of freedom, independence, privacy, pressure, home, security, rights, obligations and inclusion, in addition to the ambiguities of their happiness, hopes, and life decisions.

## 6-2: Centrality and Meaning of Marriage and Family in Arab Countries:

Several scholars have discussed the centrality of family and marriage in Arab society in general as well as Jordan in particular from different cultural norms and religious perspectives. On a macro level, marriage keeps the structure of social capital through the binary hierarchal authority and fixated distribution of gender roles. While the man is responsible for financial matters and other responsibilities in the public sphere, domestic work falls to women who should maintain family integration and social bonds (Bourdieu 2001). Accordingly, marriage is a tool to keep the social order.

Moghadam presented a remarkable picture of the family, as the only societal institution that is conceptualized as “Essential” and “Natural” as a result of the biological reproductive basis of kin ties. According to Parson, the modern family has two functions: the first is socializing children into the normative system of values, while the second is providing a stable emotional environment for the family male worker. These functions are mainly the responsibility of the mother and the wife.

In Arab and Muslim countries, marriage is considered a rite of passage. Most of the Muslim countries have traditions based on Islamic heritage as marriage is considered a religious duty that completes half of the religion. The masculinity of a man is not complete without marriage and having kids. In addition, the single man is less respected in society, considering him as abnormal. At the same time the femininity of the woman is recognized by being a wife and a mother. These ideas originated in Qur’anic text interpretations that talk about marriage and consider the sexual urge as an instinct that cannot be satisfied except by marriage with aims for life continuity. Hence, marriage is considered an obligation in Islamic legislations (Khuraysat 1990, 17-23)

In Jordan, marriage does not only have religious importance but also symbolic and emotional values. These values are economic, political, and social. According to Bishara: “Womanhood is often equated with motherhood” (cited. Knudsen 2006, 192). What confirms the engraved cultural perceptions about marriage and motherhood is Dalia’s mother’s unconscious question to the doctor while Dalia was in ICU for very serious heart medical case, she said:

*“ As soon as I got out from the ER - electric shocks- to the ICU, the doctor came in. Mom (who had never asked me about marriage) immediately asked the doctor: “Will she be able to get married?!!” (Dalia laughed) I was still in ICU...!!! The doctor said yes...then she asked will she have kids??!!...”*

In Jordan, as in other Arab countries, the nuclear family (father, mother and the children), appears to dominate. Household types in Jordan have been changing with the increase in nuclear families and the decrease in extended families. During the period 1996-2003, the number of unmarried families, divorced families and unmarried mothers increased (Department of Statistics- Jordan, 2003 P7, 8)

Due to these changes, promoting family unity as a basic cell in society is one of the goals of women’s association in Jordan .They advocate for culturally acceptable values more than individual freedoms. Kholud AbuZaid –formerly of Save the Children stated:

*“The family is the nucleus of the whole world, so we are trying to build the capacity of the families, bring the women and men together, not to separate them by empowering women with a few slogans, or to start making their own decisions away from the family. It's not right, I'm looking at the Arab woman as part of the community, as part of raising the next generation. The family is a unit-a whole unit” (Knudsen 2006, 189)*

Since family is the natural institution, the alarm of the increasing numbers of Never-Married singles all over the world is ringing a bell. According to Davis, several aspects are indicative of this trend: the state of marriage has weakened; divorce rates have

increased, marriage postponement, proportions of Never-Married have risen, non-marital cohabitation has increased and the availability of contraception has become more widespread (Moghadam 2003, 113-116). The increasing numbers of Never-Married women is considered a crisis. Many articles written in Arab newspapers depict this phenomenon as a social crisis and a threat that constitutes a risk to society, its ethics, culture, and values (e.g. *AlShorfa* newspaper on 31 Dec2009).

I suggested that a partial reason for considering this phenomenon a dilemma is the threat it can cause to the notion of patriarchy. Patriarchy is seen as the base on which the marriage institution is grounded and the structure that provides social and economic stability. The status of being Never-Married leads to more independence for women and less patriarchy practiced in the society, consequently, it destabilizes the binary system of hierarchal authority.

Marriage was an unquestionable step to be taken automatically. It was excluded from the zone of choice, discussion, and preference. From the interviews I conducted, the participants still include marriage as an option in their lives with no age ceiling; yet, the meaning of marriage and family for them has shifted, and has become less of a priority. The cultural and religious values have started to change, the image of the “marriage institution” has altered to hold the negative implications of marriage and to stand as one of the factors holding Never-Married from changing their lives and including “companionship” for the rest of their lives. There is a remarkable change concerning marriage decisions; the participants moved from unconscious to rational decisions of staying single. In addition, there is a start of naturalizing singleness. This situation does not only apply to West Amman but conforms to the study done by Johnson regarding

Never-Married women in Palestine. Her interviewees challenge the idea of happiness in marriage life (Cornwall and Edwards ed. 2010).

The meaning of marriage for the Jordanian society as my informants see it includes several images: It is the step that should be taken after the woman gets her education, she gets married then is expected to have kids. In that way, the woman receives the society's acceptance and recognition of her womanhood. Thus, all the "dos" and the "don'ts" of social, familial and professional life are based on this concept. Marriage has a religious importance for some as it prevents from illicit sexual relations and considered as "Sotra" an honor protector and a major tool for security and protection. The importance of marriage also emerges from culture, human nature, continuity of life, and economy. Few interpretations present the cultural changes happening in West Amman's society. They naturalize the status of the Never-Married at SMAM, and others even go further to praise and encourage the singulate status.

The frame that shapes marriage institution still portrays the gendered distribution of roles; the man is the main breadwinner who is responsible on public spheres as well as security and family protection, while women are subordinates and secondary. Due to that, men are sensitive to the situation in which their wives have higher professional levels. Marriage is seen as a factor limiting woman's freedom, it reduces woman's role and life to her body and sexuality, in addition, it constraints the woman's progress, personality and way of thinking to her husband, kids, and home responsibilities while no space is left for herself. In spite of these dominant meanings of marriage, the change of marriage perceptions is discussed. Never-Married women ideals define it as companionship that is not based on patriarchal structure and hierarchy, accordingly, the "right person" for them is a partner

and a friend, he is the man who does not hold patriarchal ideals and be able to convert these ideals into real practices. I interpret this as a reason for my informants not getting married. Men hold tightly to keep their power, authority and domination, while women change their ideals looking for more autonomy, less patriarchy and less traditional gendered roles. At the same time women themselves suffer from ambiguity, self-confusion and inability to put their ideals into practice.

The major changes taking place in marriage and family structures are associated with changes in diverse socioeconomic domains such as economy, politics, patriarchy, citizenship, and civil society. According to the changes concerning marriage as a choice, the society has started to learn how to include the individual as part of its space, while insisting on maintaining the strings of the family as a core unit that always dominates. Consequently, the meaning and function of the new family should be revisited according to the new situation.

### 6-3 The Triangulated Relationship: Individual, Family and Society:

In West Amman, the triangulated inseparable relationship between individuals, families and society is based upon and circled with inescapable patriarchal structures. I clarified this relationship by portraying and arguing more complex layers of definitions and shapes of patriarchy that shape and reshape the three pillars of the triangulated diagram focusing on the case of Never-Married women.

#### 6-3-1 Patriarchy and Modern Patriarchy:

##### 6-3-1-1 Definition of Patriarchy:

Arab societies are characterized by high levels of patriarchy that is practiced not only among families and private spheres but also in other public spaces.

Naila Kabeer clarified the notion of patriarchy in Arab families. Kabeer noted: “Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honor through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection- and dependence- of women” (q td. in Moghadam 2003, 122). Guardianship of the woman is always given to the father and brothers until she is married.

Patriarchy is also defined in the Arab context to include the elders as: “The prioritizing of the rights of males and elders (including elder women) and the justification of those rights within kinship values which are usually supported by religion” (Joseph 1996).

Expanding patriarchy in public spheres, Pateman says that patriarchy is replaced with what is called “Fraternal patriarchy”. In other words, it replaced the power of men as fathers with not only the power of men as brothers but also as men who are not necessarily part of the kinship but part of public spheres. Shoup commented specifically about the case of patriarchy in Amman in which the senior male figure is the head of the family and the public decision maker, while woman can express their voices in the private sphere only.

These are general definitions of patriarchy. My research though captures a more complex script of patriarchy and gender than presented in previous scholarly work. The existing research lacks consideration for the case of Never-Married women specifically. In this last case, married female family members are also entitled to more rights than the Never-Married, especially when it comes to family commitments. This prioritization of married females applies to public spheres as well. At work for example, the married woman is seen to have more rights when it comes to working hours, or work versus family commitments in addition to financial privileges like income tax. This patriarchy and

higher ranking of married women over Never-Married women explains why some of my informants felt more comfortable during the interview with the fact that I am unmarried. Accordingly, the definition offered by Joseph should include the prioritization of married females when talking about the Never-Married, and should also consider other possible social statuses of women (e.g. divorced or widowed) that might be ignored. In much of the literatures written about families in the Arab world, the specific case of the Never-Married women is missing from the researcher's account.

#### 6-3-1-2 Modern Patriarchy and Symbolic Domination:

Changes happening in patriarchy are related to the forms and shapes used to maintain patriarchal structures. In the case of my informants, symbolic power is the tool mostly used to keep the hierarchal formation and acts more strongly than the traditional form of power and domination. According to Bourdieu (2001), the dominated in this case contribute to their own domination by accepting the limits imposed. Meanwhile, this results for bodily emotional and social forms of shame, guilt, anxiety...etc. It is usually the petit bourgeoisie women who are more concerned with ethical respectability and are the greatest victims of symbolic domination.

In the same context, Joseph described the brother /sister relationship as a connective love/power dynamic. In the name of love, brothers are entitled to control their sisters. The narratives of my interviewees show a noticeable change in this relation, as the brothers become more supportive of their sisters' agency. However, as indicated in Chapter Three, their superiority over female family members remains visible. Close observation of this relationship in the daily lives of the families would have resulted in clearer interpretations of this relation, but this stands as a limitation in my research.

I explain the changes taking place in brother/sister relationship in two ways. The first is about a real change in patriarchal notions and a genuine unleashing of patriarchy by men. This case can be a result of the economic situation of men, their inability to carry the responsibility of their sisters, and women's independence. The second explanation concerning the change in the brother/ sister relationship is a change in the tool of power used by brothers and male figures but not a change in the final goal of preserving the notion of patriarchy. Power used by several brothers of my interviewees is the indirect use of their authoritative role, meaning they discard the use of force or dictatorship and substitute it with a frame of friendship and democratic negotiations that in the end implies superiority and power with less direct confrontations.

The second explanation is more likely to be the case. The mentioned form of power is not limited to brother/ sister relationship but extends to include family members' relationship and the ways in which Never-Married women hold and accept the responsibility of caretaking and home commitments as well as the choice limitations they deal with.

Families in general depend on symbolic power as effective tools in keeping the required shape of patriarchy. Several aspects of private and public spheres are indications of the clinging notion of patriarchy.

Joseph (1999) described the gendered identities and relations in Arab families through her classifications of the different selves. There are very strong ties and connectivity between individuals and family members. This is named as the "Familial self", and ranks as the first priority upon the other selves. The individual self is lower in the hierarchy and is usually the last notion to be thought of in making any decisions. According to the mentioned priorities in Arab families, many norms, values, and life plans are centered on

the family and serve as constraints to an individual's life. Clear examples of this are found in the Arab woman as a daughter and a wife (Joseph 1999).

According to this classification, girls in their early life stages of life are taught to centralize their connective selves around their families in the name of love. When they grow up and get married, connectivity moves from their original family to the new family to become the main one while the original family stands as a subordinate connective self. Yet, the Never-Married are kept in their original emotional connective circle as a way of emotional fulfillment that is prioritized over the individual self. Recognizing one's self is an important factor in well being and the lack of it causes frustrations. Since the Never-Married are in the early steps in having their independence and a sense of self, a struggle resulted between their familial and individual selves as their families were a priority and symbolic domination was used through their whole lives.

#### 6-3-1-3 Patriarchy: Weakened or Reaffirmed?

Moghadam linked the notion of patriarchy to class emergence and economy. The emergence of the modern middle class within a capitalist economy is a weakening factor that fades the patriarchal order and produces demographic changes including marriage patterns (Moghadam2003). Yet, many values and perceptions in Arab families and societies are based on the notion of patriarchy in both public and private spheres. As a result, any changes concerning the notion of patriarchy influence all other sub-concepts. Part of this research explored the effect of patriarchy, specifically in the case of Never-Married women. My fieldwork shows that the notion of patriarchy still controls Jordanian society and the lives of the Never-Married women. The notions of masculinity still guide men's behaviors and remain strong in public and private spheres. Yet, the base of

patriarchy has weakened and became more destabilized. Several observations indicate this change. Some changes are real, while others are different tools used for the original goal of maintaining patriarchal domination. Parents are seen to give their daughters the choice of including marriage in their lives or not, few parents would encourage staying single more than having a bad marriage, Never-Married women are respected members of the community who enjoy access to education, work, and in many cases their own social lives. However, the Never-Married may struggle on a personal level due to the family connectivity conflicts and the negotiation that occurs between the self, family and cultural values. In addition, Never-Married women may suffer due to the ways in which society extols the virtues of marriage and motherhood.

The “reproduction of Arab patriarchy” is a notion discussed by Joseph (1999). This notion does not refer only to structural and cultural aspects of family relationships but also to the psychodynamic processes and connectivity in Arab families.

To clarify more how the notion of patriarchy still controls Jordanian society and the lives of the Never-Married women, I elaborate the major aspects characterizing the Jordanian society with particular attention to Never-Married women:

Both Shoup and Nyrop described the values of Jordanian families by indicating that the culture of shame “*eib*” and honor “*ird*” are seeded in Jordanian children’s upbringing for both Muslims and Christians (Shoup 2007, 99-101. Nyrop 1980, 85, 86).

Family honor, reputation, and moral standing are held by individuals and mostly females according to the Arab proverb: “The honor of the family rides on the skirts of its women” (Shoup 2007, 89) Even though the culture of “Eib”/ shame, the politics of choice, and the bargain between individual and familial selves of the Never-Married women are

changing slowly, there are still different layers that are considered taboo and cannot yet be breached. Examples of these taboos are dating, sexual activities, and separating from the family to live alone. The examples given reflect the reasons for the tight hold specifically on these aspects. It is both a reflection of preserving patriarchy as well as the sacred inspiration of a woman's body, virginity, and family honor.

Another illustration about the patriarchy that is still dominant is the women-women relationship. Through my fieldwork, I discovered an unhealthy relationship between women. One of the locations in which this struggle occurs is in the work place where many women exist and patriarchy dominates among married women. In addition, married women feel threatened by Never-married women. This tension goes back to the patriarchal structure that provides more rights for married women over Never-Married women. This sometimes results in underestimating the latter. In addition, the conflicting paths both take can cause an amount of tension. Married women hold tightly to their patriarchal umbrella in both public and private spheres, while Never-Married try through their independence to minimize the effect of patriarchy and gain better acknowledgment. McDowell discussed space and exclusion. The belief in categorical difference is binary and hierarchal. It constructs women as inferior to men. This binary division according to McDowell is drawn in the social production of space, in what is considered natural and contrived environments and in regulations that control "Who should occupy which spaces and who should be excluded (McDowell 1999, 11).

This research showed that categorical differences and binary divisions do not stop at the inferiority of women to men but exceeds that to include another layer of inferiority, which is a Never-Married women's inferiority to a married women.

Regarding the woman-woman relationship, Chouinard and Grant stated:

“Women are also positioned differently by their social class, their age and family status, by their sexual inclination, by whether or not they are able-bodied (Chouinard and Grant, 1995). In different circumstances and places these social divisions divide one group of women from another, resulting in cross cutting lines of difference. In particular circumstances, then, their interests may conflict or cohere” (McDowell 1999, 245)

As mentioned earlier, the concepts of inclusion and exclusion are found to be strongly influenced by patriarchy that controls Arab families as well as the larger public and private spheres in Arab societies. Even when the Never-married woman plays the role of the father as the main breadwinner at home, she is not given the patriarchal authority and the full hierarchy. Her family and society maintain the limits she has to abide by as unmarried female. In addition, her femininity and gendered roles are still fixated in the case of Never-Married women similar to married woman but with even lower hierarchal levels. She is objectified in her body and sexuality, her role in private spheres still prioritized over other life aspects and her weakness and her need of security can be fulfilled only through family male figures.

#### 6-3-2 Conflicts and Confusions:

All participants agreed that living in West Amman causes several confusions between modernity and conservatism. I interpreted the cosmopolitan nature of West Amman due to the mixture of the different political and socioeconomic transitions it went through (As mentioned in the first two Chapters). This caused vast diversity in Amman’s society and accordingly the molding of different identities, cultures, and values.

My informants represent professional, well-educated, Never-Married women. Most of them have traveled in their lives on either vacation, or have lived abroad for several

years. They started working immediately after graduation and have gone through relationships exploring possible partners, yet they have not pursued the goal of marriage itself. Financially they are independent, have full control over their daily finances but not their assets. They do not have financial commitments for their families except for one who is taking complete responsibility. Their families support them financially when needed. They live with their families though they are passionate to be independent, while some have found in living with their families a way of escaping hidden home responsibilities and a way of escaping loneliness as well. Most of the interviewees are secular except two religious women. The influence of class differences is not very clear among the interviewees and needs to be further investigated in future research.

Clear common aspect among women informants is the meaning of marriage for them, while it holds negative connotations, as part of their ideals, it is seen as a companionship with those whom they describe as the “right person”. The women’s ideals appear to be far from patriarchal structures, though, in practice, they still conform to it in different public and private spheres trying to achieve the acceptance of both family and society.

On the other hand, differences among informants are reflected in two vital issues: First is the ways they navigate and understand the different social spaces of selves, family and society. Second, in the degree and the way patriarchy is practiced at their homes.

Considering the background of my interviewees, I looked at what navigation tools they use to reach self satisfaction, and trying to reduce struggle and conflict in their lives.

In their daily lives and practices, some try to fight the strict patriarchy and acknowledge their individual selves even with means that are perceived as improper such as sneaking out without the father’s knowledge due to his strictness in curfews, looking for excuses to

travel and get away from home pressure. Others deny marriage opportunities to avoid undesirable father's pressure but same time not able to state even within themselves their discontent with father's patriarchy. Third who are capable, but still have the pressure of the family love/ power, move into a separate apartment in the same building with parents, as a way to have some privacy.

On the broader level of navigating spaces, some of the participants find it important to have strong personalities to be able to limit some social pressures. Being secular or religious are other important ways in which Never-Married navigate different spaces. As many categorize themselves secular; religion does not constitute part of their decisions (e.g. Samer has had a girlfriend for 11 years without marriage). At the same time, others have religious background that directs their life and practices. They find in religion a way for spiritual healing and belief in the destiny of being single. Some participants use the tools of denial in navigating their spaces, trying to be content with all different pressures and conflicts surrounding them (e.g. the use of: Dad knows better).

Eventhough the tools used differ according to different personalities and home structures, the two common major tools that all women participants use to navigate spaces are work and family. Dominated by the symbolic power and power/ love connectivity, attachments to family and friends as well as having extra caretaking responsibilities are central ways of occupying the emotional space they have. In addition, work plays a major role in providing financial security and eventually more independence. Furthermore, work is important in shaping the Never-Married's identities as professional women and as a fulfilling aspect in their lives.

The notion of patriarchy does not only exist in the private spheres but extends to include public spheres as well (e.g. work and social circles) and it influences identity clarity, understanding or confusion in different degrees.

The conflicts in Never-Married women's lives are clear from their ways of understanding different meanings and terms (such as: independence, privacy, selves, inclusion, and exclusion). Considering the physical space, several interviewees referred to the confusion they feel about their homes, using expressions like "It's my home but not my home".

They also have conflicts in their positions in society, the different values they hold, their meanings of marriage for them, and the way they exclude themselves in some social situations and circles. This conflict is seen noticeably less in the case of the Never-Married men due to different values and meanings of masculinity and patriarchy they hold in both public and private spheres. Due to these values that conform with the three pillars of selves, families and society, men do not experience wide gaps between their ideals and practices.

Another example of women's confusion is the different ways and duality of behaviors of the Never-Married themselves as well as their parents inside and outside Jordan, according to McDowell their secure and insecure spaces and zones. While the Never-Married women exclude themselves from certain circles, they appear less influenced about social pressures and interpretations in different degrees. Some who constitute minorities in West Amman is an exception to arguments of conflict.

One of the major conflicts in the identities of Never-Married women is their sexuality. Marriage in Jordan is a necessity and remaining single is not recommended due to the belief in modesty and the importance of not committing religiously forbidden sexual

practices ( Ubaydat 1986, 107). Hence, the image of homosexuality and sexual problems is reflected upon people who have not married since sex is considered an instinct that cannot be denied yet it must be practiced within the frame of marriage (Ubaydat 1986, 112). Furthermore, advocating women's reproductive rights and sexual orientation is difficult in Jordan where sexuality is considered taboo and human rights are not well accepted (Knudsen 2006, 191).

The National Program officer of UNIFEM, Dana Malhas explained:

“Sexuality and issues related to it are still considered a taboo subject in all of the countries of the region. Strict social norms hence result in reluctance to [provide] education about issues related to sexuality and health related topics to men and women alike, but mostly to women, which results in young women being either afraid or reluctant [to get] information about sexual matters due to the stigma and the direct link of such questions with sexual activity.” (Knudsen 2006, 170)...She also added: "Honor is in the little piece of meat called the hymen." (Knudsen 2006, 176)

In the study done by Sa'ar in Palestine, a Never-Married woman clearly stated that she had several romantic relationships, some of which she had sexual intercourse, but she did not get married. One of the men refused to marry her due to his fear of her independence and strong personality, which shows the strong dominance of patriarchy in sexual relations. Sa'ar pointed out that female's sexuality is composed of two parts: pleasure and reproduction. The latter constitutes the positive welcomed side inside the frame of marriage, while the former is seen as intrinsically immortal and threatening. Pleasure is supposed to need initiation to be awakened and taught to be considered as scary and disgusting. According to Sa'ar:

“There are women who block the entire issue of sexuality from their consciousness, while other women have had full sexual and romantic relationships and have become closely attuned to their sexual desires. The majority are located between these two poles. Among

unmarried women indirect sexual practices entice many to mature sexually, to assume womanhood” (Sa’ar 2004)

From the mentioned literature and studies, along with my fieldwork, the Jordanian society seems to be more conservative when it comes to sexuality than Palestinian society. The reason of this difference between the two countries might be the long history of political situation in Palestine that leaves Palestinian women there with more exposure and interaction with the Zionists who hold different cultural norms affecting reflected Never-Married women’s independence.

Clear conflicts regarding sexuality were described from the interviewees during my fieldwork. Most of them acknowledged a need and the right of sexual activity regardless of religion. The informants tend to lean towards secular more than religious perspectives in their beliefs and practices. Few other informants deny this right due to religious views. Even the participants, who acknowledge this right, admit confusion and conservatism when it comes to sexual matters. The move from ideal to practice is a step that is not yet reached. However, acknowledging the right to sexual practices, which is rarely practiced according to the women’s statements, is by itself a noticeable change in Jordanian society. The statements mentioned by the two male interviewees differed completely from the women, indicating the naturalizing of sexual ideals and practices among singles in the Jordanian society.

This notion of sexuality represents a clear example about the influence of both exposure and personal needs in raising self conflicts that are- in this case- not only related to the family and social circles but are related to deeper layers of the selves.

Even though the sexuality issue was not openly discussed with my interviewees due to the conservatisms among them, my research explained part of the sexual frustrations that some interviewees have, which is translated into confusions, denials, loneliness, and the fulfillment of emotional space through family and friends.

Through my observations, I noticed a correlation between minor conflicts and class variances. I discerned that the two participants having less conflict were the ones who represent two extreme poles of the middle class while the participants in between struggle with more conflicts. However, as I concluded the interviews and analyzed more thoroughly the influence of class on identity struggles, I determined that no clear effect can be traced. Accordingly, I interpreted the existence of minorities (e.g. Samer) who do not have noticeable conflicts to be based on personal traits and detailed family backgrounds which varies among individuals. Since the change in patriarchy is relatively new, some people can adapt to the change in a faster or slower manner than other individuals. I argued that the studies published by the World Bank, which indicated that the higher the social class, the higher the use of gender language and roles (World Bank 2005) cannot be generalized in the context of my study. Yet the peace that Heba has in comparison to other women interviewed can be explained by the class positioning and the less exposure. This results in more coherence with certain original values and less conflict with new foreign values that come with exposure.

Clear ties with patriarchy exist and translate into women's confusion. The more the families experience and practice patriarchy, the more they are concerned with their image and acceptance in the society and less openness as well as higher degrees of conflict are found among female individuals, while men are tuned with their ideals, families and

society. The opposite is true for women, in case of minor patriarchal practices. This does not only apply on Never-Married women only but can be investigated in further research on all female individuals of the society.

As a point of clarification to Never-Married women's conflicts, the picture includes the Never-Married woman as a dependent individual in the family, yet an independent person in professional life. It includes the Never-Married woman as a main carrier of the emotional support and care taking, yet expected to be free from responsibilities and the designed personal priorities as perceived in public spheres. It includes the Never-Married woman as a "Good woman" who commits herself to women values, purity and weakness, yet an objectified body that is vulnerable for harassments parallel to being a tough professional individual who devotes her time to her career and expected to provide effort similar to men.

Sensitivity in discussing the lives of the Never-Married women stems from the conflicts these women internalize, having gaps between their ideals and practices, being in the bottom of the patriarchal pyramid while trying to take few steps towards independence. In the same time, they are holding tightly to their own cultural norms, values, and identities that keep them included, acknowledged and respected among their families and in society. This describes ambiguities and confusions of a new status in the society that is not yet grounded.

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## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

As you were informed earlier, I am a graduate student doing my masters in Gender studies at the American University in Cairo and this research is for my thesis project. The research is about the inclusion or exclusion of never married singles in West Amman. I will be asking you some related questions and I will use the tape recorder –if you approve-for the discussion to have thorough use of the words, while taping I will make sure not to reveal your real name or identity and I will delete it after I finish writing down the required notes. I also guarantee you that I will use alias names through all my research process and for sure including the publication of the thesis. I want you to feel free and know that you have the right to stop me at anytime, ask me not to use tape recording or stop the whole interview if in any case you feel uncomfortable or pressured in anyway. The results of this interview will be used for academic purposes and possible scholarly work. So, do you agree to be part of the sample interviewed and tape recorded?

## APPENDIX B

Individual Interview questions for Never married singles (males and females)

### Family And social life

- Can you please talk a little about your daily life style?
- Can you please tell me about the type of social life you have? Where do you go? With who? How often...etc
- What role do you have when there is a family decision that has to be taken? And what if the decision is for an issue concerning you?
- How do you feel about that?
- How important are the concepts of family, marriage, sexuality and motherhood / or Fatherhood - for male interviewees-in your and people's lives?
- Do you think of having these options in your life? Explain please.
- Can you please talk about your role in the family (e.g. commitments, obligations, rights...)?
- How much space do you have for your private independent life?
- How do you see the religious and cultural beliefs influence your status in the family?

### Social securities:

- For the people who are living with their families: Have you ever thought of living alone? Why or why not?
- For Never married people who live away from their families: can you please talk a little about your experience in making this decision and living alone?
- How safe do you feel yourself in public spheres (e.g. waking in streets...)?

-What are the possibilities of dealing with harassments? Why do you think and how do you deal with it?

Financial securities:

-How do you think your financial status (income, loans, access to facilities and securities) resemble or differ from married couples?

- What access do you have to your own financial? How much control do you have over your financials?

-What are your family expectations regarding your financial contribution and behaviors?

Working environment:

-Can you please talk a little about your work?

- How much do you see yourself included or excluded in your working environment?

- Do you see yourself having better opportunities or more obstacles of professional growth in comparison to married women (or men in case of male interviewee)?

-What expectations does this work expect from you (commitment, loyalty, priority and giving) for professional life?

-If you're engaged in or have ever tried to go for voluntary work, how do you see this experience differ from your professional life?

Life, health and well being:

-How do you perceive yourself as being not married?

-Do you feel that your status of not being married is causing you psychological burden or pressure? Please explain.

-What role do you see yourself doing in the society?

- In your opinion, are there any consequences on the society that result from the increasing numbers of Never Married Singles?
- How do you see a good and the bad example of the woman/ man (for make interviewee)?
- In what ways do you feel yourself included or excluded from the society? And do you relate that to society or yourself?
- What do you feel you are missing to be happy?
- Have you ever felt that you are victimized? How?
- Have you ever thought that your physical or psychological problems are due to your status of not being married? If not what do you think are the factors influencing your status? And how do you think you can improve your health?
- How do you deal with your physical and psychological problems? (Religion, psychiatrists and counselors, gynecologists...)
- Do you think there are differences between Never-Married men and women in any of the discussed issues? Please explain.
- Any other things you need to talk about? Any recommendations you can give for a better understanding of Never-Married singles' status?

## APPENDIX C

### Quick guide to Interviewees Profiles

NAME	1-Shereen Mustafa	2-Reem Awad	3- Mona ElJameel	4-Maya Jawad	5- Lamis Kamel	6- Dalia Abuleil	7- Alia Alzeer
AGE	33	39	41	40	37	33	34
RELIGION	Muslim	Muslim (born to be)	Muslim-veiled	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim
PROFESSION	Development projects	Prog. Dev. In dev proj assoc.+ dancer	Head of KG	Management-moving to fitness	Marketing manager	PR (acct director)-originally vet	Pharmacist(now establishing her business)-was in company
AREA OF LIVING	Jbeiha-with F	Shmeisani (separate apartment – but same F building)	Shmeisani-with F	Sweifiyyeh-with F	4 <sup>th</sup> circle-with F	Marka Elshamaliyyeh-with F	Gardens St.-with F
FAMILY MEMBERS	Parents-2 bro-1 sis(father: academic :head of university -mother” women projects	Parents (dad: retired but had musical inst shop-mom house wife- 1 bro M- 2 sis (1M abroad +1 NM older	Parents(dad: radiologist-mom nurse Swedish )- 3 sisters other than her( 2 M-1of thm abroad)- 1 NM older	Parents (dad businessman –mom: housewife )- 1 bro M- 1 sis divorced	Parents (retired, was head of school, then restaurant-mom housewife)- 1 sis M	Mom (now nothing but was teacher)& sis(younger -NM)- step sis younger M- Dad passed away & were separated	Parents(retired but both worked in media:broadcasters,then dad head of TV channel then secretary general of ministry of media)- sis M- Bro M- both younger

NAME	1-Ruba Qasem	2-Bassam jamal	3- Rawan Rabee3	4-Maysam magdi	5- Dina Dawood	6- Heba Bader	7- Samer Alnagi
AGE	37	42	39	Early 40s	41	41	46
RELIGION	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Muslim-inherited not believer	Muslim	Muslim
Profession	Free lance-enslntnt (training for dev) in yemen-suprvis in Amman my & bro business (shop)	Self employed - graphic design co.	Recently music but before business woman	Recently non-used to work at USA – conference planning- & in Jordan hotels..etc	Graphic designer -earlier banker	Now retired- 6 motnhs ago- but b4 then :@Aldiwan elmalaki- & I wnt to work again Royal Hashemite court	Now gym manager-earlier had political science masters-worked in family business (yoghurt factory)- then lived 5 years in Lebanon
Area of living	7 <sup>th</sup> circle-with family-unfortunatelly	5 <sup>th</sup> circle-with family	Derghbar-with family	5 <sup>th</sup> circle-with family(nvr thgouht of it as if this what shld be	1 <sup>st</sup> circle-alone for 8years	1 <sup>st</sup> circle-with family	AlMadina Al Monawwar a St- with family But I hv my flat but not living thr
Family members	Parents- Sis (M) – bro (M)	Me & mom @ home-sis M abroad-dad & bro passed away	Me & mom lving at home-sis & bro M- dad passed away	Parents @ home- sis M (abudhabi) - Bro M in USA	8sis & 1 bro all M- parents passed away-me divorced	Mo & bro NM at home- 3 bro M- 1 sis M- bro passed away & dad passed away	Parents- 1bro & 2 sis all M, I am eldest