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État, société, psyché : Une analyse dialectique de l'oppression genrée multiscalaire dans la vie quotidienne des femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes

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Résumé de la thèse

Cette thèse analyse l'oppression sexuée selon trois dimensions - institutionnelle, interpersonnelle et intériorisée - à l'aide d'études pertinentes de grande qualité et d'entretiens avec des femmes jordaniennes et palestiniennes sur leurs expériences quotidiennes. La thèse se concentre en particulier sur les dimensions de l'oppression auxquelles les femmes interrogées ont choisi de faire face et sur la manière dont elles y font face. Le travail est basé sur une enquête originale menée auprès de 300 personnes, dont les résultats ont ensuite alimenté une série de questions semi-structurées administrées sous forme d'entretiens à un échantillon de femmes jordaniennes et palestiniennes âgées de 24 à 35 ans. Ce groupe a été sélectionné pour sa capacité à répondre en tant que fille et, dans la majorité des cas, en tant que mère. Les sources primaires sont également étayées par des entretiens avec cinq experts en matière d'égalité des sexes dans la région.

La législation moderne qui régit les droits civils et corporels, y compris le mariage, le divorce, le sexe et l'héritage, renforce les droits des garçons et des hommes par rapport à ceux des filles et des femmes et constitue la principale source d'oppression institutionnelle fondée sur le genre en Palestine et en Jordanie. Ces lois placent les femmes dans un statut juridique infantile qui les oblige à dépendre culturellement et socialement de parents masculins dans des sociétés qui, dans l'ensemble, ne sont pas politiquement libres. Par ailleurs, en tant qu'Arabes, les femmes reconnaissent que leurs sociétés sont soumises à des relations de pouvoir institutionnelles patriarcales géopolitiques imposées par l'Occident - hégémonie économique, militaire et politique - qui imposent à tous les Palestiniens et Jordaniens un régime colonial de colons ou des gouvernements répressifs non indépendants qui s'appuient sur une insécurité et une surveillance chroniques. La deuxième source d'oppression examinée est interpersonnelle. Cette forme d'oppression sociale et culturelle place les femmes dans des positions où elles pensent devoir "se sacrifier" et négocier avec les systèmes institutionnels (néo)patriarcaux ainsi qu'avec les formes collectives intergénérationnelles de traumatisme pour fonctionner efficacement dans leur société, y compris dans la manière dont elles gèrent les pressions exercées pour se marier et leurs relations intimes. Ce sacrifice et cette négociation peuvent être compris théoriquement comme

un "marchandage patriarcal" ou, dans le cadre de ce travail, comme un "marchandage avec les structures néo-patriarcales". Les personnes interrogées comprennent consciemment ou inconsciemment que ces stratégies sont nécessaires à l'existence dans des systèmes d'oppression sexospécifiques et ont longuement discuté des façons dont elles ont négocié, y compris pour l'indépendance (par exemple en acceptant un mariage précoce pour obtenir une certaine indépendance par rapport à la famille d'origine) ou en feignant la piété pour protéger leurs jeunes sœurs et la "réputation" de la famille. La troisième source d'oppression est l'intériorisation psychologique et corporelle, collective et individuelle, de l'oppression institutionnelle et interpersonnelle. Les participantes à l'étude ont évoqué l'intériorisation de quelque chose de similaire à ce que les féministes noires américaines ont décrit comme la "triple oppression" basée sur les statuts racial, sexuel et de classe/culturel. Dans ce cas, les femmes intériorisent leur oppression institutionnelle, juridique et interpersonnelle, sociale et culturelle (en particulier le code social du '*eib*, ou de la honte), en plus d'être soumises au phénomène du sexisme mondialisé, en ce qui concerne les normes de beauté par exemple, et donc de lutter contre son intériorisation. La honte fonctionne comme un code informel mais solide qui régit les comportements et l'ordre social, exigeant par exemple le respect des aînés et la gentillesse envers les voisins. Bien qu'elle ne soit pas intrinsèquement négative, elle régit également les femmes et s'attache à la modestie et à la pureté en public. L'intériorisation de ces valeurs par les femmes se produit dans des sociétés déjà rendues non libres par un "ordre" patriarcal, géopolitique, économique, politique et racial répressif plus large, qui dépeint fréquemment et commodément les femmes arabes comme étant principalement opprimées par leur propre culture et leur propre religion. La thèse constate que l'intériorisation des systèmes institutionnels et sociaux d'oppression tout en essayant de satisfaire leurs désirs et leurs aspirations conduit la plupart des femmes (et de nombreux hommes) à créer et à vivre une double vie.

La thèse se termine par une analyse des descriptions faites par les participantes à la recherche de leurs formes individuelles non organisées de praxis, qui informent leurs négociations sociales et ont changé leurs perceptions de l'ordre hégémonique des sexes. Cela inclut des processus de rééducation sur les structures précoloniales de l'action féminine, l'exposition à différents concepts féministes par le biais de la technologie et du transfert intergénérationnel de connaissances, et l'introduction d'un féminisme organique largement individuel, qui part de la base et crée des

relations plus solidaires les unes avec les autres. Cela se manifeste non seulement dans leurs discussions, mais aussi dans leurs espoirs et leurs efforts pour les générations futures de filles et de femmes.

Contexte Historique et Géopolitique : Palestine et Jordanie

Cette thèse s'inscrit dans un contexte historique et géopolitique profondément marqué par la colonisation, le néocolonialisme et les tensions régionales. La Palestine, sous occupation israélienne, et la Jordanie, avec son héritage mandataire et son autoritarisme étatique, offrent des cadres institutionnels et légaux qui structurent les rapports de genre de manière inégalitaire. La formation des États modernes après le partage du territoire du Levant au début du XXe siècle a paradoxalement institutionnalisé des formes « traditionnelles » de patriarcat à travers la loi, en renforçant la dépendance des femmes vis-à-vis des hommes et en légitimant une hiérarchie sociale inégalitaire.

Dans ces territoires, les régimes juridiques du statut personnel – mariage, divorce, héritage et citoyenneté – ont été façonnés non seulement par des traditions locales, mais également par des relations de pouvoir externes. Le colonialisme historique, le néocolonialisme contemporain et l'imposition de normes légales et économiques internationales ont consolidé un ordre où les droits des femmes restent conditionnés par leur statut de citoyennes minoritaires dans des États qui reproduisent des hiérarchies patriarcales et impérialistes.

L'oppression institutionnelle ne peut être comprise isolément : elle est inextricablement liée aux pratiques interpersonnelles et à l'intériorisation culturelle. Les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes naviguent dans un espace où les lois étatiques, les attentes sociales et les codes culturels comme le eib se superposent, générant une triple contrainte. Cette contextualisation historique et géopolitique est essentielle pour comprendre comment les stratégies de négociation, de résilience et de subversion décrites dans cette recherche s'inscrivent dans des dynamiques structurelles qui dépassent les choix individuels.

Introduction

Dans l'ombre des frontières coloniales et de l'État néopatriarcal, les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes naviguent dans un ensemble relationnel d'oppressions à la fois institutionnelles, interpersonnelles et intériorisées. Cette thèse examine comment l'assujettissement au genre est maintenu, et potentiellement subverti, à travers ces trois dimensions. Elle s'appuie sur les expériences vécues par les femmes qui négocient les systèmes juridiques conçus pour les infantiliser, les codes sociaux qui exigent leur complicité et les fardeaux psychologiques qui peuvent fracturer leur sens de soi. Grâce à des données d'enquête originales sur 300 répondants, à des entretiens semi-structurés avec des femmes de 24 à 35 ans, à des contributions d'experts et à des études pertinentes, ce travail révèle comment les actes quotidiens de survie et de résistance exposent les contradictions des systèmes oppressifs tout en ouvrant la voie à des libertés accrues.

Au niveau institutionnel, l'État moderne apparaît comme un paradoxe : les régimes juridiques postcoloniaux en Jordanie et en Palestine, hérités des mandats britanniques et français et perpétués par une gouvernance autoritaire, codifient la "protection" pour en faire un outil de contrôle. Les lois régissant le mariage, le divorce, la citoyenneté et l'héritage renforcent la dépendance des femmes à l'égard des hommes de leur famille. Ces cadres ne sont pas des reliques de la "tradition" mais des produits de la modernité coloniale, alignés sur les structures tribales et patriarcales. Cette oppression institutionnelle s'inscrit dans une matrice géopolitique plus large : l'impérialisme occidental impose précarité économique, occupation militaire et narratifs qui réduisent leur oppression à un retard culturel. L'État contrôle l'autonomie des femmes, la considérant comme conditionnelle à la tutelle masculine. Les lois reproduisent le pouvoir patriarcal, tandis que la violence coloniale en Palestine et l'autoritarisme en Jordanie aggravent l'assujettissement. Ces structures façonnent et sont façonnées par le paysage géopolitique, renforçant le statut subalterne des femmes sous couvert de protection.

Au niveau interpersonnel, les femmes négocient avec les systèmes structurels et idéologiques qui reproduisent l'oppression sexiste. Les négociations tactiques, telles que le mariage précoce pour échapper à la famille, la feinte religiosité ou l'éducation pour retarder les obligations maritales, révèlent les paradoxes de l'agency sous contrainte : la résistance s'insère dans des actes qui soutiennent également le statu quo. Ces tactiques, bien que modifiant subtilement la dynamique

familiale, restent limitées par des systèmes qui individualisent la résistance et restreignent l’action collective.

L'intériorisation des oppressions superposées, examinée au chapitre 3, fracture souvent l’identité des femmes en une "triple conscience" : en tant qu’Arabes, elles portent la déshumanisation géopolitique ; en tant que femmes, elles affrontent le sexisme local et global ; et en tant que femmes arabes, elles intériorisent des codes tels que le 'eib, qui régulent le corps et les choix. Cette intériorisation conduit beaucoup à mener une "double vie", se conformant en public tout en cultivant une rébellion contenue en privé. Les politiques de respectabilité fonctionnent comme mécanismes régulateurs, obligeant les femmes à se conformer, ce qui impose un tribut psychologique et contribue à la reproduction de l’oppression à travers les générations.

Le chapitre 4 montre qu’en dépit de ces contraintes, les femmes articulent un féminisme organique enraciné dans la rééducation, l’exposition à la pensée féministe transnationale, les histoires précoloniales de l’action et le dialogue intergénérationnel. Ces pratiques fragmentées reflètent une praxis de libération rejetant l’universalisme féministe occidental et les réformes centrées sur l’État. Le changement émerge par la réimagination relationnelle : les mères révisent leurs préjugés intériorisés, les communautés renégocient les codes de pudeur et les femmes réaffectent la technologie pour accroître la conscience. La loi peut reconnaître, mais ne peut démanteler les structures patriarcales profondément enracinées.

Cette thèse interroge la logique de l’oppression : le patriarcat crée un cadre où lois, normes sociales et contraintes intériorisées apparaissent comme naturelles, mais révèlent leurs contradictions sous un examen critique. Les lois jordaniennes et palestiniennes considèrent l’incapacité des femmes comme une vérité fondamentale, reflétant la rationalité coloniale qui légitime la domination. Tout acte de résistance devient ainsi une réfutation implicite des "vérités acceptées".

Le patriarcat, tout comme l’occupation israélienne, repose sur un axiome de contrôle : la violence devient "sécurité", l’effacement ethnique "ordre". Pourtant, la résistance palestinienne, du sumud aux recours juridiques, rompt cette axiome et transforme la survie en contre-logique, démontrant la contingence du système. Chaque acte de survie des femmes palestiniennes sous

bombardement incarne cette fragilité. La thèse témoigne de la résilience nécessaire pour persister face à des bouleversements politiques, institutionnels et émotionnels.

Cette thèse recentre les femmes arabes comme des agents obligés, naviguant et réimaginant les systèmes oppressifs. Le chapitre 1 retrace l'enracinement juridique de l'oppression ; le chapitre 2 montre le pouvoir ambivalent de la négociation néo-patriarcale ; le chapitre 3 recadre l'oppression intériorisée dans une perspective relationnelle ; et le chapitre 4 met en lumière le potentiel de résistance quotidienne. Ensemble, ces chapitres décrivent le patriarcat comme structure et pratique, intégré dans les lois, façonné par les négociations intimes et soutenu par les normes quotidiennes. Ils montrent le fonctionnement du pouvoir à travers institutions, dynamiques personnelles et attentes héritées, tout en soulignant la contestation modeste mais régulière qui en découle. Pour y faire face, une politique féministe bien ancrée doit comprendre à la fois les structures juridiques et les réalités vécues, et saisir les "espaces intermédiaires" où émergent la résistance et la réalisation.

Méthodologie, objectif et éthique

Mon point de départ : mes deux grands-mères se sont mariées très jeunes, à seize et dix-neuf ans, et ont eu leurs premiers enfants tôt. Ces expériences personnelles, confrontées à l'évolution du statut civil et social des femmes dans le monde arabophone, ont motivé ma recherche, en mettant en lumière les fractures et l'instabilité des possibilités des femmes à satisfaire leurs désirs et besoins dans le foyer, la société et le marché du travail.

Cette recherche examine les préjugés sexistes en Jordanie et en Palestine, en se concentrant sur la manière dont les femmes négocient et résistent aux structures oppressives. Elle vise à identifier comment elles restent actrices malgré de multiples obstacles et à analyser le processus d'adaptation et de manœuvre dans cette dynamique. L'étude met en évidence la violence manifeste des États et des structures sociales, ainsi que la violence intériorisée, et fournit une perspective subjective et contextualisée sur la manière dont les femmes existent parallèlement aux codes sociaux, politiques et familiaux dominants. Chaque femme, dans son contexte, utilise le marchandage comme méthode pour naviguer dans l'espace et l'identité.

L'identification de la Jordanie et de la Palestine au patriarcat classique (Kandiyoti, 1988) ou au néopatriarcat (Sharabi, 1988 ; Campbell, 2014 ; Moghaddam, 1991, 2020 ; Walby, 2020), dans le cadre du régime de genre (Walby, 2009, 2020), permet d'étudier à la fois les pratiques oppressives et les structures elles-mêmes (Giddens, 1984 ; Sewell Jr., 1992) et les manières dont les femmes naviguent à travers elles. Cela inclut le marchandage : sa nature, sa nécessité perçue,

la localisation et l'utilisation du pouvoir, et la possibilité d'induire des changements structurels individuels, parfois en opposition ou en accord avec le patriarcat. La recherche examine également l'intériorisation de cette oppression, en lien avec Fanon (1952) et le rôle de la honte culturelle sur les femmes.

Une perspective multigénérationnelle a été envisagée, mais l'autocensure lors d'interviews mère-fille a montré l'importance d'une "double vie" des femmes. Les entretiens ont donc été menés par groupe d'âge, tout en recueillant leur perception des changements entre générations, soulevant des questions de temporalité et de liminalité du genre : conflit ou transmission de plus d'espace et de liberté aux plus jeunes ?

À travers des interviews semi-structurées de femmes et d'experts, le travail met en lumière l'expérience des femmes de Jordanie et de Palestine face à l'oppression néo-patriarcale, en valorisant la subjectivité. Contrairement à la littérature existante qui tend à uniformiser les récits, cette recherche se concentre sur les voix et réponses spécifiques des participantes.

Prise de position et approche de la recherche

En tant que Palestinienne étrangère permanente, ma position dans la recherche est quelque peu unique. Tout d'abord, je fais partie de la catégorie de femmes échantillonnées pour ce travail et j'ai donc mes propres perspectives, expériences et réponses aux questions posées comme autre point de référence. Le fait que je fasse partie du même échantillon a mis les participantes à l'aise et la discussion a souvent évolué très naturellement vers une conversation tout à fait franche. Comme je suis consciente des différents contextes dans lesquels les femmes jordaniennes et palestiniennes sont élevées, il y a beaucoup moins de risques que je les place dans des catégories stéréotypées préexistantes et largement fausses. Je suis plus consciente du code social et je connais donc l'importance de l'anonymat, même en ce qui concerne la question la plus simple.

Je suis capable d'exister avec ce double statut dans de multiples contextes, notamment en ayant reçu une éducation chrétienne et musulmane à parts égales, ce qui me permet de connaître les traditions et les cultures religieuses des deux groupes. Je parle trois des langues les plus couramment parlées dans la région - l'arabe, l'anglais et le français - et je dispose d'un solide réseau social au Levant et dans le monde arabe au sens large. La langue a permis aux participants de s'exprimer dans plusieurs langues simultanément (dans la mesure du possible) et d'utiliser une terminologie plus précise pour expliquer leurs points de vue ; ma familiarité avec les deux

religions peut également apporter un certain réconfort car je peux être perçu comme un membre du groupe interne (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) dans les deux cas. Grâce à mes documents de nationalité, je suis également exemptée de la majorité des codes de conduite sociaux, car le fait d'être une étrangère (occidentale) dans la région me confère une certaine protection en ce qui concerne ma liberté d'expression.

L'approche de la thèse est à la fois empirique et analytique. Tout d'abord, l'un des principaux objectifs est de décrire de manière inductive la façon dont les femmes de Jordanie et de Palestine naviguent dans les structures oppressives et d'examiner si elles sont en mesure de mener une vie épanouie. Cette approche empirique met l'accent sur les expériences subjectives des femmes tout en les plaçant dans des cadres thématiques et analytiques au fur et à mesure de leur émergence. Du point de vue de la recherche féministe, elle a également permis aux femmes interrogées, qui n'ont pas l'habitude de parler franchement avec les chercheurs régionaux, de le faire et d'éviter de s'autocensurer sur des sujets considérés comme tabous ou inappropriés dans l'espace public.

Ce que nous comprenons comme des vérités "universelles" ou "impartiales", produites par des chercheurs, des universitaires et des scientifiques, est en fin de compte façonné par des individus qui tentent d'observer le monde à distance, détachant souvent leur travail des réalités qu'ils analysent. La connaissance est considérée comme objective, alors qu'en pratique, elle ignore souvent la subjectivité du chercheur et du sujet, créant ainsi la fiction d'un auteur impartial. L'objectivité nous oblige à prendre en compte le subjectif pour établir la "vérité".

Méthodes de collecte et d'analyse des données et considérations éthiques

Pour ce projet de recherche qualitative, il était essentiel de privilégier des conversations profondes et prolongées plutôt que de viser un grand nombre de participantes. Différentes méthodes ont été combinées pour compenser les limites de chacune et fournir une image à la fois large et précise. Les entretiens, conçus pour durer au moins une heure, comportaient moins de dix questions (annexe B).

Une analyse documentaire spécifique au chapitre a été menée sur le genre et les régimes de genre, les féminismes, le néopatriarcat, le patriarcat et les accords patriarcaux, les théories de la structure sociale, l'oppression intériorisée et la honte, parallèlement à des recherches sur les indicateurs généraux de genre en Jordanie et en Palestine.

Une enquête en ligne a alimenté les entretiens narratifs semi-structurés. Lancée sur un mois via SurveyMonkey (novembre-décembre 2021) et diffusée par réseaux personnels, groupes de médias sociaux et références de pairs, elle a recueilli 305 réponses. Le logiciel a classé les réponses en questions fermées et ouvertes. L'objectif était de recueillir des informations générales sur les préoccupations des jeunes femmes arabes, d'affiner la question de recherche et de vérifier si des phénomènes théoriques, comme le marchandage patriarcal, étaient présents dans les populations contemporaines. Le questionnaire faisait référence à des tendances observées dans ma propre expérience et dans la littérature (annexe A).

Les questions visaient à comprendre les obstacles perçus par les jeunes femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes, leurs perspectives sur le féminisme et le patriarcat, notamment par contraste avec le Nord global. Des observations réflexives basées sur mes expériences ont été intégrées pour vérifier leur résonance auprès des participantes.

Limites de l'étude

L'importance de l'étude tient en grande partie à la nature du contenu obtenu grâce aux différentes méthodes de recherche. Les récits descriptifs de différents phénomènes peu étudiés, notamment la violence néopatriarcale, l'oppression intériorisée sous différentes formes et la culture de la honte qui prévaut dans le monde arabe et qui vise souvent spécifiquement les femmes, donnent un aperçu approfondi des récits contemporains. Il tente également de contourner les idées fausses sur les femmes de la région tout en les plaçant dans leur contexte d'oppression. En choisissant une approche centrée sur l'expérience vécue par les femmes, il peut s'avérer que l'on dispose d'informations plus "racontables" qui peuvent aider à brosser un tableau plus précis (parallèlement à d'autres types de sources importantes) pour les praticiens locaux et internationaux, ce qui conduit à une prise de décision plus éclairée.

Une certaine valeur ajoutée d'un point de vue sociologique, mettant en évidence les unités sociales centrales à étudier dans les contextes jordanien et palestinien, ainsi que la fonctionnalité de la structure sociale en général. Il fournit également une explication contemporaine à de nombreux aspects de la culture arabe qui n'est généralement pas articulée dans les universités.

Les limites de cette étude incluent l'impossibilité d'inclure un groupe de participants plus important et plus diversifié. Il y a un manque de représentation de la véritable diversité culturelle que l'on trouve à la fois en Palestine et en Jordanie ; ceci est mis en évidence par le manque de représentation des participantes résidant actuellement dans différents gouvernorats jordaniens, où les tranches socio-économiques varient de manière significative (Ma'an, Mafraq, Irbid, par exemple). De même, l'accès à un plus grand nombre de femmes de Cisjordanie, de Gaza et de '48 Palestiniennes (bien qu'elles soient plus représentées dans cet échantillon que leurs homologues).

De plus, comme cette thèse a été écrite pendant un bouleversement de la violence coloniale et impérialiste contre les pays du Levant (*Bilad al-Sham*), en particulier contre les Palestiniens, j'ai un conflit interne constant en tant que chercheur face à un génocide contre mon peuple. Ainsi, le parti pris contre les acteurs occidentaux qui y contribuent, même s'il n'est pas infondé, peut être perçu comme un antagonisme. Je ne pense pas, cependant, que cela contribue à un manque de précision dans l'analyse des résultats.

Chapitre 1. "Protéger les femmes" et le pouvoir de l'État par le droit : Une étude historique des relations patriarcales entre les femmes et les institutions en Palestine et en Jordanie

RÉSUMÉ

Ce chapitre s'appuie sur des recherches d'archives, des sources universitaires et des entretiens pour affirmer que l'établissement, après les divisions Sykes-Picot de la Grande Syrie en États

"modernes" et en colonies de peuplement a paradoxalement modernisé et institutionnalisé les relations patriarcales "traditionnelles" par le biais de la loi, en grande partie pour renforcer les formes répressives et extractives des États eux-mêmes. Ce chapitre examine les principales approches théoriques du patriarcat en tant que signe et ensemble de pratiques institutionnalisées et culturelles, ainsi que le développement de lois sexospécifiques au fil du temps dans le Levant, ou *Bilad al-Sham.* Il se concentre en particulier sur la distribution et la régulation des ressources et des droits civiques, familiaux et corporels dans la Palestine historique et la Jordanie d'aujourd'hui. Il met l'accent sur la manière dont les frontières et donc les domaines législatifs se sont déplacés et ont coexisté sous des formes empilées au fil du temps dans ces territoires. Les défis collectifs et individuels sur le terrain ont également révisé ces distributions de pouvoir et de ressources, avec des contradictions persistantes. L'analyse s'inscrit dans le cadre des études féministes, anticoloniales et anti-impérialistes au sens large et dans la région. Elle montre comment les formes traditionnelles de domination masculine ont évolué vers des formes fermement institutionnalisées depuis la fin de l'ère ottomane jusqu'à aujourd'hui, érodant l'autonomie des femmes et leur éventail d'options, en fonction de leur classe et de leur position citoyenne, ainsi que la façon dont les relations coloniales, compradores et impérialistes avec le Nord global imposent d'autres échelles de relations patriarcales qui limitent la souveraineté et le champ d'action de sociétés et de gouvernements tout entiers.

Ce chapitre soutient que la partition post-Sykes-Picot de la Grande Syrie, la centralisation ottomane, les mandats britanniques et français, ainsi que les régimes postcoloniaux, n’ont pas démantelé le patriarcat mais l’ont intégré dans le droit de l’État. Les systèmes juridiques de Jordanie et de Palestine codifient l’autorité masculine, transformant le corps des femmes, leur mariage et leur reproduction en instruments d’affirmation de la souveraineté et de l’ordre social. Du patchwork des codes familiaux ottomans aux lois pénales britanniques et tribunaux contemporains, ces dispositifs maintiennent la tutelle masculine, les hiérarchies sectaires et la négociabilité des droits des femmes selon les logiques impériales, nationalistes et des bailleurs de fonds.

Le chapitre repense le patriarcat comme un système dynamique médiatisé par l'État et considère la famille comme institution politisée naturalisant les hiérarchies de sexe. L'analyse retrace l'évolution historique des régimes juridiques régissant les droits corporels et civiques des femmes, des Tanzimat ottomans aux statuts contemporains, montrant comment la "tradition" a été réorientée pour contrôler les populations via les chefs religieux tout en centralisant propriété et commerce dans le droit étatique et la patrilinéarité.

Il examine ensuite les interactions entre coutumes tribales, autorités religieuses et donateurs internationaux dans un cadre juridique hybride. Les lois restreignant la citoyenneté des femmes, régulant le mariage et contrôlant l'autonomie corporelle ne sont pas archaïques mais instruments actifs de l'État, avec des réformes symboliques répondant aux pressions des donateurs, laissant intactes les fondations de l'impunité patriarcale.

En Palestine, l'occupation et la gouvernance à plusieurs niveaux fragmentent le paysage juridique : les ordres militaires israéliens découpent les territoires, l'Autorité palestinienne applique des lois héritées des régimes précédents, et les tribunaux religieux statuent sur le statut personnel. Ce chaos disperse la responsabilité et entrave toute réforme, forçant les femmes à naviguer dans un labyrinthe où l'indépendance civique et corporelle est soumise à des intérêts coloniaux, communautaires et politiques changeants.

Le chapitre conclut en explorant les contradictions entre cadres institutionnels et luttes vécues, questionnant la portée des initiatives féministes étatiques et ONG, souvent centrées sur les mesures plutôt que sur la libération, contournant l'oppression structurelle et dépolitisant la justice de genre. Les entretiens avec des femmes jordaniennes et palestiniennes révèlent leur compréhension quotidienne du féminisme et sa praxis, exposant les limites des paradigmes réformistes qui assimilent amendements juridiques et émancipation. La loi apparaît ainsi comme instrument de contrôle patriarcal et terrain de subversion. En opposant la dynamique monarchie-tribu-donateur de la Jordanie à l'occupation carérale de la Palestine, le chapitre

repense les pratiques féministes hors des cadres de l'État et des ONG et interroge comment réimaginer l'équité de genre face à la fragmentation juridique et aux réformes incomplètes.

Généalogies des droits corporels et civiques : Tracer les lois "modernes" sur le genre en Palestine et en Jordanie de la fin de la période ottomane à la période actuelle

Cette section examine la dégradation progressive des droits corporels et civils des femmes en Jordanie et en Palestine, en retraçant l'évolution d'un patriarcat patrilinéaire "traditionnel" sous l'Empire ottoman à l'émergence d'un néopatriarcat dans l'État-nation moderne. Il situe ces transformations dans le cadre de changements historiques et géopolitiques plus larges, en soutenant que la consolidation du pouvoir familial dans le cadre de structures patriarcales au cours des réformes du Tanzimat ottoman, influencées par le code napoléonien, a jeté les bases des restrictions ultérieures. Ces dynamiques ont été exacerbées pendant la période coloniale et renforcées par les cadres législatifs contemporains.

En se concentrant sur la relation entre les femmes et l'État, cette section contribue au cadre général du chapitre en explorant la manière dont ces changements de gouvernance ont systématiquement eu un impact sur les droits juridiques, sociaux et corporels des femmes. À l'aide d'une analyse historique et d'archives, cette section interroge la manière dont les politiques coloniales et les systèmes juridiques ont renforcé les normes patriarcales, en éclipsant les pratiques indigènes et en encourageant les stéréotypes sur la culture et la "religion" de la région. Dans cette optique, la discussion cherche à remettre en question les tropes orientalistes qui attribuent l'oppression sexiste uniquement à la religion ou aux traditions culturelles, en soulignant au contraire le rôle des structures de pouvoir et des modèles de gouvernance externes.

Questions "culturelles" contemporaines, genre et régimes juridiques en Jordanie : citoyenneté, sexe et mariage, et "tradition" tribale

Si la religion est souvent citée comme le principal moteur de l'inégalité entre les sexes en Jordanie, un examen plus approfondi révèle comment les pouvoirs coloniaux ont capitalisé et modernisé les structures tribales pour institutionnaliser les systèmes d'oppression. En renforçant les cadres patriarcaux, les autorités coloniales ont enraciné la marginalisation des femmes, et cette intersection de forces tribales, coloniales et sociales continue de façonner l'environnement restrictif pour les femmes aujourd'hui. Comme l'explique Johnstone (2015), "comme l'ont souligné les juristes Chopra et Isser, la discrimination fondée sur le sexe n'est généralement pas un élément intrinsèque d'un système judiciaire particulier. Au contraire, les systèmes judiciaires reflètent et perpétuent des aspects de la société dans laquelle ils s'inscrivent, tels que les relations de pouvoir asymétriques entre les hommes et les femmes (1)."

Ainsi, l'intersection du tribalisme, du colonialisme et du patriarcat a eu un impact profond et durable sur les relations hommes-femmes en Jordanie. Le système tribal, soutenu par le régime colonial, reste une force centrale dans le façonnement des sphères publiques et privées, assurant la marginalisation continue des femmes. Il est essentiel de comprendre ce contexte historique pour analyser les dynamiques de genre contemporaines et les obstacles persistants auxquels les femmes sont confrontées en Jordanie aujourd'hui.

Dans ce cadre, les rôles des femmes étaient confinés à la sphère domestique, leur action étant systématiquement exclue des domaines public et politique. Cette marginalisation a non seulement limité la participation des femmes à l'élaboration du projet national, mais a également renforcé les perceptions sociétales des rôles de genre, qui continuent de façonner les réalités contemporaines des femmes en Jordanie. Par exemple, si les femmes jordaniennes bénéficient aujourd'hui de taux d'alphabétisation relativement élevés et d'un accès croissant à l'éducation, leur représentation dans les sphères politiques et économiques reste disproportionnellement faible.

Contradictions entre le vécu et l'État : Féminismes institutionnels, "internationaux" et ONG

Le féminisme en tant que concept unificateur ou plutôt universel gagne et perd simultanément du terrain dans la région arabe, y compris en Jordanie et en Palestine. Les formes dominantes de projets féministes dans la région sont liées aux gouvernements, aux organisations "non gouvernementales", aux entreprises et aux bailleurs de fonds étrangers occidentaux qui leur imposent de nombreuses limites. Alors que les interventions de l'État et des ONG se présentent souvent comme des alliés dans la promotion des droits des femmes, de nombreuses femmes en Jordanie et en Palestine considèrent ces féminismes institutionnels comme extractifs, aliénants, ou décontextualisés et non pertinents. Cette section explore la manière dont ces cadres, généralement façonnés par les agendas des donateurs, les mandats universels et les valeurs imposées de l'extérieur, prennent souvent le pas sur les réalités vécues et les priorités des femmes qu'ils prétendent servir. S'appuyant sur des conversations avec des femmes qui sont témoins et/ou sujets de ces interventions, cette discussion se concentre sur la façon dont le langage féministe a été dépolitisé, instrumentalisé, et parfois complètement rejeté. Plutôt que de considérer ces réactions comme une résistance au féminisme lui-même, elles révèlent les tensions entre les paradigmes institutionnels imposés et les stratégies quotidiennes que les femmes sont obligées d'utiliser pour lutter contre l'oppression. Que se passe-t-il lorsque le féminisme est filtré par des structures qui sont elles-mêmes complices des formes de violence qu'elles prétendent combattre ?

Le féminisme en Palestine et en Jordanie est façonné à la fois par les expériences vécues et les cadres institutionnels, les femmes luttant contre l'oppression d'une manière qui reflète leurs réalités politiques et sociales spécifiques. Les femmes palestiniennes sont confrontées au double combat de la résistance à la violence et à l'occupation israéliennes et de la remise en question des normes patriarcales au sein de leurs communautés, où l'accès à l'éducation, aux soins de santé et aux opportunités économiques est encore plus limité, voire éradiqué, par le statu quo général. En Jordanie, les femmes sont confrontées à des restrictions légales et sociales qui limitent leurs droits et à des conditions économiques difficiles.

Le concept d'intersectionnalité, tel que discuté par Dorlin (2021, 679-682), a subi une transformation significative depuis sa création, en particulier dans le contexte français, ce qui est également pertinent pour l'approche adoptée à l'égard du "Sud global". A l'origine, il s'agissait d'un cadre radical d'analyse des systèmes d'oppression qui se chevauchent, tels que le genre, la race et la classe, mais il a été de plus en plus institutionnalisé, ce qui a conduit à sa dépolitisation. Dans les milieux universitaires et financiers, elle est souvent réduite à un mot à la mode, dépouillée de son sens critique et utilisée comme un geste superficiel, voire une posture morale, plutôt que comme un outil de changement systémique. Malgré cela, l'intersectionnalité a revitalisé les études féministes en France, suscitant des débats et clarifiant les divisions entre les perspectives de recherche et les disciplines. Cependant, elle a également été confrontée à une importante réaction idéologique, en particulier de la part des partisans du positivisme paternaliste et du républicanisme nationaliste, qui la considèrent comme une menace pour l'universalisme français et les "valeurs occidentales". Cette critique réactionnaire, souvent ancrée dans des idéologies antiféministes et racistes, a conduit à la censure, à des mesures disciplinaires et à l'annulation d'événements académiques. Son analyse met en évidence la lutte actuelle pour préserver le potentiel transformateur de l'intersectionnalité au milieu de la cooptation et de la résistance idéologique. Cette dynamique est encore compliquée par la montée du fémonationalisme, où la rhétorique féministe est cooptée pour justifier des programmes nationalistes et anti-immigration.

Bint Nour, de Ramallah, me dit : "Le féminisme est très important pour moi, mes deux parents sont féministes et m'ont élevée dans ce sens. En gros, je peux faire tout ce que je veux et je devrais pouvoir le faire. J'ai l'impression que l'on s'est approprié ce terme pour lui donner de nouvelles significations, en particulier en Occident, où les questions réelles sont reléguées au second plan. Le travail sexuel, bien que je ne sois pas contre, peut rarement être appliqué dans le contexte de l'autonomisation - ou d'un droit à la 'chirurgie plastique' problématique pour centrer ces choses comme des priorités alors qu'il y a d'autres choses que nous devons faire d'abord (communication personnelle, 2024)."

Chapitre 2. Agents obligés : Les contrats interpersonnels individuels, les stratégies d'adaptation et les changements progressifs

Résumé

S'appuyant principalement sur des entretiens, mais s'inscrivant dans le cadre de débats théoriques pertinents, ce chapitre examine comment les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes négocient et élaborent des stratégies individuelles au sein de leurs sociétés (lieux de travail, familles et autres contextes) et comment se construit et s'utilise ce que Pierre Bourdieu a appelé l'"habitus". Les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes négocient et élaborent des stratégies individuelles au sein de leurs sociétés (lieux de travail, familles et autres contextes) et construisent et utilisent ce que Pierre Bourdieu appelle l'"habitus". Celles-ci sont délimitées par les frontières imposées par un État néolibéral dont l'aide sociale est limitée et par le fonctionnement du patriarcat, en particulier par le biais de la loi, comme indiqué au chapitre 1. Essentiellement, les femmes manœuvrent à travers les normes et les codes structurels tout en essayant de mettre en œuvre des changements progressifs individuellement. À l'aide d'un codage thématique et de méthodes comparatives, la thèse a déterminé des modèles de négociation entre les femmes dans des domaines tels que le mariage, la religiosité et l'éducation pour parvenir à une situation plus proche de ce qu'elles préfèrent. Le chapitre affirme que ces négociations remettent en question les normes patriarcales et les renforcent en restant dans leur logique générale et en opérant individuellement plutôt que collectivement. Il identifie des dynamiques familiales et amicales et des attitudes intergénérationnelles plus équitables, notamment une plus grande capacité de reproduction, le partage (ou l'externalisation) des tâches ménagères, la liberté de mouvement des filles et des femmes, des attitudes moins sexistes et des changements dans les pratiques d'éducation des enfants par rapport à celles des parents. Toutefois, comme les négociations et les changements sont profondément individualisés, il n'est pas possible d'isoler ou de disséquer une relation de cause à effet directe avec un changement social visible, mais certainement de centrer le processus lui-même.

Ce chapitre explore comment les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes, confrontées à des structures néopatriarcales, négocient individuellement leur liberté à travers compromis, défi et recalibrage discret de leur habitus, transformant ainsi leurs espaces privés et communautaires. En s'appuyant sur l'habitus de Bourdieu et les schémas de Sewell, la négociation patriarcale de Kandiyoti est analysée au niveau microéconomique : décisions quotidiennes concernant couvre-feux, éducation, carrière ou garde des enfants permettent des changements intergénérationnels et remodelent les contours matériels et symboliques des vies masculines et féminines.

Les entretiens révèlent trois modèles de changement sous-structurel : comparaison générationnelle signalant une plus grande autonomie ; exposition à de nouvelles connaissances et demandes de capitaux modifiant l'habitus, reflétant les tendances nationales mais de manière inégale selon les classes ; et mobilité de classe économique, utilisant l'externalisation du travail domestique pour gagner en autonomie tout en reproduisant hiérarchies de classe et ethniques.

L'analyse se déploie en deux mouvements : d'abord le processus de négociation néopatriarcale, montrant comment les choix individuels se conforment et contestent les structures ; ensuite les changements sous-structurels associés à l'évolution des habitus et schémas, révélant des reconfigurations matérielles du pouvoir au sein des familles et communautés. Les récits illustrent un paradoxe : gains de liberté personnelle pouvant renforcer les systèmes d'inégalité, accentués par l'occupation militarisée en Palestine et les impératifs néolibéraux.

Ce chapitre remet en question les modèles déterministes d'émancipation, affirmant que l'action sous patriarcat est une dialectique fragile, faite d'actes quotidiens de survie et de résistance. Les femmes menant une "double vie" montrent que la résistance naît de l'intérieur, entre conformité publique et subversion privée. Intégrant Foucault et les perspectives féministes, il souligne que l'action individuelle est limitée et construite par des relations de pouvoir omniprésentes.

La négociation, loin d’être un simple compromis, peut offrir un espace pour l’exercice de l’action et de la liberté personnelle (Mahmood, 2005 ; Fadil, 2011 ; Abu-Lughod, 2013 ; Rawat, 2014 ; Kabeer, 2016), tout en conservant des contraintes structurelles. Reconnaître ces gains sans les glorifier exige une approche nuancée (Dayan-Herzbrun, 2005) : l’agence est un terrain relationnel complexe façonné par pouvoir, affect, survie et histoire, indissociable des intentions, contraintes et contextes éthiques qui la produisent.

Mariage, piété feinte, éducation et emploi

Les deux sous-sections suivantes, qui analysent les réponses aux entretiens par le biais d'une analyse du discours narratif, mettent en évidence les **principaux** résultats, en résumé;

Tout d'abord, toutes les participantes aux entretiens mentionnent une augmentation des libertés personnelles vis-à-vis de leurs mères, ce qui indique qu'un changement (sub)structurel a lieu au sein du foyer au niveau intergénérationnel. Ce changement indique une prise de conscience et des efforts accrus de la part des générations de femmes plus âgées pour alléger certaines pressions sociales exercées par leurs filles. Il est certain que ce n'est pas le cas dans tous les contextes familiaux, mais ce point a été développé à partir des perspectives des participants à la recherche. Ce résultat n'est pas habituellement enregistré, mais il a été compris comme un "changement d'époque" influencé par des facteurs internes et externes.

Deuxièmement, l'internet, en tandem avec la demande de capitaux, a suscité des changements socioculturels considérables, les acteurs étant exposés à de nouvelles connaissances et à de nouvelles demandes, ce qui a entraîné un changement d'habitus, la transformation de certaines structures et donc des changements sous-structurels. Cela est lié d'une certaine manière à un taux de fécondité plus faible (en particulier parmi la "petite bourgeoisie"), mais les tendances nationales montrent également un déclin général depuis les années 1970 (plus important en Jordanie qu'en Palestine).

Troisièmement, les situations socio-économiques, ou "classes", sont beaucoup plus malléables qu'on ne le pense, en ce sens qu'un individu, en particulier dans une région économiquement instable, peut appartenir à différentes "classes" au cours de sa vie. Cela signifie, dans le contexte des femmes interrogées, que certains processus de négociation peuvent être contournés avec des moyens financiers. Cela se manifeste également par des niveaux d'éducation élevés et la nécessité d'avoir un ménage à double revenu pour maintenir une certaine qualité de vie. Par exemple, le phénomène de l'externalisation du travail domestique est très répandu dans la région.

La première partie analyse en détail le processus de négociation néopatriarcale, la section suivante s'appuie sur les changements sociaux substructurels qui se sont produits (discutés par les participants aux entretiens) et, bien que je ne prétende pas à une relation de cause à effet directe, les discussions soulignent que l'évolution des *habitus* (et des schémas) a contribué à ces changements. La nature changeante du monde lui-même, en particulier dans le contexte de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, et surtout les changements rapides qui se sont produits au cours des dernières décennies, ont poussé les femmes au niveau international, ainsi que dans leurs contextes locaux spécifiques, à innover dans la manière de traiter avec leurs homologues.

La section de la discussion mettra en évidence les changements substructurels des relations/dynamiques inter-familiales dans le contexte des femmes, les changements substructurels concernant l'éducation et l'emploi, et les libertés personnelles ; tous ces changements sont menés à travers un processus de négociation et un habitus en mutation. D'une manière ou d'une autre, les participants à l'étude ont compris le concept de négociation (néo)patriarcale, et beaucoup l'ont expliqué comme un processus continu et quotidien, en particulier sous l'angle du "sacrifice personnel". Si toutes les participantes ne l'ont pas compris d'un point de vue théorique, beaucoup ont fait le lien avec le processus - le patriarcat en général semble avoir affecté toutes les participantes interrogées.

Le marchandage (néo)patriarcal est compris contextuellement comme une nécessité pour la survie et l'indépendance ; cela suggère qu'il s'agit d'une pratique beaucoup plus courante et donc

très différente d'une femme à l'autre. Il implique des concessions sur les valeurs, les comportements et les décisions, en échange d'autres concessions dues à l'environnement sexiste très oppressif. En échange, les femmes sont en mesure d'atteindre leurs priorités personnelles dans le cadre des contraintes des structures patriarcales qui s'exercent contre elles.

Chapitre 3. Les complications psychologiques : L'intériorisation des pressions géopolitiques, sexuées et culturelles

Résumé

Ce chapitre étudie l'intériorisation de trois oppressions distinctes mais qui se chevauchent, subies par les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes : en tant qu'Arabes, en tant que femmes et en tant que femmes arabes. Ces couches reflètent respectivement l'instabilité géopolitique et la domination occidentale, le sexisme systémique et les pressions culturelles spécifiques telles que le *"eib"*. S'appuyant sur des entretiens de première main, des théories féministes postcoloniales et des approches psychosociales, ce chapitre explore la manière dont ces oppressions créent une triple conscience, contraignant les femmes à des identités fragmentées et à des doubles vies. En tant qu'Arabes, les femmes intériorisent l'instabilité géopolitique et les récits impérialistes imposés à la région. En tant que femmes, elles naviguent dans les systèmes internationaux et locaux de sexisme. En tant que femmes arabes, elles sont confrontées à des mécanismes de contrôle spécifiques à leur culture, comme le "eib", qui fonctionne à la fois comme un outil de régulation et de police du genre. La violence horizontale, les traumatismes intergénérationnels et la codépendance sont des thèmes récurrents qui mettent en évidence la façon dont l'intériorisation sert à la fois de mécanisme de survie et de perpétuation des normes sociétales oppressives. En mettant l'accent sur les voix des femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes, il met en lumière les effets psychosociaux de la vie sous des oppressions multiples et croisées, tout en contribuant à des discussions plus larges sur le genre, le pouvoir et la résistance dans les contextes postcoloniaux. Les femmes réfléchissent ici à l'intériorisation et à la reproduction des

restrictions et des normes, produisant une sorte de bataille interne permanente pour la plupart qu'elles affrontent et tentent de résoudre.

Suite aux discussions précédentes sur la relation des femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes avec l'État et la "société", ce chapitre examine la relation entre les femmes et le "soi" dans des contextes socio-politiques oppressifs. Il étudie les effets psychosociaux croisés des oppressions institutionnalisées et sociales, offrant une compréhension approfondie de "l'oppression intériorisée" dans les sociétés néopatriarcales. À l'aide de récits primaires, d'analyses sociopolitiques et de théories féministes, il met en lumière la manière dont les systèmes patriarcaux, coloniaux et les attentes sociétales convergent pour façonner les expériences des femmes, influençant à la fois les identités individuelles et la conscience collective.

Le chapitre commence par situer l'internalisation comme un phénomène mondial tout en l'ancrant dans des réalités locales. Si l'oppression intériorisée transcende les frontières géographiques, elle prend des formes différentes selon les contextes socioculturels. Pour les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes, elle opère à l'intersection du genre, du colonialisme et des contraintes culturelles. Dans les structures (néo)patriarcales, exacerbées par l'héritage colonial, l'intériorisation suscite des réactions telles que la honte, une perception déformée de soi et un contrôle social renforcé, qui affectent le sentiment d'action et d'appartenance des femmes.

Trois conclusions essentielles se dégagent. Premièrement, l'intériorisation du sexisme, qui se manifeste par la honte du sexe, des normes de beauté irréalistes, la honte du corps et des formes de violence horizontale, où les femmes se surveillent les unes les autres. L'hostilité horizontale, un élément clé, dirige l'action contre les pairs plutôt que contre les structures d'oppression, reproduisant ainsi les inégalités systémiques.

Deuxièmement, l'insécurité matérielle et politique intériorisée produit une double et triple conscience, une dépendance culturelle et une ambivalence identitaire. S'inspirant de Du Bois (1903), cette "double conscience" traduit le conflit entre la perception de soi et les réalités extérieures. En Palestine, le (néo)patriarcat aggravé par le colonialisme intensifie cette dissonance, soulignant comment les identités fragmentées émergent à la fois comme des stratégies d'adaptation et comme des actes potentiels de défiance.

Troisièmement, le chapitre aborde l'intériorisation du *'eib* (la honte), un mécanisme culturel genré qui régule les comportements des femmes et fragmente le moi. Bien que le '*eib* régisse à la fois les hommes et les femmes, ces dernières en portent le fardeau de manière disproportionnée, quelle que soit leur classe sociale ou leur appartenance religieuse. L'intériorisation du '*eib* conduit à des "doubles vies" et à une conscience stratifiée, les femmes devant trouver un équilibre entre les attentes de la société et leurs désirs d'autonomie. Comme le note Williams (2012, 135-144), l'oppression intériorisée sert souvent à la survie, à la protection et à la reproduction.

Centré sur leurs voix, ce chapitre élargit la compréhension de l'intériorisation dans des cadres sociopolitiques et culturels spécifiques, offrant des pistes de résistance, de redéfinition et de changement collectif.

Intériorisation du sexisme : "Je dis toujours que le plus grand ennemi de la femme est l'autre femme".

En langue arabe, il n'existe toujours pas de formulation fixe ou précise pour le terme sexisme/misogynie intériorisé. L'une des traductions proposées, *koroh' el nisa'a el-dakhili*, "haine intérieure des femmes", ne reflète pas le fait que le terme est spécifique aux femmes. Cela me semble étrange compte tenu de la prévalence de ce terme dans la société, qui prend de nombreuses formes et est reproduit (consciemment et inconsciemment) par les hommes et les femmes.

Le sexisme intériorisé désigne l'assimilation inconsciente de croyances sexistes par les femmes, ce qui les conduit à adopter des comportements et des attitudes qui dévalorisent leur propre sexe et renforcent les normes patriarcales (par exemple Bearman et al., 2009 ; Rahmani 2020). Il en résulte souvent de l'autosurveillance, de la compétition et la priorisation des perspectives masculines, ce qui peut limiter l'autonomie des femmes et perpétuer les inégalités sociales (Evteeva, 2024). Dans les contextes arabes, le sexisme intériorisé est intensifié par des normes culturelles qui donnent la priorité à l'autorité et à l'influence masculines, façonnant les rôles et les attentes des hommes et des femmes au sein des structures familiales et sociétales (Husseini, 2021). Si les participants à la recherche ont mis en évidence différentes formes de sexisme

intériorisé, l'effet de la violence horizontale sur la situation et la manière dont elle s'infiltre dans la vie quotidienne des participants constituent un fil conducteur.

Le Dr Islah Jad ajoute à propos du sexisme intériorisé : "Il peut certainement s'agir d'un mécanisme d'adaptation, en particulier dans les familles conservatrices, où l'on gagne à éviter les reproches et les punitions et à jouir d'une certaine paix sociale et familiale, mais la résistance est également évidente dans de nombreux cas et une culture plus soucieuse de l'égalité des sexes se répand rapidement (communication personnelle, 2022)".

Intériorisation de l'insécurité (sociopolitique et matérielle) : "Il est paradoxal d'être une femme palestinienne"

La discussion avec les sources primaires fait ressortir deux thèmes clés : la négociation et le rejet de la double conscience dans le contexte palestinien, et les effets interpersonnels de l'occupation, des systèmes de tutelle et des séparations familiales. En Palestine, où l'oppresseur est clairement identifiable, le rejet de la double conscience est plus prononcé, grâce à une résistance active et à la revendication de l'identité culturelle. En Jordanie, les effets plus subtils du colonialisme intériorisé se manifestent par des relations ambivalentes et une codépendance, en particulier au sein de structures familiales façonnées par des systèmes de tutelle patriarcaux, illustrant l'interaction complexe des héritages coloniaux, de l'oppression sexospécifique et des tactiques de subversion.

De nombreuses oppressions se croisent dans le monde arabophone, l'occupation étant la plus dominante en Palestine, tandis que la Jordanie et la Palestine sont aux prises avec une gouvernance sociale, politique et juridique médiocre et sexiste. À cela s'ajoutent des économies faibles et des opportunités limitées. La quasi-inexistence de l'État-providence et les obstacles importants à la migration créent un état perpétuel d'insécurité et de stress. Même si une forme d'oppression n'affecte pas directement une personne, d'autres formes s'infiltrent inévitablement dans sa vie. L'intériorisation de l'instabilité matérielle, qu'elle soit économique, liée à la citoyenneté et à la protection, à la liberté de circulation, à la violence ou à l'instabilité régionale, devient une expérience constante de procédures complexes, d'attente interminable et de

contournement de nombreux obstacles juste pour satisfaire les besoins de base. Il s'agit désormais d'un mode de vie, visible et intériorisé, transmis de génération en génération.

Dans une perspective de genre, j'explorerai les mécanismes internes et externes qui peuvent apparaître chez les femmes, et les individus en général, en raison de cette insécurité intériorisée. Les femmes, en particulier, sont confrontées à la fois à l'instabilité politique et au fardeau supplémentaire de la codépendance juridique et personnelle, ce qui contribue encore à l'anxiété et à l'instabilité. Leur positionnement social et leur insécurité intériorisée se traduisent souvent par une forme de double conscience (Du Bois, 1903) ; une double conscience fondée sur la race qui, lorsqu'elle est combinée à des normes culturelles et de genre, évolue vers une triple conscience. Cela génère des effets psychosociaux tels que l'ambivalence dans les relations et un sens fracturé du soi, ainsi qu'une culture de la dépendance.

Intériorisation de *'Eib* : "Parce que nos corps ont toujours été *'Eib*"

Il est difficile d'expliquer une abstraction socioculturelle de longue date dans toute son ampleur, la nuance que le phénomène englobe est difficile à saisir car elle est profondément ancrée dans la culture - il s'agit d'un habitus intergénérationnel. *Eib* se traduit directement par "défaut", bien qu'il soit utilisé pour décrire un acte "honteux". Il est si répandu qu'il est difficile d'imaginer que de nombreux Arabes, hommes ou femmes, n'ont pas été soumis à ce mot (et au code social qui lui est associé) au cours de leur vie. Ce code social régit le comportement public des hommes et des femmes, même s'il est bien connu qu'il affecte les femmes de manière disproportionnée.

Le concept de ʿ*eib* (honte) en tant que régulateur du comportement social a des racines profondes dans les normes tribales arabes préislamiques, où l'honneur et la réputation fonctionnaient comme des piliers de la cohésion communautaire (Smith, 1903 ; Al-Tabari, 1987). Les récits historiques de la société Jahiliyya soulignent comment les codes de la honte, distincts des notions religieuses ultérieures de *haram* (interdit), régissaient les rôles familiaux et de genre pour protéger la position tribale (Ahmed, 1992). Même lorsque des cadres juridiques islamiques sont apparus, ces valeurs préislamiques ont persisté, se mêlant à l'éthique religieuse pour façonner les attentes sociales (Joseph ed. 1999a.).

Les effets de ce phénomène socioculturel imposent des restrictions beaucoup plus strictes à l'être et au comportement des femmes, qui en sont venues à porter le poids de l'honneur de la famille. Il réglemente fortement de multiples aspects de sa vie ainsi que son cadre interne. Il limite des aspects tels que le code vestimentaire, les interactions avec les amis, les interactions avec les hommes, la liberté de mouvement et d'expression, afin de préserver la respectabilité de leur famille. Cette réglementation sociale se manifeste sous la forme d'un système de surveillance intériorisé, les femmes étant socialisées pour se conformer à ces normes. Sakleh (2020) décrit comment cette intériorisation fonctionne comme une forme d'"autosurveillance", où les femmes se protègent contre les actions qui pourraient provoquer un jugement communautaire (ou même être remarquées).

Le contrôle sexué du corps des femmes est particulièrement évident dans la régulation du comportement sexuel. La déclaration de Bint Nariman selon laquelle elle a "des problèmes corporels majeurs et des inhibitions sexuelles parce que nos corps ont toujours été *'eib*'" fait écho à la honte intériorisée dont souffrent de nombreuses femmes (communication personnelle, 2022). Cette stigmatisation culturelle du corps des femmes est souvent liée au concept de virginité, comme nous l'avons vu précédemment, une valeur qui est appliquée de manière beaucoup plus stricte pour les femmes que pour les hommes. Comme le souligne Bint Nadia, "il y a en quelque sorte deux poids, deux mesures, car la petite amie de mon frère aîné reste tout le temps à la maison et ma mère n'y voit pas d'inconvénient. L'autre jour, mon jeune frère a demandé à ma mère ce qu'elle pensait du fait qu'ils vivent avec leurs partenaires et elle a simplement répondu : "Oui, mais pas ta sœur '*eib* (communication personnelle, 2022)". Nous voyons ici que le contrôle du corps des femmes se manifeste sous la forme de honte et de restrictions, en particulier lorsqu'il s'agit de la sexualité des femmes.

Ce chapitre a retracé la manière dont les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes intériorisent les systèmes d'oppression qui se chevauchent, l'instabilité géopolitique, le sexisme systémique et les normes de genre culturellement enracinées, produisant des formes stratifiées d'autorégulation, de fragmentation et de survie. À travers le prisme de la triple conscience, nous voyons comment les femmes naviguent dans leurs identités non pas comme des ensembles unifiés, mais comme des espaces contestés, façonnés par des pressions externes et des attentes intériorisées. Le sexisme intériorisé fait surface dans la police interpersonnelle et la violence horizontale ; l'insécurité

politique et matérielle intériorisée génère l'ambivalence, l'hypervigilance et l'appartenance fracturée ; l'*eib* intériorisé impose la honte corporelle et la surveillance morale, contribuant à la double vie des femmes.

Pourtant, dans le cadre de ces luttes, les récits des femmes révèlent non seulement le poids de l'intériorisation, mais aussi la créativité et la capacité d'action nécessaires pour gérer, résister et parfois reconfigurer les identités imposées. Le développement de la double et triple conscience reflète un processus profondément relationnel, souvent douloureux, par lequel les femmes survivent et contestent les structures qui les entourent.

En situant l'intériorisation dans ses dimensions géopolitiques, culturelles et sexospécifiques spécifiques, ce chapitre souligne que l'oppression intériorisée n'est pas un phénomène purement psychologique, mais un processus enraciné socialement et historiquement. Comme le montrent les voix des participants, l'intériorisation est souvent une stratégie d'endurance autant qu'une reproduction de la domination, offrant des aperçus de réimaginations potentielles même dans le cadre de la contrainte.

Le chapitre suivant prolonge cette exploration en s'éloignant des luttes intériorisées pour examiner comment les femmes conceptualisent le changement, la guérison et la résistance, à la fois pour elles-mêmes et pour les générations futures, dans les limites et les possibilités qui s'offrent à elles.

Chapitre 4. De l'incarnation à la communauté : Stratégies quotidiennes de la pratique féministe informelle

Résumé

Ce chapitre conclut la triple analyse de la thèse sur l'oppression institutionnelle, interpersonnelle et intériorisée en mettant l'accent sur les actes quotidiens par lesquels les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes transmutant l'assujettissement incarné en actions libératrices collectives (potentielles). S'appuyant sur la critique de l'infantilisation juridique du chapitre 1, l'exploration

du marchandage patriarcal du chapitre 2 et la dissection des pressions intériorisées (comme le '*eib*) du chapitre 3, cette synthèse finale révèle comment la praxis féministe informelle (rééducation, exposition et solidarité organique) affronte les systèmes de contrôle qui se croisent tout en semant les graines d'un avenir transformateur.

La rééducation commence par une enquête solitaire sur les normes coloniales et patriarcales, la récupération de la culture et de l'autonomie par le biais d'histoires ancestrales et d'une réflexion critique. L'exposition fracture les récits hégémoniques en établissant des passerelles entre les espaces numériques et le dialogue intergénérationnel, et en œuvrant pour des libertés allant au-delà de la marchandisation néolibérale. Les féminismes organiques transforment les connaissances personnelles en force communautaire. Ces pratiques mettent en œuvre une dialectique vécue : la rééducation démantèle la honte intériorisée tout en remettant en question les hiérarchies juridiques ; l'exposition critique la cooptation néolibérale tout en exigeant un accès équitable ; la solidarité organique rejette les cadres dépolitisés des ONG tout en recentrant la lutte anticoloniale. En traduisant la résistance individuelle en cadres communautaires, nous pouvons imaginer une organisation alternative. Les visions des participants pour les jeunes générations, la sécurité, l'autonomie et les soins collectifs, émergent comme un plan vivant pour une justice de genre fondée sur la dignité, la résistance et les avenirs anticoloniaux. Ce chapitre comble le fossé entre les réalités vécues et les approches féministes théoriques, en offrant une perspective nuancée sur la façon dont les femmes façonnent activement des voies vers l'émancipation en l'absence de soutien systémique. Il met en évidence la nécessité d'une réforme à la fois structurelle et individuelle, soulignant que si la transformation personnelle est vitale, elle doit être complétée par un changement structurel pour parvenir à une libération durable.

Ce chapitre est le point culminant de la triple enquête de la thèse sur l'oppression institutionnelle, interpersonnelle et intériorisée, en examinant ces dynamiques à travers le prisme direct des femmes interrogées. Nous explorons ici les stratégies personnelles et communautaires que les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes ont citées, souvent de manière informelle et en dehors des structures formelles, alors qu'elles affrontent de multiples couches d'assujettissement et imaginent un statu quo plus équitable. Leurs récits révèlent comment les pratiques quotidiennes peuvent servir de sites de résistance et de renouveau, et comment les actes de défi individuels

peuvent évoluer vers des mouvements collectifs qui remettent en question les relations de pouvoir hégémoniques.

Au cœur de cette enquête se trouvent trois formes interdépendantes de praxis féministe informelle. La première est la rééducation, un processus qui commence dans la solitude lorsque les femmes désapprennent les récits coloniaux et patriarcaux qui ont façonné leur perception d'elles-mêmes et de leurs possibilités. En s'engageant dans des histoires ancestrales, des récits locaux et une réflexion critique, les participantes se réapproprient les connaissances culturelles et redécouvrent les traditions de l'action féminine qui avaient été occultées. Ce travail intérieur permet non seulement de démanteler les pressions intériorisées telles que le code de l'eib, mais aussi de jeter les bases d'une compréhension et d'une solidarité mutuelles.

La deuxième pratique est l'exposition, qui englobe à la fois l'engagement numérique et le dialogue intergénérationnel. Les femmes ont décrit comment les plateformes de médias sociaux, les rassemblements communautaires et les conversations avec des parents plus âgés et plus jeunes créent des espaces pour partager des contre-récits et remettre en question les hypothèses hégémoniques sur le genre. Lors de ces rencontres, les frontières de classe et de géographie sont dépassées et les femmes découvrent des expériences et des idées qui vont au-delà de leur environnement immédiat. L'exposition devient alors un catalyseur pour imaginer d'autres modes de vie et pour forger des liens qui transcendent les contraintes locales.

Le féminisme organique, troisième mode de praxis informelle, émerge lorsque les idées personnelles se traduisent en force communautaire. Avec leurs expériences de rééducation, d'exposition, cela donne lieu à des espaces autonomes qui donnent la priorité aux soins, au dialogue et à la prise de décision partagée. Il s'agit d'un potentiel de solidarité construit à partir de la base qui peut contester les régimes juridiques et sociaux qui cherchent à isoler les femmes et à renforcer leur dépendance.

En mettant l'accent sur les témoignages des participantes, ce chapitre comble les lacunes entre les réalités vécues et les cadres féministes théoriques. Il critique les limites des réformes descendantes qui manquent de résonance culturelle et plaide en faveur d'une approche qui associe la transformation personnelle au changement structurel. Les espoirs des femmes pour les générations futures : sécurité sociale et physique, autonomie dans la prise de décision et soins

intergénérationnels, suggèrent qu'une libération durable nécessite à la fois l'autonomisation individuelle et la reconfiguration collective des institutions sociales. En mettant en lumière ces stratégies quotidiennes, ce chapitre offre une perspective nuancée sur la manière dont la praxis féministe informelle peut engendrer des avenirs transformateurs fondés sur la dignité, la résistance et la justice.

Il est important de noter que leurs visions transcendent les idéologies institutionnelles et les cadres imposés par les donateurs. Elles ne s'expriment pas à partir des scénarios des ONG ou des programmes internationaux, mais à partir de l'immédiateté de l'expérience vécue, des conversations dans les maisons, dans les taxis, dans les réflexions personnelles. Il ne s'agit pas de donner une image de marque au féminisme ou de s'aligner sur les tendances sociopolitiques. Il s'agit de remodeler le quotidien : transformer les relations, les attentes et les modes d'être qui ont été largement régis par la peur, la honte et la limitation.

En exprimant leurs espoirs pour les jeunes générations, ils signalent leur engagement à favoriser l'authenticité, l'inclusion et la résilience par des moyens qui ne sont pas liés à une politique mais à un objectif. Elles envisagent un avenir où les jeunes femmes peuvent s'exprimer sans crainte, évoluer sans jugement et construire une communauté sans compétition. En fin de compte, leur vision est celle d'un monde où les jeunes femmes ne sont plus confinées par les mêmes luttes héritées, mais sont habilitées à tracer leur propre chemin, avec confiance, clarté et soutien collectif. C'est une vision qui insiste sur la possibilité d'une transformation personnelle comme forme de résistance politique, et d'un espoir partagé comme fondement d'un changement structurel.

Ce chapitre montre que si les réformes formelles échouent souvent à traiter l’assujettissement des femmes, les Palestiniennes et Jordaniennes pratiquent des actes quotidiens de réimagination et de praxis personnelle, forgeant de nouvelles possibilités vers l’équité entre les sexes. Par rééducation, exposition et solidarité organique, elles affrontent et déstabilisent le colonialisme, le patriarcat et le conformisme néolibéral, révélant que transformation personnelle et émancipation collective sont indissociables.

La rééducation agit comme praxis intime et critique : en désapprenant les récits coloniaux-patriarcaux et en explorant les traditions précoloniales, elles démantèlent la honte

intériorisée ('eib), créant les conditions d'une solidarité qui invite les autres à remettre en question les hiérarchies de genre. L'exposition étend ce travail aux sphères relationnelles et numériques, fracturant les scénarios culturels monolithiques et révélant des imaginaires alternatifs de justice entre les sexes.

Le féminisme organique repose sur des structures matérielles d'entraide non organisée : soins partagés, co-construction d'espaces sûrs et culture mutuelle de clarté politique. Les aspirations pour autonomie, sécurité et soins intergénérationnels sont des engagements concrets, confrontés aux réformes étatiques infantilisantes et aux programmes ONG dépolitisés.

En plaçant ces pratiques informelles au centre de la transformation, le chapitre recadre les luttes des femmes comme génératives et proto-politiques, affirmant que l'émancipation durable naît d'un travail relationnel soutenu de désapprentissage, de connexion et d'attention collective, et non de subventions ou de décrets. Cette approche propose un plan d'avenir anticolonial, fondé sur dignité, solidarité et interdépendance entre libération personnelle et politique.

Conclusion

Cette thèse a examiné les structures complexes et relationnelles de l'oppression fondée sur le genre vécues par les femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes, articulant leur gestion des défis institutionnels, interpersonnels et intériorisés. Grâce à une approche dialectique, elle retrace comment les forces historiques, juridiques et sociales construisent et renforcent les contraintes patriarcales, tout en mettant en lumière les réactions personnelles et souvent contradictoires des femmes face à ces forces. En centrant l'attention sur leurs voix, la recherche propose une analyse nuancée de la manière dont l'oppression est vécue et contestée du niveau institutionnel au niveau intime. Cette thèse contribue ainsi à la réflexion féministe en plaçant l'expérience locale au centre, démontrant comment la théorie et la pratique doivent s'articuler pour comprendre les formes d'oppression spécifiques au contexte palestinien et jordanien.

Le premier résultat majeur est que les structures institutionnelles, en particulier les cadres juridiques régissant les droits civils et corporels, fonctionnent comme des mécanismes primaires d'oppression sexospécifique. Les lois sur le statut personnel, la nationalité et la lenteur des

réformes légales consacrent la domination masculine, renforcent un ordre patriarcal et limitent l'autonomie des femmes. Ces lois s'insèrent dans des contextes géopolitiques et économiques, où colonialisme, structures néocoloniales et influences occidentales maintiennent les inégalités. Elles évoluent pour refléter et renforcer les intérêts des États et des impérialistes, tout en restant ancrées dans le patriarcat. La recherche souligne également la cooptation du féminisme par des institutions néolibérales et ONG.

La deuxième dimension concerne l'interpersonnel, où les structures patriarcales sont à la fois maintenues et contournées par le "marchandage" des femmes avec les contraintes sociales et familiales. Mariages stratégiques, piété feinte, éducation et emploi sont autant de négociations qui ne sont ni résistance pure ni capitulation, mais des actes dialectiques produisant des changements progressifs dans les normes de genre.

La troisième dimension est l'oppression intériorisée, où la domination externe s'inscrit dans le psychisme des femmes. Elles vivent une "triple conscience", combinant instabilité géopolitique, assujettissement sexiste et codes culturels comme le 'eib. Cette intériorisation entraîne autosurveillance et doubles vies, mais n'est pas statique : les femmes développent conscience critique et stratégies de transformation à travers dialogues intergénérationnels et exposition à des récits alternatifs.

Ces trois dimensions sont interdépendantes : les négociations personnelles, la conformité légale et la honte intériorisée se renforcent et s'influencent mutuellement. La thèse remet en question les cadres féministes dominants et orientalistes, situant l'expérience des femmes dans des systèmes de pouvoir locaux, nationaux et mondiaux. Elle met en évidence l'importance des actes de résistance informels, de la rééducation et de la solidarité organique comme voies potentielles de changement transformateur.

Enfin, la violence à Gaza et dans le Levant intensifie les vulnérabilités tout en forgeant de nouveaux modes de résilience. La recherche, ancrée dans ce contexte, témoigne de ces réalités, documente et refuse l'effacement des expériences féminines. Dans une perspective plus large, cette thèse souligne que l'oppression des femmes n'est pas seulement un problème individuel,

mais un phénomène social et politique enraciné dans l'histoire coloniale et les structures néopatriarcales contemporaines. Les dynamiques locales, nationales et régionales se croisent pour produire des contraintes spécifiques, mais elles offrent également des terrains d'action pour la résistance et la réimagination de futures sociétés égalitaires. En articulant les expériences personnelles aux contextes géopolitiques et historiques, cette recherche invite à repenser les stratégies féministes et anticoloniales, en montrant que la transformation durable repose sur l'articulation de l'autonomisation individuelle et de la reconstruction collective des institutions sociales.

Palestine will be free.

State, Society, Psyche: A Dialectical Analysis of Multiscalar Gendered Oppression in Palestinian and Jordanian Women's Everyday Lives

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis analyzes gendered oppression along three dimensions – institutional, interpersonal, and internalized – using high-quality relevant scholarship and interviews with Jordanian and Palestinian women about their daily lived experiences. The thesis focuses especially on the dimensions of oppression the women interviewed chose to contend with and how they navigate them. The work is based on an original survey conducted with 300 people, whose results then informed a semi-structured question set administered as interviews to a sample of Jordanian and Palestinian women between 24 and 35 years of age. This group was selected for their capacity to answer as both daughters, and in majority of cases as mothers too. The primary sources are further supported by informant interviews with five experts on gender in the region.

Modern state legislation that governs civil and bodily rights, including marriage, divorce, sex, and inheritance, reinforces the rights of boys and men over girls and women and is the primary source of institutional gendered oppression in Palestine and Jordan. These laws place women in an infantile legal status that forces them to culturally and socially depend on male relatives in societies that overall are not politically free. Related, as Arabs, women recognize their societies exist under Western-imposed geopolitical patriarchal institutional relations of power – economic, military, and political hegemony – that impose on all Palestinians and Jordanians settler-colonial rule or non-independent repressive governments that rely on chronic insecurity and surveillance. The second source of oppression examined is interpersonal. This form of social and cultural oppression puts women in positions where they believe they must ‘sacrifice’ and negotiate with the (neo)patriarchal institutional systems as well as intergenerational collective forms of trauma to function effectively in their societies, including in how they navigate pressures to marry and their intimate relationships. This sacrifice and negotiation can be understood theoretically as ‘patriarchal bargaining,’ or in the scope of this work, ‘bargaining with neo-patriarchal structures.’ Respondents consciously or unconsciously understand these strategies as necessary to existence under gendered systems of oppression and discussed at length the ways they have bargained, including for independence (e.g. accepting early marriage to gain a measure of independence from the natal family) or by feigning piety to protect younger female siblings and

the family ‘reputation.’ The third source of oppression is collective and individual psychological and embodied internalization of institutional and interpersonal oppression. Research participants discussed internalizing something similar to what Black US feminists have described as ‘triple oppression’ based on racial, sexual, and class/cultural statuses. In this case, women internalize their institutional legal and interpersonal social and cultural oppression (specifically the social code of ‘*eib*, or shame), in addition to subjugation to the phenomenon of globalized sexism, relating to beauty standards for example, and thus contending with its internalization. Shame operates as an informal yet solidified code that governs behaviors and the social order, for example requiring respect for one’s elders and kindness to one’s neighbours. While it is not inherently negative, it also polices women and fixates on public modesty and purity. Internalizing such values as women occurs in societies already made unfree by a larger repressive patriarchal, geopolitical, economic, political, and racial ‘order’ that frequently and conveniently portrays Arab women as primarily oppressed by their own cultures and religions. The thesis finds that the internalization of institutional and social systems of oppression while at the same time trying to fulfill their desires and aspirations leads most women (and many men) to create and live a double-life.

The dissertation concludes with analysis of research participants’ descriptions of their unorganized individual forms of praxis, which informs their social negotiations and has changed their perceptions of the hegemonic gender order. This includes processes of reeducation on pre-colonial structures of female agency, exposure to different feminist concepts through technology and intergenerational transference of knowledge, and the introduction of a largely individual organic feminism, one that starts from below and creates more supportive relationships with one another. This is not only present in their discussions, but in their hopes and efforts for future generations of girls and women.

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To my grandmothers,

to my wonderful parents, Wafa'a and Najib, and my brother Ramez, for your love, support and patience – my debt and gratitude are life-long

to my friends, Sari, Shams, little Shams, Fadi, and Malek, thank you for endless discussions, care, and encouragement; you are my sun, moon, and stars

to my family, my aunts and my cousins: three generations of remarkable women make for both inspiration and motivation

and to my research participants, I deeply appreciate your trust, input, openness, and honesty; our discussions have made me hopeful.

Writing this thesis has been both a personal and political struggle. It evolved not just as a research project, but as an act of endurance. After five years in a precarious academic environment, I faced near abandonment by my previous supervisors and the very real possibility of losing my place at the university. With little direction and no foundational feminist guidance, I had to rebuild my project from scratch. During six months of volatile uncertainty, I was fortunate to find new supervisors. I am deeply grateful to Elsa Dorlin, who took a chance on me and believed in this work, and to Frances Hasso, whose critical guidance reshaped and focused my research. Their support allowed me to begin again, this time through a feminist and philosophical lens. For two years, I dedicated myself to bringing this thesis up to standard, navigating institutional neglect, interpersonal ruptures, and internal pressure. Thank you, Dr. Hasso and Dr. Dorlin, for your feminist solidarity and thoughtful guidance – in all the ways possible, I would have not reached this point without either of you.

The genocide unfolding in Gaza since 2023 has compounded these challenges. In the face of relentless violence against Palestinian men, women, and children, staying focused has been immensely difficult. At times, academic theory felt inadequate, even exploitative, in the face of

such overwhelming brutality. The devastation of Gaza not only filled the news but also deeply affected my loved ones – grief and rage. In this context, my work became an act of defiance, a refusal to surrender to the destructive will of the powers that be. The genocide in Gaza is not merely an example of gendered violence, but the culmination, the logical end-point, of the colonial-neopatriarchal system this thesis critiques. While the dissertation has transformed, multiple times in multiple ways, it reflects how both oppression and liberation, like research, are iterative, messy, and unfinished processes.

Introduction

In the shadow of colonial borders and neopatriarchal statecraft, Palestinian and Jordanian women navigate a relational set of oppressions that is at once institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. This thesis interrogates how gendered subjugation is sustained, and potentially, subtly subverted, across these three dimensions. The work draws on the lived experiences of women who negotiate legal systems designed to infantilize them, social codes that demand their complicity, and psychological burdens that can fracture their sense of self. Through original survey data from 300 respondents, semi-structured interviews with 24–35-year-old women, expert interview contributions, and engagement with relevant scholarship, this work attempts to reveal how women's daily acts of survival and resistance expose the contradictions of oppressive systems while seeding possibilities for increased liberties.

At the institutional level, the modern state emerges as a paradox: postcolonial legal regimes in Jordan and Palestine, forged under British and French mandates and perpetuated by authoritarian and settler-colonial governance, codify "protection" into a tool of control. Laws regulating marriage, divorce, citizenship, and inheritance enforce women's dependence on male kin, as explored in Chapter 1. These frameworks are not relics of 'tradition' but products of colonial modernity, designed to consolidate state power by aligning with tribal and patriarchal structures. Yet this institutional oppression exists within a broader geopolitical matrix: Palestinian and Jordanian women articulate their subjugation as inseparable from Western imperialism, which imposes economic precarity, military occupation, and narratives that reduce their multifaceted oppression to cultural backwardness. The state plays a pivotal role in policing women's

autonomy, framing it as conditional and contingent on male guardianship. Laws governing marriage, divorce, nationality, and bodily sovereignty do not only reflect patriarchal power; they reproduce it, ensuring that women remain tethered to structures of male control. In Palestine, settler-colonial violence reinforces a state of collective precarity that compounds gendered subjugation, while in Jordan, the weight of authoritarianism and the monarchy's strategic deployment of patriarchy as a stabilizing force further entrench systemic inequities. These legal structures do not exist in a vacuum, they shape and are shaped by the geopolitical landscape, reinforcing women's subordinate status under the guise of protection and national security.

Interpersonally, Chapter 2 shows how women engage in neo-patriarchal bargaining with structural and ideological systems that encourage reproduction of gendered oppression. The results are tactical negotiations that simultaneously resist and reinforce oppressive norms, but often improve their individual situations in marginal or significant ways. To secure fragments of autonomy, interviewees describe accepting earlier marriages to escape natal families, feigning religiosity to shield familial reputations and younger sisters, or leveraging education to delay marital obligations. These bargains reflect neither passivity nor outright defiance but a pragmatic navigation of structures that punish overt dissent. Such tactics are not passive concessions but calculated responses to a system that offers few alternatives. They reveal the paradoxes of "agency" under constraint, where resistance is often embedded within the very acts that sustain the status quo; a presentation of **obligated** agents. While such strategies subtly shift familial dynamics as evidenced by declining fertility rates and evolving intergenerational expectations, they remain constrained by systems that individualize resistance, minimizing pathways to collective action.

The process of internalizing these layered oppressions, examined in Chapter 3, often fractures women's identities into what interviewees liken to a triple consciousness: as Arabs, they bear the weight of geopolitical dehumanization; as women, they confront localized and globalized sexisms; and as Arab women, they internalize codes like *'eib* (shame), which police their bodies and choices under the guise of cultural preservation. This internalization forces many into "double lives," performing compliance in public while privately cultivating their own form of what I consider a contained and natural rebellion. Internally, these pressures can fracture the self,

creating a psychic landscape of contradictions. The weight of gendered, geopolitical, and cultural oppression does not remain external; it actively shapes how women understand themselves and their place in the world. Respectability politics, which include the idea of *'eib*, function as regulatory mechanisms, disciplining women into compliance even in the absence of direct coercion. Women learn to perform different versions of themselves in different spaces, balancing visibility with concealment. This method exacts a psychological toll that is not simply a byproduct of oppression but a fundamental feature of its operation, overdetermining its reproduction across generations.

Yet, as Chapter 4 finds, despite these constraints we find unintended transformation. Women articulate an organic feminism rooted in reeducation and undoing of patriarchal norms, exposure to transnational feminist thought and pre-colonial histories of agency, and intergenerational dialogue. These practices, though fragmented and personal, reflect a praxis of liberation that rejects both Western feminist universalism and state-centric "feminist" or "women's rights" reforms. Instead, they envision change through relational shifts: mothers revising their own internalized biases by witnessing daughters' choices, communities renegotiating modesty codes, and women repurposing technology to raise their own awareness. The law may provide recognition, but in the current forms of state power relevant to their lives, it cannot dismantle the deeply embedded structures that sustain patriarchal power. Real transformation requires a cultural reimagining of gender relations; one rooted in local realities, responsive to historical and geopolitical complexities, and informed by the lived experiences of women themselves.

At its core, this thesis interrogates the logic of oppression; how systems of gendered subjugation sustain themselves through internally consistent yet fundamentally flawed premises. Much like formal logic operates through axiomatic structures, patriarchy in Palestine and Jordan creates for itself a reinforcing framework where legal, social, and psychological mechanisms present as an inescapable order. Laws codify male guardianship under the guise of protection, social norms discipline women through the language of honor, and internalized constraints compel compliance through fear, shame, and necessity. Each component is presented as natural, inevitable, or even benevolent, yet when examined critically, the contradictions within these systems expose it as largely farcical. As logical systems derive conclusions from accepted axioms, Jordan's (and to

some extent Palestine's) guardianship laws premise women's 'incapacity' as a foundational 'truth,' rendering their disenfranchisement a 'logical' outcome, mirroring the axiomatic foundations of formal reasoning. This juridical manipulation mirrors colonial rationalities that weaponize "protection" to legitimize domination; yet, like all axiomatic systems, patriarchy's authority hinges on the suspension of critique. Much like consuming fiction, a suspension of disbelief is required, then, to function within the boundaries of this closed circuit.

As such, this work applies a dialectical approach: by centering the lived experiences of Palestinian and Jordanian women, it presents the internal contradictions of gendered oppression, revealing spaces where its logic fractures under the weight of its own inconsistencies. By separating the different realms of oppression, we can understand they function relationally and all contribute to the persistence of this oppression. Women's survival strategies, their negotiations with patriarchy, and their moments of subversion or rejection function as counterexamples, disruptions that demonstrate how oppressive structures are neither monolithic nor absolute but contested, unstable, and subject to reinterpretation. The personal is not only political but philosophical: each act of resistance, however small, is an implicit refutation of the 'accepted truths' that underpin their subjugation.

By bridging postcolonial histories with feminist analysis and psychosocial frameworks, with an approach geared towards a combination of grounded theory and philosophy of logic, this thesis moves beyond merely describing oppression to deconstructing its rationalizations. If patriarchy operates through a rigid but faulty set of premises, then liberation necessitates an epistemic shift; a rejection of the assumptions that render women's subordination as natural or immutable. In this sense, women's resistance, whether through subversion or open contestation, becomes an act of redefinition, an assertion that the status quo could be otherwise and exposing its fragility.

Much like patriarchy, the Israeli occupation of Palestine is sustained by an axiomatic denial of indigenous Palestinian sovereignty, a foundational premise that recasts violence as "security" and ethnic cleansing as "order." By positioning Palestinian existence as inherently threatening, it obscures the fact that the opposite is true. The settler-colonial state constructs a self-justifying logic: ethnic cleansing, military checkpoints, settlement expansion, and mass displacement become "logical" conclusions derived from the original erasure of Indigenous rights. This

circular reasoning is not unique, but rather inherent to settler colonialism itself; where outcomes like apartheid and genocide are rendered inevitable by design, not by evidence. Yet Palestinian resistance, from *sumud* (steadfastness) to legal challenges in international courts, enacts an epistemic rupture, rejecting the occupation's core axiom. Their refusal to be unmade exposes the system's contingency, transforming survival into a counter-logic that dismantles the myth of inevitability.

Every act of survival by Palestinian women under bombardment embodies the counter-logics this work traces. Just as patriarchy's axioms demand suspension of critique, women's survival demands suspension of despair. Their acts of refusal, both quiet and loud, are not exceptions to oppression's logic but proof of its fragility. This thesis, and the journey of creating it, stands as a testament to the resilience required to persist amid overlapping emotional, political, and institutional upheaval. It was not written from a place of detachment, but through the stress of lived experience. Each chapter reflects not only the voices of the women I spoke with, but also the difficulty of translating their insights into a coherent narrative without erasing the ambiguity, grief, or hope they carried.

This thesis works to contribute to feminist and postcolonial scholarship by recentering Arab women not as victims of "culture" or "tradition" but as *obligated* agents who navigate and reimagine and even reproduce oppressive systems. It challenges the binary between structure and agency, revealing how women's micro-level negotiations both sustain and destabilize patriarchy. Chapter 1 historicizes the legal entrenchment of gendered oppression, while Chapter 2 expresses the ambivalent power of neo-patriarchal bargaining. Chapter 3 reframes internalized oppression through a relational lens, and Chapter 4 highlights the potential of unorganized, everyday resistance. These chapters map patriarchy as both structure and practice, built into legal systems, shaped through intimate and communal negotiations, and upheld by daily thoughts and norms. It shows how power works through institutions, personal dynamics, and inherited expectations, but also how it's challenged in small, steady ways. Confronting it requires a feminist politics that's grounded, responsive to legal structures and lived realities alike, and understanding of the conditions of the 'in-between spaces' where both resistance and realization emerge.

Some Historical Context on Palestine and Jordan

Jordan's recent history can be read through its national flag, a symbol not merely of statehood, but of the region's entangled struggles with colonialism, revolt, and shifting sovereignties. Adapted from the banner of the Great Arab Revolt of 1916, the flag's colors and design reflect broader aspirations for Arab unity and independence. Yet, the promises carried by that revolt, chiefly, the establishment of a unified Arab state, were undermined by colonial arrangements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. The flag thus stands as a visual remnant of both a revolutionary moment and its betrayal (CIA, Country Profile: Jordan, 2024). Through this lens, Jordan's statehood appears not as the fulfillment of a national dream but as the outcome of imperial compromise, setting the stage for the contemporary socio-political realities within which women in Jordan live today.

Under Ottoman rule, Arabs in the region saw World War I as an opportunity to rebel against economic and social hardships under the Ottoman empire. Seeking British support, they launched the Arab Revolt in June 1916. However, while the British had assured the Hashemites of Arab independence, they secretly negotiated the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) with France, dividing the Levant between them. The 1917 Balfour Declaration further complicated the region by pledging British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine. The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916) had promised Hashemite leadership over an independent Arab state, but post-war mandates betrayed these commitments, with Britain controlling Iraq and Palestine and France taking Syria and Lebanon.

Following these betrayals, the Hashemite dynasty faced fragmentation. Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca, refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles and lost British support. His son Faisal briefly ruled Syria before the French ousted him, leading to his installment as King of Iraq under British supervision. Meanwhile, Abdullah was placed in Transjordan under British mandate, where he later became its first king in 1946 (he was later violently ousted).

During the interwar period, Transjordan was sparsely populated, with British officials controlling key policies while Emir Abdullah oversaw domestic governance. The Arab Legion, led by British officers, cemented Transjordan's military strength and secured its role as a British ally in

World War II. By the war's end, Transjordan had gained near-full sovereignty, officially becoming the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946.

In the decades that followed, King Hussein (1952-1999) navigated the challenges of constantly shifting geopolitics, balancing Western alliances with regional pressures, particularly amid the rise of pan-Arab nationalism. Jordan's uneasy relations with neighboring states came to a head during the 1967 war, in which it lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem to Israel, further shifting its demographic landscape with an influx of Palestinian refugees.

Today, Jordan is a largely homogeneous nation in religious identity, with approximately 97.2% of the population identifying as Muslim, predominantly Sunni. The Christian, Druze, Shi'a, and Baha'i communities form a small minority (US Department of State, 2017). As of 2018, the population was estimated at 10.3 million, with approximately 2 million registered Palestinian refugees and many more naturalized. Additionally, Jordan hosts 762,420 registered refugees from Syria and Iraq (UNHCR, 2019). As of 2025 the total number of refugees registered with the UNHCR has reduced to 614, 970 (UNHCR, 2025).

The rapid demographic shifts have had economic and social consequences. Initial waves of foreign aid targeted refugee populations, inadvertently exacerbating local frustrations over economic inequality. A WANA Institute report highlights how disparities in aid distribution led to resentment among low-income Jordanians, many of whom faced economic hardship before the crisis (Sayegh & Bondokji, 2017, 7-8). Despite government efforts to integrate support for both host and refugee communities, social tensions persist.

Jordan maintains a high literacy rate, with 93.3% of women and 97.9% of men over the age of 15 possessing reading and writing skills (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018). While educational access has improved, employment opportunities, particularly for women, remain limited — an issue that will be further explored in subsequent sections.

Palestine's modern history is deeply shaped by colonialism, resistance, and ongoing occupation. Understanding this context is essential to grasp the geopolitical landscape under which Palestinian women live today.

The British occupation of Palestine (1917-1948) formalized colonial control through the League of Nations Mandate system, enabling Zionist settlement and marginalizing indigenous Palestinians. The 1917 Balfour Declaration expressed British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine, despite the majority Arab population. British policies facilitated large-scale Zionist land acquisition and militarization, leading to Palestinian displacement and resistance. The Great Revolt (1936-1939) was a major Palestinian uprising against both British rule and Zionist colonization, but it was brutally suppressed.

In 1948, Zionist forces carried out a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing known as the Nakba (Catastrophe), expelling over 750,000 Palestinians and destroying more than 500 villages (Pappé, 2006). The newly established Israeli state refused Palestinian refugees the right to return, in violation of international law (UNGA Resolution 194, 1948). This marked the beginning of a protracted refugee crisis, with millions of Palestinians living in exile or under apartheid rule.

After the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel occupied the remaining Palestinian territories: the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. This occupation, declared illegal under international law (UNSCR 242, 1967), persists today, imposing severe restrictions on Palestinian movement, economy, and governance. The Israeli settlement project continues to expand in the West Bank, systematically displacing Palestinians and fragmenting their land (for example UN OCHA, 2023).

Gaza, under a 17-year blockade, has faced recurrent Israeli assaults, with devastating humanitarian consequences. The 2008-09, 2012, 2014, and ongoing from October 2023 Israeli military campaigns have resulted in more than 50,000 Palestinian deaths of which at least 13,000 are children, infrastructure destruction, and worsening humanitarian conditions (UN OCHA, 2024). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has acknowledged the plausibility of genocide in Gaza and ordered Israel to prevent further harm to civilians which had no palpable impact (ICJ, 2024).

Palestinians have resisted colonization through various forms, from armed struggle to popular uprisings. The First Intifada (1987-1993) was a mass civil resistance movement against Israeli occupation, leading to the 1993 Oslo Accords, which failed to achieve Palestinian sovereignty. The Second Intifada (2000-2005) erupted amid continued Israeli expansion and military

repression. Today, Palestinian resistance continues in multiple forms, from organizing to armed struggle, as Israel's ethnic cleansing, occupation and settler expansion persist.

The ongoing violence and 'plausible genocide' in Gaza has disproportionately affected Palestinian women, who face compounded challenges due to both the Israeli occupation and patriarchal structures within their communities. Economic hardship, displacement, and settler violence have exacerbated conditions, limiting women's access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. In Gaza, women endure extreme hardships under the blockade and ongoing hostilities. The destruction of healthcare infrastructure has severely disrupted maternal and newborn health services, with an estimated 50,000 pregnant women facing limited access to emergency obstetric care. Maternal deaths are expected to rise due to inadequate care, and the psychological toll of the conflict has led to increases in stress-induced miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature births (UNICEF et al., 2023). Additionally, the entire population of Gaza is experiencing crisis levels of acute food insecurity, further endangering the health and well-being of women and children (UN Women, 2024).

Understanding these historical and contemporary realities is essential to contextualizing women's lives, resistance, and agency in a landscape of enduring colonial violence and struggle for liberation.

Methodology, Purpose, and Ethics

My point of departure: both of my grandmothers were married quite young, so young in fact, that today, their life-long unions would be illegal in every country in the world. This is not generally perceived as a good or bad thing, but as a fact of the time they existed. As my maternal grandmother turned sixteen she had her first child, the first of six. My paternal grandmother had her first child of four as she turned nineteen.

The constantly changing civil and social status of women, within my own lifetime, with particular respect to the Arab-speaking world has been the main driver for my curiosity and pursuit of this research. The abrupt changes happening to the status quo of women, particularly vis-a-vis my own mother's upbringing prompted the thought, quite early on in life, that these

changes are of significance and highlights fractures and instability in our abilities to pursue our own wants and needs in the home, society, and labor market.

This research seeks to address the perpetuated gender bias within the Arab speaking world generally, but particularly Jordan and Palestine. More centrally, the ways in which women bargain and cope with oppressive structures. It aims to identify the ways women are able to remain active agents despite having a plethora of obstacles to overcome. Furthermore it will attempt to investigate the process of coping and maneuvering in this dynamic. This work will highlight the different forms of manifest violence from state and social structures (and internal violence that can arise as a result), and critically, provide a subjective, candid, and contextualized perspective to help understand how women exist alongside these dominating social, political, and familial codes. Through answering these questions it quickly becomes apparent that each woman, within her own context, uses bargaining as a method to navigate both space and identity.

Initially, my thinking was geared towards the apparent notion that women, particularly in Jordan and Palestine, are subject to a set of continuous stressors, many of which are gender specific. As such, both through my time working in Amman, Beirut, and Dubai, and being a Palestinian woman it becomes apparent from my own experiences and those of my peers, that in turn, particular coping mechanisms are developed in response. Again, from general observation, these coping mechanisms range from self-medication to internalizing the social misogyny themselves. Eventually, this line of inquiry has become only one aspect of the study.

Identifying Jordan and Palestine as traditional/classical patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988), or more contemporarily neopatriarchy (Sharabi 1988, Campbell 2014, Valentine Moghaddam 1991, 2020, Walby, 2020), within the framework of gender regime (Walby 2009, 2020), allows for the study of both oppressive practices as well as structures or site. As such, the first chapter highlights the most prominent forms of gendered violence in Jordan and Palestine today. This allows for an inquiry into the structures (Giddens, 1984, Sewell Jr., 1992) themselves and the ways in which women manage to navigate through and between.

This includes bargaining: What is the nature of this bargain and why do women feel it must be made? Do they view themselves as working in unfavorable social positioning? Where is power formed and how is it used? Can structural or substructual change be prompted on an individual level? Furthermore do these changes stand in opposition or accordance with the demands of the patriarchy and the status quo? And the contrary, in what circumstances do women contribute to propagating the existing structure of oppression?

As well as questions of internalizing: Is this gendered oppression internalized? Does this relate to Fanon's (1952) conceptualization of internalized oppression? If so, how is it manifested? How does the cultural concept of shame affect women in these contexts?

I also thought it critical to include a multi-generational perspective and had initially intended to interview sets of mothers and daughters together, however, upon attempting one, it proved, as I had previously worried, that the self-censorship of the participants due to the presence of their counterparts proved a hindrance; reinforcing one of the main findings, the presence of a 'double life'. But this is a very important aspect of the study, a very frequently changing status to personal, civil, and social status of women, and the effects this have on the individual. As such, while deciding to interview only one age group, I attempted to inquire at the very least to their perception of the changes between their upbringings vis-a-vis their mother's (or daughter's, where applicable). This prompted questions of both temporality and liminality of gender; does this cause a disconnect between generations? Is this a site for conflict or do older generations willingly give more space and freedom to younger women?

Through both expert and semi-structured interviews of women from the region this work will attempt to highlight the experiences of women from Palestine and Jordan within the context of coping with neo-patriarchal oppression. Finally, a central aim of this work is to foreground subjective experience, particularly within this context. While existing literature often incorporates subjective accounts, studies of women in the region tend to treat them as overly fixed or uniform subjects. In contrast, this thesis places significant emphasis on the voices and responses of the research participants throughout.

Positionality Statement and Approach to the Research

As a permanently foreign Palestinian woman, my research positionality is somewhat unique. First, I fall under the category of women sampled for the work, and thus have my own perspectives, experiences and responses to the questions put forward as another point of reference. My falling under the same sample put at ease the participants and the discussion often evolved very naturally into a totally candid conversation. As I am aware of the different contexts Jordanian and Palestinian women are raised in, there is significantly less risk that I may place them under pre-existing and largely untrue stereotypical categories. I am more aware of the social code and thus know the importance of anonymity even with regards to the simplest question.

I am able to exist with this dual status in multiple contexts, this included having in equal parts a Christian and Muslim upbringing, so I am aware of the religious traditions and cultures of both. I speak three of the most commonly spoken languages in the region Arabic, English, and French, with a robust social network in Levant and the wider Arab speaking world. The language facilitated participants expressing themselves in multiple languages simultaneously (where possible) and using more accurate terminology in explaining their perspectives; my familiarity with both religions can also offer some comfort as I can be perceived as an in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) member in both cases. Due to my nationality documents I am also exempted from the majority of social codes of conduct as being a (Western) foreigner (in the region) allows a layer of protection regarding my freedom of expression.

The “insider” perspective in research comes with both advantages and challenges. To illustrate the distinction between insider and outsider research, Saidin and Yaacob reference the work of Mercer (2007), who outlines two research trends. The first involves researchers studying topics outside of their own background, such as researching different races or cultures. The second trend focuses on researchers investigating subjects with which they are already familiar, like exploring their own culture or ethnic background (Hockey, 1993). These two approaches distinguish between insider and outsider research (Merton, 1972). An insider researcher is someone who shares characteristics like gender, ethnicity, or culture with the group being

studied, while an outsider researcher does not share these same attributes (Saidin & Yaacob, 2016, 849-50).

The authors note some of the advantages to insider researchers, including: a potentially deeper understanding of the issue, an ability to allow the flow of social interaction naturally, an ability to access more robust information and analysis from respondents, and, related, "familiarity with the cultural and political structure of an organisation… [can] save time in trying to understand [an] issue…" (Saidin and Yaacob, 2016: 849-50; citing Smyth & Holian, 2008).

Some of the disadvantages of familiarity are assuming overfamiliarity that "overlook[s] the confidentiality and sensitivity of the information" (ibid.) as well as underestimating the differences and contradictions (ideological, situational, material) among the "same" group.

In this case, I recognize that my tendency to self-censor and conform to social codes and academic standards could be seen as both a shortcoming and a potential advantage. While this self-censorship may limit certain responses, it also ensures that the participants are not simply answering based on a preconceived notion of what the researcher expects to hear. Additionally, there is a blurring of boundaries between the researcher and the subject, as I may also be considered part of the group being studied. This overlap introduces the possibility of natural bias, where my personal experiences could influence the interpretation of the data, potentially leading to the overlooking of broader trends in favor of more personal or 'relatable' insights.

I was able to solicit information that within Arab culture is not lightly given. Women were able to share stories relating to access to sexual health services, sexuality generally, and their need to hide all of this from society at large. Furthermore, upbringing was a topic that was frequently discussed. Contrary to acceptable cultural behavior, they were able to criticize familial behavior and often pinpoint the specific effects this had on them. Despite substantial socio-economic and historical differences among them, and a variety of manifestations, there were overarching trends that shaped the women's lives. I attempt to also explain cultural behavior that is not often recorded such as the use of informal insulting language directed towards men, the state, pieces of legislation, amongst others.

As such, the general approach was to use my positionality to the advantage of the research while using scholarship, analysis, and discussion with experts and colleagues to maintain a critical analytical distance as it was needed.

The thesis is both empirical and analytical in its approach. First, one of the key aims is to inductively describe the ways in which women from Jordan and Palestine navigate oppressive structures, and explore whether they are able to still lead fulfilling lives. This empirical approach centers women's subjective experiences while also placing them into thematic and analytical frames as these emerge. From a feminist research perspective, it also allowed space for women respondents who do not usually speak candidly with regional researchers to speak candidly and avoid censoring themselves on topics considered taboo or inappropriate in public space.

Qualitative descriptive studies, grounded in naturalistic inquiry, focus on understanding phenomena in their natural context without pre-selecting variables or adhering to a specific theoretical framework. While they differ from other qualitative designs, they may share elements, such as grounded theory's use of constant comparative analysis. However, qualitative descriptive research does not aim to generate theory but rather to provide a clear description of the data (Lambert & Lambert, 2012, 255).

In this thesis, the qualitative descriptive approach integrates aspects of grounded theory to explore responses to gendered oppression, coping mechanisms, and patriarchal bargains, while also observing the impact of social structures on women's lives. This research can also be classified as narrative research, aiming to capture subjective experiences and identify trends in the subject area.

This awareness of positionality emphasizes the significance of personal experience in shaping critical perspectives. Personal experience as a critical factor highlights the ways in which lived realities inform not only the research process but also the understanding of broader socio-political structures. Rather than being a limitation, subjectivity offers an entry point for deeper engagement with the material.

What we understand as ‘universal’ or ‘impartial’ truths, produced by researchers, academics, and scientists, are ultimately shaped by individuals attempting to observe the world from a distance, often detaching their work from the realities they analyze. Knowledge is treated as objective, when in practice, it frequently ignores the subjectivity of both the researcher and the subject, creating a fiction of an impartial author. Objectivity compels us to consider the subjective in order to ascertain ‘truth.’

It is essentially impossible to remain neutral, particularly within the realm of writing and research. The very choice of subject, whether externally mandated or personally chosen, already reflects bias. Haraway (1988) argues for the necessity of recognizing subjectivity, not just through the author’s positionality but through the perspectives of the subjects themselves. She advocates for a plurality of viewpoints, emphasizing that true comprehension of any community arises from weaving together different, inherently partial narratives. Within gender studies, she maintains this approach allows researchers to “elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another’s point of view (583).” The ‘situated’ nature of knowledge means it is always produced within a specific moment of culture and history, shaped by political and social forces. Research must then engage with its subjects as active agents, not passive objects:

> The object of knowledge [must] be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and his authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge (ibid., 591).

This acknowledgment of subjectivity does not mean a submission to relativism, but rather an understanding that ‘care and critique’ are not mutually exclusive. Describing certain realities does not equate to an endorsement of them (ibid.).

Scott (1991) expands on this idea in “The Evidence of Experience,” where she challenges the assumption that history can be written purely from neutral facts. Instead, she argues that lived experience, often dismissed as anecdotal, is essential for understanding history, particularly for marginalized groups. She critiques the view that experience is an unquestionable truth, suggesting that we need to examine how experience is shaped and framed. She explains that

while personal accounts may seem undeniably true, relying solely on them as foundational evidence weakens the critical analysis of histories of difference (Scott 1991, 777).

Critics, such as Hsiao (2022), argue that lived experience cannot override statistical generalizations and dismiss anecdotal evidence as irrelevant to broader trends. However, this critique misrepresents Scott and Haraway's positions, which do not advocate replacing quantitative analysis but rather integrating lived experience as a necessary component of understanding reality. Without qualitative engagement, statistical data remains decontextualized, reinforcing dominant narratives rather than critically examining them.

Stuart Hall (1990) further explores the constructed nature of identity, arguing that it is shaped by historical and social forces rather than being an inherent truth. This is particularly relevant in discussions of gender and race, where dominant narratives often erase complexity. Arab women, for instance, are frequently collapsed into the category of 'Muslim women' (Abu-Lughod 2013; Joseph 1993, 1996, 1999a.), despite the ethnic, national, and religious diversity within Arab societies.

This necessity of self-narration and counter-hegemonic discourse is also central to Said's (1984) "Permission to Narrate," where he critiques the dominance of the Israeli narrative in Western discourse – a structure that applies to feminist discourse as well. In the Arab region, hegemonic narratives are reinforced both by localized, de-radicalized feminist movements and by the Western trope of Arab/Muslim women as needing to be 'saved' (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Spivak (1988) builds on these critiques, making a foundational intervention in postcolonial and feminist theory. She argues that knowledge production is never 'innocent' and is always shaped by the biases of its authors. She challenges dominant Western intellectual frameworks, critiquing figures like Foucault, Marx, and Derrida for theorizing about marginalized groups without engaging with their lived realities. Spivak highlights the compounded erasure of subaltern women, emphasizing that the dominant historical and academic narratives silence them even further:

> Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the

> ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow… (ibid., 28).

Knowledge production does not exist in a vacuum; it is shaped by power, perspective, and historical context. Recognizing subjectivity in research is not a concession but a necessary step toward a more complete and truthful understanding of oppression, social change, and history itself.

Methods of Data Collection, Data Analysis & Ethical Considerations

For this qualitative research project, it was imperative to bypass the limitations of reaching a broad number of women and instead engage in deep, personal, and lengthy conversations. To achieve this, different methods were employed to compensate for each other's gaps and present a broad yet accurate picture. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research, interviews were designed to last at least an hour, though the number of questions remained under ten (Annex B.).

A chapter-specific literature review was conducted on topics relevant to the thesis, including gender and gender regimes, feminisms, neopatriarchy, patriarchy and patriarchal bargains, different social structure theories, internalized oppression, and shame, among others. This review was carried out alongside research on general gender indicators in Jordan and Palestine.

An online survey was used to inform the semi-structured narrative interviews. The survey was launched for one month, from November to December 2021, through the platform SurveyMonkey. It included ten questions and was distributed through personal networks, relevant social media groups, and peer referrals, yielding a conservative total of 305 respondents. The software categorized responses into closed and open-ended questions. The goal was to gather general insights into the issues most pressing for young Arab women and refine the

research question while identifying whether certain theoretical phenomena, such as patriarchal bargaining, were evident in contemporary populations. Given the deeply reflexive nature of this project, the initial questionnaire referenced trends I had either personally experienced or frequently encountered in relevant literature. The full set of survey responses can be found in Annex A.

The survey questions were designed to gain insight into perceived barriers faced by young Palestinian and Jordanian women and to understand perspectives on dominant gender studies topics, such as feminism and patriarchy, particularly in contrast to their meanings in the Global North. Additionally, I incorporated reflexive observations based on my own lived experiences to see whether they resonated with participants. Some questions and responses are presented in the figures below, while the remainder can be consulted in Annex A.

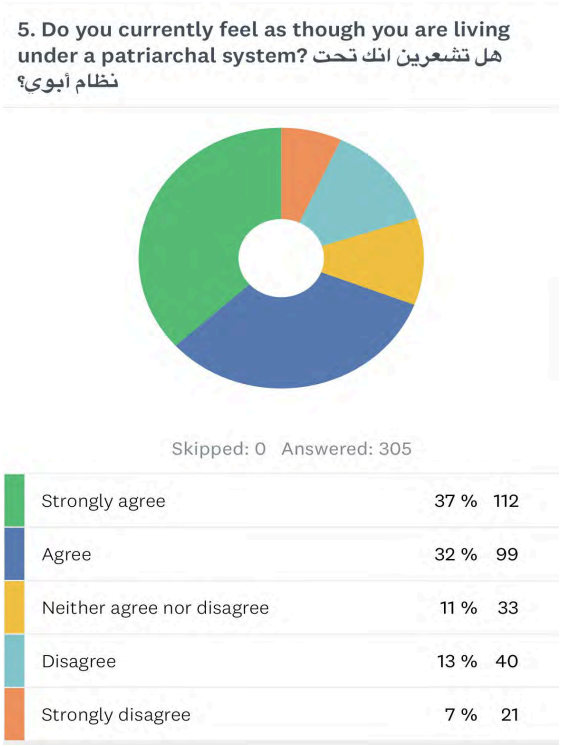

Fig A.

Due to the nature of surveys, most questions were closed-ended, though space was provided for additional comments. While no theoretical frameworks were explicitly dissected, one question was phrased in relation to the conceptual notion of patriarchal bargaining. The survey did not

specifically focus on the lived conditions of Palestinian and Jordanian women and was open to Arab women regardless of their current location. There were no age restrictions; however, participants were asked to provide their ages.

From this organized dataset, certain trends became apparent, helping to clarify which questions required further exploration in a more personal and detailed context. This initial survey proved useful in identifying preliminary themes and codes that later informed a thematic analysis. While the survey alone was insufficient to capture the depth and breadth of women's perceptions, notable trends emerged, particularly those cited by over 60% of respondents, that warranted further investigation.

The results indicated several significant findings, but only trends with over 50% consensus were pursued. These included, but were not limited to, women being subject to different rules than their male siblings or relatives and the observation that generational shifts had led to daughters experiencing relatively more leniency than their mothers had. This highlighted intergenerational changes, though whether they were viewed positively or negatively was not immediately clear.



Fig B.

A total of 20 semi-structured narrative interviews were conducted, with the majority of participants falling within the 25–35 age range. A handful of outliers from other age groups were also interviewed to assess whether perspectives were age-specific or indicative of broader intergenerational social forces. The women interviewed came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and most had, at some point, lived outside the Arab world for education or work. Jordanian participants were largely from Amman, though some were from the southern governorates. Palestinian participants included women from Gaza, the West Bank, and ‘48 Palestinians (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship). The research sample consisted of willing respondents who answered an open call for participants on personal social media networks.

While the information provided by interviewees was invaluable, the majority had some experience living abroad, which is considered a privilege in Jordan and Palestine today. Additionally, as participants were initially solicited online, the sample lacks full geographical and socio-economic representation. To counteract potential class bias, expert interviews were conducted for two key reasons: first, to cross-reference findings or general statements made by participants to determine whether similar trends appeared in their work with different communities, and second, to assess whether the patterns observed held true across both micro and macro contexts, albeit to varying degrees. Experts were also asked to offer insights based on their own professional and personal experiences. All interviews were conducted between February and March 2022, and the socio-demographic table of research participants can be found in Annex C.

General ethical considerations that guide qualitative research include: **informed consent, voluntary participation, ‘do no harm,’ confidentiality and anonymity, and assessing only.** These were encompassed in the disclaimer read to participants before each interview. To encourage candid responses, interviewees' identities remain anonymous. While details such as age, occupation, marital status, and family positionality were recorded, data is presented in a manner that ensures participants' privacy. All gathered data remains confidential unless requested by relevant authorities. However, expert interviewees are named with their consent.

The following statement was read to each participant before the interview:

> This interview will be used as field data as one of a total of 20 interviews conducted with women in the country as well as (Palestine/Jordan). These interviews are all completely anonymous with the exception of age and nationality/ethnicity. The audio of these files will not be shared; the content of this interview will be used towards completing my PhD at the University of Toulouse in France. All the data will be used in an honest and ethical manner. Please feel free to choose a pseudonym for yourself. Please confirm that you have understood this agreement and respond with: I consent or I do not consent.

Participants were also informed that they could refuse to answer any questions they found uncomfortable. The entire discussion was used as data except for information explicitly stated as 'off the record.'

The data was analyzed using two main methods: thematic analysis and narrative discourse analysis. Given the broad scope of the data and the research focus on women's perceptions of their own womanhood and its social implications, these approaches were the most suitable.

Thematic analysis involved developing codes to categorize and analyze responses, which were then grouped into overarching themes. This method is particularly useful when the researcher has preexisting knowledge of the subject (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Many interviewees provided detailed examples of their experiences, offering rich anecdotal evidence. As this was a descriptive and exploratory study, survey responses informed interview questions, and *in vivo* coding (using participants' own frequently used terms as codes) streamlined the analysis process. The data was reviewed multiple times, allowing additional themes to emerge. Coding proved especially useful given the generality of the topic. Examples of common codes included patriarchy, feminism, Western feminism, social misogyny, shame, upbringing, and double standards, which were then organized into broader themes.

One criticism of thematic analysis is its potential to miss nuances in the data, as it relies on the researcher's interpretation, making it inherently subjective (Caulfield, 2022). In this case, my frame of reference (both personal and professional) situates the study within a deductive thematic analysis approach. Key themes identified throughout the thesis include patriarchy and its effects, bargaining and sacrifice, intergenerational changes, internalized sexism, and the

phenomenon of ‘double lives.’ These themes were then examined in relation to state structures, societal expectations, and self-perception.

Narrative analysis was also employed, incorporating both latent and semantic approaches (Polkinghorne, 2007).

> The disjunction between a person’s actual experienced meaning and his or her storied description has four sources: (a) the limits of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning, (b) the limits of reflection to bring notice to the layers of meaning that are present outside of awareness, (c) the resistance of people because of social desirability to reveal fully the entire complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware, and (d) the complexity caused by the fact that texts are often a cocreation of the interviewer and participant (ibid., 480).

This involved examining not only explicit content but also the subtext and context in which participants expressed their experiences. Since many interviewees conveyed their thoughts through anecdotal storytelling, their narratives were analyzed within the thematic framework of the thesis. Additionally, language choice offered insights into participants' socio-economic backgrounds and educational histories.

Importantly, Squire et al. explain, “By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted and what, if any, effects they have. For many of us, problematic as they are, narratives carry traces of human lives that we want to understand (2013, 2).”

As Moen (2006, 27) argues, narrative is both the method and the phenomenon itself (citing Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), making it a valuable tool for this research. However, the approach is not without limitations, particularly regarding discrepancies between verbal accounts and reality due to language constraints, limited self-awareness, social desirability biases, and the co-constructed nature of interviews (Polkinghorne, 2007).

My positionality in this research, I believe, has proved beneficial, as participants did not feel the need to explain cultural contexts, allowing them to focus on specific perceptions, situations, and experiences with minimal risk of misinterpretation (of the actual and implied).

Limitations of the Study

This thesis seeks to contribute to a growing body of knowledge on the contemporary Arab 'woman' within the specific context of gender as a continuously developing phenomenon. In addition to oppression within three contexts: state oppression, social oppression and the ways it is negotiated, and oppression within the self.

The significance of the study largely relates to the nature of the content obtained through the different research methods. The descriptive accounts of different understudied phenomena including neopatriarchal violence, internalized oppression in different forms, and the culture of shame that is prevalent in the Arab world that often specifically targets women provide deep insight to contemporary narratives. It also attempts to bypass common misconception about women in the region while still positioning them in their oppressive contexts. Through choosing an approach that centers on women's lived-experience may prove to provide more 'relatable' information that can help paint a more accurate picture (alongside other important types of sources) for local and international practitioners alike thus leading to more informed decision making.

Some added value from a sociological perspective highlighting social units central to study in the Jordanian and Palestinian contexts, and the functionality of social structure generally. It also provides a contemporary explanation to many aspects of Arab culture that is generally not articulated in academia.

The limitations of this study include an inability to include a greater and more diverse participant pool. There is a lack of representations for the true diversity of culture found in both Palestine and Jordan; this is highlighted by the lack of representation of participants currently residing in different Jordanian governorates, where the socio-economic brackets vary significantly (Ma'an, Mafraq, Irbid, for example). As well as access to a larger number of women from the West Bank,

Gaza, and ‘48 Palestinians (though they are more represented in this sample than their counterparts).

Additionally, as this thesis has been written during an upheaval of settler-colonial and imperialist violence against the countries in the Levant (*Bilad al-Sham*) specifically against the Palestinians, I have a constant internal conflict as a researcher in the face of a genocide against my people. And thus the bias against the Western actors contributing to this, while not unfounded, may be conceived as antagonistic. I do not believe, however, this contributes to a lack of accuracy in the analysis of the results.

Chapter 1. “Protecting Women” and State Power through Law: A Historical Consideration of Patriarchal Relations between Women and Institutions in Palestine and Jordan

ABSTRACT

This chapter uses archival research, scholarly sources, and interviews to argue that the establishment after the Sykes-Picot divisions of Greater Syria into “modern” states and settler-colonies paradoxically modernized and institutionalized “traditional” patriarchal relations through the law, largely to reinforce the repressive and extractive forms of states themselves. The chapter examines the major theoretical approaches to patriarchy as a sign and set of institutionalized and cultural practices, and the development of gendered laws over time in the Levant, or *Bilad al-Sham.* It focuses in particular on the gendered distribution and regulation of civic, family, and corporeal resources and rights in today’s historic Palestine and Jordan. It keeps at the foreground the ways borders and thus legislative domains have shifted and coexisted in stacked forms over time in these territories. Collective and individual challenges on the ground, too, have revised these distributions of power and resources, with continuing contradictions. The analysis is situated within feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist scholarship broadly and in the region. It shows how traditional forms of male dominance have shifted to firmly institutionalized forms from the late Ottoman era to the present, eroding women’s autonomy and range of options, informed by their class and citizenship positions, as well as how settler-colonial, comprador, and imperialist relations with the Global North impose other scales of patriarchal relations that restrict the sovereignty and range of action of entire societies and governments.

This chapter argues that the post–Sykes-Picot partition of Greater Syria into modern nation-states and settler-colonial fragments, reinforced by Ottoman centralization, British and French mandates, and successive postcolonial regimes, did not dismantle patriarchal relations but embedded them in the very architecture of state law. Far from reflecting a static "tradition," legal systems in Jordan and Palestine actively codified male authority into adaptable regimes of governance. Women's bodies, marriages, and reproductive lives became the terrain on which sovereignty, legitimacy, and social order were, and continue to be, asserted. What appears as a patchwork, from Ottoman family codes to British penal laws to contemporary state and religious courts, functions in tandem to secure male guardianship, uphold sectarian hierarchies, and render women's rights perpetually negotiable within imperial, nationalist, and donor-driven bargains.

The chapter begins by rethinking patriarchy as a dynamic, state-mediated power system rather than a fixed cultural relic. Engaging feminist and anti-colonial scholarship, it positions the family as a politicized institution where gendered hierarchies are naturalized through law and colonial modernity. From this theoretical vantage, the analysis moves to the historical evolution of legal regimes governing women's corporeal and civic rights, tracing transformations from the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms through Mandate-era legislation to contemporary statutes. This genealogy reveals how "tradition" was repurposed to control populations through subcontracting personal status matters to communal religious leaders while centralizing property and commerce under state law and patrilineality.

The chapter then examines how tribal customs, religious authorities, and international donors collide within a hybrid legal framework. Laws that restrict women's citizenship, regulate marriage, and police bodily autonomy emerge not as archaic residues but as active instruments of statecraft, struck to maintain tribal legitimacy and satisfy performative demands for modernity. Selective reforms, such as amendments to penal codes, serve as token gestures under donor pressure, leaving intact the foundations of patriarchal impunity.

In Palestine, the legal landscape is deliberately fragmented by occupation and layered governance. Israeli military orders carve territories and jurisdictions, while the Palestinian Authority enforces statutes inherited from Ottoman, Jordanian, and Egyptian rule, and religious courts adjudicate personal status. This strategic chaos disperses accountability and obstructs

meaningful reform, compelling women to navigate a maze where civic and bodily independence are governed by shifting colonial, communal, and political interests.

The chapter concludes by exploring the contradictions between institutional frameworks and women's lived struggles, signaling the broader implications of these tensions for subsequent analyses of power, autonomy, and resistance. Against this backdrop, it interrogates how state-led and NGO-driven feminist initiatives, framed as 'intersectional,' capacity-building or empowerment, often prioritize metrics over liberation, bypass structural oppression, and depoliticize gender justice. Interviews with Jordanian and Palestinian women reveal everyday understanding of feminism and feminist praxis, and the significance of these terms to the women I spoke with. These politicized strategies expose the limitations of reformist paradigms that equate legal amendments with emancipation, and lay the groundwork for the next chapters, which will delve deeper into the socio-cultural and personal terrains where this oppression bleeds into. Throughout, the law emerges as both an instrument of patriarchal control and terrain of subversion. By contrasting Jordan's monarchy-tribe-donor dynamics with Palestine's carceral occupation, the chapter rethinks feminist practices outside of state and NGO frameworks. How can gender equity be reimagined when legal fragmentation and incomplete reforms persist?

Thinking Through Patriarchy

Anti-feudal, "feminist," anti-colonial and anti-imperialist scholars and political movements the world over have critically and extensively theorized the concept of patriarchy, producing a large body of knowledge that this thesis will not fully address. The thesis instead draws on this knowledge synthetically and strategically to illuminate the systems navigated by contemporary women in Jordan and Palestine. We know that patriarchy does not exist in a void. It is produced relationally, situationally and is experienced through class, racial, and citizenship status as well as cultural and legal systems. The "choices" and "agency" available to societies that exist under the multifaceted rule of colonialism and imperialism are in fact shaped and delimited by such rule. The same holds true for women in those societies, although this thesis found people largely acknowledged the causal factors associated with the systems of oppression and individuals closest to their daily lives This is probably a human condition given the complexity of systems involved and shaping our lives. This analysis navigates these different systems, taking women's

experiences and explanations seriously while grounding them in original analysis informed by the research and scholarship. The concept of patriarchy, while expansive and deeply contested, is critical to understanding how state structures consolidate gendered power dynamics. In Jordan and Palestine, state apparatuses have historically absorbed and reproduced patriarchal norms through legislation, economic policies, and social frameworks. These mechanisms transform abstract concepts of patriarchy into tangible, lived realities for women, making the state a central actor in perpetuating, adapting, or challenging patriarchal structures.

The 'patriarchy' as it was previously understood alluded to the domination of men over women through the state, but more specifically the control of women in the household (for example, Weber 1947); the term implied an unchanging, fixed historical and contemporary phenomenon. This assumes that unequal gender relations are the 'natural order', an argument that has proved itself as no longer relevant to swathes of the contemporary world. This rigidity was not useful for analysis, nor for change.

Classically, patriarchy is associated with familial forms. For example, the definition proposed by the Cambridge Dictionary is, "a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage." In the Arab world as in other parts, patriarchy is ideally a benign social and economic system of distribution led by the oldest men in return for protection and survival in a corporatist logic of relational hierarchy based on both age and gender, meaning it shapes the lives of girls and boys, men and women (for example, Joseph, 1993). Within this system, older women benefit as wives and mothers, especially of sons, and girls and women are central to its reproduction. Similar to the thinking of Kandiyoti, Joseph explains, "I argue that both women and men, juniors and seniors, were woven into fluid and shifting webs of relationality that at times empowered them and at times subordinated them (ibid., 468 see also Joseph, 1999a.)." This is only possible because they see more benefits than losses from reproducing the system. In the ideal, all members are fed, housed, and protected and accept the hierarchy based on age and gender as mutually beneficial. It should be noted that family historically and presently in this system is a larger structure than the heteronormative man, wife, and their biological children, understood as the Western construct of the 'nuclear family.'

The remainder of this section addresses the primary theoretical frames that have explained and usually criticized and sought to transform patriarchy, with various levels of success. Patriarchy places women in precarious positions and men in traumatic and abnormal psychological spaces (Glas & Alexander, 2020). Patriarchy is intersected into an overall regime of oppression dominating political and personal lives of individuals in different measures based on fictitious gendered 'myths' that facilitates the dominance of men over women (as well as the heteronormativity implicated therein). In this sense, through these base assumptions we do not consider that there are relational, overlapping factors that contribute to the subjugation of women, particularly women of color; one example of how this may be manifest, is theories from Patricia Hill Collins (1990) where she expressed a 'matrix of domination' in which structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal powers contribute to this perpetuated oppression. Importantly, it presents a false dichotomy of 'men' and 'women' and reproduces these arbitrarily constructed categories of 'human' function – the idea of gender roles. It is imperative to note that it functions as an ideology as well as a set of structures (Walby 1989, 2009, 2020), more specifically it is an ideology that feeds practice that consolidates the structural integrity of the 'patriarchy'.

What is now called Marxism is a socio-economic theory first presented by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that is rooted in historical materialism that proposes that throughout history class divisions, specifically between the 'proletariat,' or working class, against the wealthy ruling class, or the bourgeoisie have continuously existed. Society is divided unequally; some classes control the means of production, and others serve as the means of production in positions of oppression, exploitation and subordination. The proletariat earn wages for their work which does not amount to the products of their labor sustaining the imbalance driving the working class into poverty (surplus value). This dynamic is maintained by the pursuit of profit, which becomes the central organizing principle of economic, ideological, and social life under capitalism. Marxism emphasizes the importance of class consciousness, where the proletariat recognizes their shared exploitation and organizes collectively through mechanisms like trade unions to challenge the ruling class (Marx and Engels, 1848, Marx, 1867). Marxist theory centers on the fluidity and relational nature of social orders, as changes in the means of production have historically

transformed societies, paving the way for revolutionary shifts toward equality – maybe optimistically so within today's hegemonic neoliberal framework of geopolitical, economic, and class relations.

Continuing within that framework Marxist feminism critically examines the inseparability of class and gender, emphasizing how capitalism perpetuates the oppression of all genders. Alexandra Kollontai, a pioneering Marxist/Socialist feminist, argued that bourgeois feminism, focused on securing legal and political rights, fails to address systemic economic inequalities faced by working-class women. She contended that genuine liberation requires dismantling capitalist structures, which exploit both men and women, albeit in different ways (Kollontai, 1909). She later explored the dynamics of love, critiquing bourgeois romantic ideals as commodified and exclusionary, advocating instead for 'comradely love' rooted in collective solidarity. This vision faced criticism for allegedly undermining traditional family values, which Kollontai countered by emphasizing communal support systems (Kollontai, 1920). In essence, Marxist feminism centers on the notion that bourgeois feminism often secures rights for bourgeois women, excluding working-class women and perpetuating class hierarchies. By addressing the dual oppression of capitalism and patriarchy, Marxist feminism attempts to provide a comprehensive critique of gender inequality.

Heidi Hartmann contributed to the concept of traditional Marxist feminism through a critique for neglecting the patriarchal structures that reinforce gender oppression, specifically familial duties. She argued that capitalist exploitation and patriarchy function as intertwined systems of domination, necessitating a dual approach to dismantle both. Her central thesis argues that capitalism, unpaid domestic labor provided primarily by women sustains the workforce and lowers the costs of reproducing labor, benefiting capitalists. Simultaneously, patriarchal structures perpetuate gendered divisions of labor, relegating women to domestic roles while granting men authority in both public and private spheres thus emphasizing a need to consider patriarchy and capitalism as separate and reinforcing (Hartmann, 1981). Silvia Federici expanded this framework, emphasizing that capitalism relies on the unpaid labor of women in reproductive roles, making women's oppression central to capitalist economies (Federici, 2013 as well as her other works).

Lise Vogel developed social reproduction theory, emphasizing that women's oppression is deeply rooted in their role in the reproduction of labor power, a process undervalued under capitalism (Vogel, 1983). And as is heavily used in this work, Hisham Sharabi added a Marxist critique of Arab societal structures, identifying "neopatriarchy" as a fusion of 'traditional' norms and 'modern' state control, which marginalizes women while exploiting both genders under capitalism (Sharabi, 1988). While this framework initially presents a binary, it is understood that the social order is composed of multiple layers, but with an emphasis on the economic/labour considerations. It is important to note that patriarchal rule is quite comfortable in 'modernity' and is reproduced by it. Alda Facio (2013) concludes:

> The concept of Patriarchy itself is not a contribution of feminist theories. Many social scientists in the nineteenth century wrote about it as a more civilized or complex form of organization compared to the primitive matriarchies. Engels referred to it as the earliest system of domination establishing that Patriarchy is 'the world historical defeat of the female sex.' In this sense, it is said that Patriarchy was a form of political organization that distributed power unequally between men and women to the detriment of women (1).

Within the psychoanalytic school of feminist thought, figures like Betty Friedan (1963) and Simone de Beauvoir (1949) laid foundations for understanding gendered oppression and critiquing the psychoanalytic approach which had roots in Freudian essentialist schools of thought. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* described the deep psychological dissatisfaction of women confined to domestic roles under patriarchy, coining the "problem that has no name." Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, argued that women are systematically made "Other" within a social order dictated by men, not due to natural inequality but through cultural constructs that normalize male dominance. Other scholars, while not considered as 'psychoanalytic feminists,' such as Kate Millett (1970) or Shulamith Firestone (1970), extended these critiques, interrogating psychoanalysis as a patriarchal ideology itself. Freud's concept of "penis envy" reduced women's oppression to biological determinism, suggesting that their perceived inferiority stemmed from a lack of a phallus. Feminists countered this, viewing Freud's essentialist arguments as emblematic of the patriarchal order they sought to dismantle. Lacan

revisited Freud's framework, shifting focus to the symbolic significance of the phallus within the "Law of the Father" and its role in structuring power through language. For some feminists, Lacan's work highlighted how patriarchal domination is perpetuated within the unconscious and cultural systems alike (Lacan, 1977). Psychoanalytic feminism reframes gender oppression as systemic and rooted in the psyche, not just cultural or material inequity. Born into patriarchy, individuals navigate a fundamental tension between the desire for individuation (freedom) and recognition (belonging). This dynamic sustains male power, embedding gender hierarchies within the very fabric of human identity and socialization (Mitchell, 1974).

Another school of thought, rooted in similar concepts is Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988). She critiques the foundational assumptions of liberalism and social contract theory, arguing that patriarchy is intrinsic to the modern state. Pateman argues that the social contract, which secures freedom and equality, is underpinned by a hidden "sexual contract" that institutionalized male dominance. She writes, "The original contract constitutes both 'society' and 'the individual.' Women, however, are not party to the original contract; women are present only as the silent other (Pateman, 1988, 6)." This exclusion, she argues, is not incidental but fundamental to the functioning of liberal democracies. Pateman also critiques how the contract system enforces women's subordination in modern institutions like marriage, where women exchange sexual and reproductive services in a manner analogous to wage labor under capitalism. She asserts that "the freedom of the modern individual is underpinned by the subjection of women (ibid., 8)."

Scholars within this school emphasize the interconnection between gender and state power, exploring how patriarchal norms are reinforced through laws, policies, and institutional practices. For instance, Iris Marion Young (1990) critiqued the liberal state's role in perpetuating structural inequalities by masking power dynamics behind ostensibly neutral policies. Similarly, Nancy Fraser (1997) argued that state feminism often co-opts feminist goals, prioritizing bureaucratic inclusion over structural change. In some sense this can also be considered a Marxist approach but rather than capital or material as the source of hegemony, that the state is instead, which in many contexts is the source of capital. These scholars generally advocate for the dismantling of patriarchal structures and practices within state institutions. For example, these include

reimagining citizenship to include care work (Tronto, 1993) and transforming economic and political systems to address intersectional inequalities. In some sense this logic bleeds into today's formulation of ‘gender regimes,’ under the structure of ‘state.’

Rather than adhering to a base-superstructure theory informed by Marxist and socialist feminism, in “Theorising Patriarchy” (1989), Sylvia Walby initially argues that patriarchy is composed of six “interdependent structures” she reduces to four whereby “men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.” She insists on “social structure” to reject “the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every individual woman in a subordinate one” and insist these are historical rather than natural dynamics (ibid., 214). In some basic ways, a Marxist or socialist approach is present, though critical factors are not included in her work, particularly that of racial discrimination.

These interdependent structures are, “A patriarchal mode of production in which women's labor is expropriated by their husbands; patriarchal relations within [women’s] waged labor [in the formal economy]; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal culture (ibid., 220).” Each site, she argues, represents specific mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced. For example, patriarchal relations in waged labor and the patriarchal state manifest as unequal pay, workplace discrimination, and institutional biases, while patriarchal culture reinforces normative gender roles and expectations. Recognizing these structures as both distinct and interdependent enables a nuanced analysis of how patriarchy articulates across different contexts as both system and set of dynamic situational and contextual practices that are conscious and unconscious. When viewed as oppression, patriarchy becomes **one** of several overlapping structures, such as (and separate from) race and class, that sustain power imbalances, while retaining unique sites of gendered inequality. These overlapping yet, as she argues, ‘distinct’ systems reveal the infallible sites where gendered oppression is consistently observable (ibid., 220-221). While race is not a notable consideration in her work, she mentions in her 2020 work, “The intersection of gender, race and class in the development of the global far right includes issues of population (Gökariksel & Smith, 2019). Understanding the intersectional (sic.) component of the rise of illiberal populism further requires understanding the intersection of gender and the anticolonial (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018) (ibid.).” In some senses her framework

excludes true considerations of racial minorities within Western states and in states in the Arab-speaking world in which she considers ‘neopatriarchal.’

Walby’s concept of a “gender regime” seeks to replace “patriarchy” by considering the construction of gender relations within specific contexts, including formal and informal spaces where gender hierarchies are formed and reproduced. As Walby (2020) explains, “Gender regime theory addresses the alternative forms of gender relations at a macro level and the transformation from a private, domestic, premodern form to a public, modern one. This modern form itself takes multiple shapes, such as neoliberal and social democratic, with different levels of gender economic and political inequality, intimacy, and violence (416).” She, like theorists coming from other traditions, considers gender as shaped by “economy, polity, violence and civil society,” whereas other approaches to gendered oppression may fall within only one of the four categories. Her objects of analysis are (neo)patriarchal (largely in the Global South), neoliberal, and social democratic, largely in Western societies of the Global North (ibid.).

Many states, as Bose (2015) explains, adopt ‘gender-equal’ policies in response to societal and international pressures while simultaneously enforcing discriminatory ones that sustain their power by ceding “cultural” rights to conservative forces and patriarchal beneficiaries. Bose’s extensive analysis of gender regimes across 90+ countries identifies armed conflict and colonial histories as key indicators shaping patriarchy. Her statistical findings, supported by Moghadam (2020), highlight that the Global South lacks a fixed typology of patriarchy, varying by culture, tradition, and national context, a complexity encapsulated by the term neopatriarchy. Armed conflict, even regional instability, keeps ‘gender equality’ and gender roles in a liminal space, obstructing progress. Colonial legacies further entrench oppression, as seen in Palestine’s illegal occupation and Jordan’s inherited citizenship and Personal Status laws. While these findings support Walby’s framework, they also necessitate additional meta-sociological analysis, emphasizing the relational and historically contingent nature of gender regimes across different global contexts.

Before this discussion, it is important to mention Hisham Sharabi’s theory of neopatriarchy in the Arab world (1988), which explains the persistence of patriarchy within the paradoxical

coexistence of modernization and traditionalism. Neopatriarchy's relevance lies in its ability to capture how gendered power dynamics are both reproduced and reconfigured through the putatively postcolonial states' evolving roles. Sharabi (1988) argues that in the Arab world there is a distinct juncture, or a lag, between private and public patriarchy causing an increased presence of both, highlighting the regional specificity of these transitions.

Sharabi uses neopatriarchy to explain *contemporary* 'patriarchal' postcolonial or neocolonial states where so-called traditional societies were overlaid with oil-based "development" or economic modernization. Although he references the conditions of imperialism and colonization, Sharabi uses "neopatriarchy" to refer to a stunted process for the Arab world, assuming that it was "natural" in the metropoles. Instead of reproducing this frame, I assume that the entire world exists in the same historical moments at different times and in relation to each other. That includes the workings of gender inequality, including patriarchy.

To return to Sharabi, he explains that:

> By neopatriarchy I refer both to a theoretical foundation as well as sociohistorical reality. In the former sense, neopatriarchy occupies the space between traditional patriarchy and modernity; in the latter sense, it is a concrete, historical reality, describing a social entity, neither purely traditional, nor authentically modern, but a hybrid formation combining both. Neopatriarchy is a unique product of imperialism and of decolonization, comprising the elements that characterize, in various forms and combinations, institutions and practices of contemporary life in all developing countries, including those of Arab North Africa, and the Middle East (1988, 2).

Sharabi explains that key characteristics of neopatriarchy include the concentration of power within a small socio-political elite (bourgeoisie), the erosion of community bonds due to colonization and post-colonial political realities, and the disintegration of 'traditional' customs and values under the pressures of Westernization and globalization. Sharabi also highlights the rise of religious fundamentalist groups, which play a pivotal role in disciplining women's and men's behaviors, sexuality, and bodies. These groups enforce strict social norms, particularly

targeting younger generations, even as economic systems become more capitalist and neoliberal (1988, 6-10).

Building on Sharabi's analysis, Kandiyoti (1988) explores how patriarchal systems shift over time, particularly in relation to women's roles within families. She notes that in traditional patriarchal systems, older women often held power over younger women, such as their sons' wives. However, under neopatriarchal systems, this dynamic has eroded, leaving older women increasingly marginalized both within families and broader society. This shift reflects the broader disintegration of community bonds and the rise of individualistic, neoliberal values.
In fact, no part of the "formerly" colonized Arab world has sovereignty in relation to Western powers in the Global North. The reality is that these states and entities (such as the Palestinian Authority in the Occupied West Bank) exist under foreign capitalist economic and military systems, as well as their "cultural" projects administered through government and NGO projects. Moreover, these Western powers prefer "national" governments that are subservient to the West and thus non-democratic and non-accountable to their peoples economically, politically and militarily, whether kingdoms, constitutional republics, or something else. **Patriarchy, therefore, comes in different forms and works on multiple scales. Whether patriarchy is working in the family, at work, in society or geopolitically, these are relational systems of power that are gendered but also more than gendered.**

Kandiyoti, on her theorization of patriarchy in Africa and different parts of Asia, explains:

> I will term the 'patriarchal bargain' of any society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, ethnicity. These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression. Moreover, patriarchal bargains are not timeless or immutable entities, but are susceptible historical transformations (1988, 275).

She further defined two ‘systems’ of patriarchy; “The two types are based on examples of sub-Saharan Africa, on the one hand, and the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia on the other. My aim is to highlight a continuum ranging from less corporate forms of householding, involving the relative autonomy of mother-child units evidenced in sub-Saharan polygyny, to the more corporate male-headed entities prevalent in the regions identified by Caldwell (1978) as the ’patriarchal belt’ (ibid.).” The Arab speaking world is largely referred to as a traditional patriarchy, where in kinship systems prioritize males and grant them power (socially and legally) over their household.

Kandiyoti’s conceptualization and understanding of the patriarchal bargain provides a useful framework for examining the interaction between women and state structures in Jordan and Palestine. The state often acts as the mediator of these bargains, enforcing laws and policies that reflect the socio-political priorities of (neo)patriarchy. For example, the codification of family laws and citizenship laws rooted in male kinship systems allows for insight into how the state institutionalizes patriarchal bargains at the societal level. This interplay between personal, familial, and state-mediated patriarchy remains central to understanding how women navigate and resist oppression within these contexts.

In her recent works, Kandiyoti has reframed this thinking; ultimately, she argues, patriarchy as a stand-alone phenomenon does not exist. In a 2022 interview, she explains how in her earlier work she categorized patriarchy as a social arrangement in which male dominance and privilege were justified by the expectation that men would provide protection and material support for women and children. She termed this dynamic the ‘patriarchal bargain,’ emphasizing that men’s authority was contingent on their ability to fulfill these roles. However, over time, and particularly with the global expansion of neoliberal policies, the material conditions that sustained this system have eroded, leading to the breakdown of the patriarchal bargain. She says:

> Large-scale unemployment and precarity for men and youth meant that in many parts of the world the original terms of the patriarchal bargain were simply unfulfillable, ushering in a so-called crisis of masculinity. Women’s employment was booming in many regions and they were sometimes becoming the main breadwinners. For instance, when we look at the export-led industrialization of Southeast Asia, we see that this boom was as much

> ‘female-led’ as export-led with a workforce dominated by young women in factories. The concept of ‘classic patriarchy’ was no longer valid (Columbia Global Center, 2022).

However, as I will argue in Chapter 2, the primary data indicates that some form of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ still exists though it is not a negotiation with the ‘men’ for security (or other purposes), but rather with aspects of patriarchal structures themselves (what I will call the neo-patriarchal bargain). The social contract discussed is more visible from an individual level of experience and it can also be argued that the ‘bargain’ itself is a method of adapting to contextual oppression; it can also be witnessed on a collective level, for example, specifically in regards to repealing discriminatory laws in the Arab region (see Article 308 in Jordan for example, or domestic violence laws in the Lebanon). The erosion of the traditional patriarchal bargain under neoliberal policies highlights the adaptability of patriarchal structures within state systems.

While women have entered the workforce and increasingly gained visibility in ‘public’ life, this shift has not dismantled patriarchy but instead reshaped its manifestations. State policies, such as Jordan's repeal of Article 308 or Lebanon's domestic violence legislation, reflect attempts to negotiate these evolving gender dynamics. However, these reforms are often incomplete, revealing the enduring influence of neo-patriarchal structures within state institutions. Furthermore, they signal compliance with neoliberal pressures, such as conforming to international standards of gender equity – not for the sake of gender equity itself, but to maintain bilateral relations with other states.

Neopatriarchy thrives through interconnected domains that reproduce gendered oppression and power dynamics, influenced by multiple scales of power relations. Using a socialist feminist approach, Valentine Moghadam (2020) argues, like most regional feminist scholars, that the family remains central to gendered restrictions in the Middle East and North Africa. Beyond its role as a unit of social reproduction, the family controls women’s access to education, employment, mobility, and inheritance, reinforcing patriarchal dominance. She highlights how gendered ideologies emanate from various sources, including the state and media, shaping societal norms that sustain patriarchy.

The gendered division of labor remains particularly pronounced in the region, where domestic responsibilities fall disproportionately on women, as the state does not provide the same level of social care infrastructure found in much of the Global North. Women are often relegated to culturally or socially 'acceptable' domains of paid work, reinforcing economic dependence and limiting their autonomy. In her earlier work, Moghadam (1993) describes this phenomenon as 'neopatriarchy,' a system where modernization and state-sponsored reforms occur alongside the retention of Muslim family law, which legitimizes male authority over women (111). She argues that the persistence of colonial legacies, neo-imperialism, modernization, and religious influence continues to hinder broader development, including gender equity (ibid., 2020, 15-30). While opportunities for women have expanded, they largely remain in the service sector and other precarious, informal labor, bringing to the forefront the ways in which structural inequalities persist despite surface-level reforms (ibid., 1993, 200-225).

The term neopatriarchy highlights how even within contemporary global frameworks for gender equality, such as CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), an international legal instrument aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and girls and promoting their equal rights (UN Women, 2016), implementation often falls short of its promises. This is particularly evident in numerous Arab states, including Palestine and Jordan, where CEDAW has been ratified but not fully implemented, with exceptions such as citizenship rights in Jordan. This contradiction reflects the persistence of neopatriarchal structures, which coexist with and often undermine global gender equality initiatives. However, it is important to note that CEDAW itself operates within a liberal imperialist UN framework, as highlighted by anti-imperialist feminist critiques (Hasso, 2009) that argue that CEDAW universalizes Western notions of gender equality, often disregarding local contexts and reinforcing global geopolitical power imbalances. In this way, the limited implementation of CEDAW in Arab states is not merely a failure of political will but also a reflection of material relations of inequality that shape tensions between global norms and local realities, as well as the broader contradictions of neopatriarchy.

Sharabi's Marxist analysis offers insight into how patriarchal structures persist by linking family organization to broader socio-economic and historical forces. He argues that the tribe, as an extension of the family, shapes the foundation of patriarchal society, with the transition to

nuclear and extended families emerging only recently due to urbanization and class stratification (1988, 30). This framework is particularly relevant to the neo-patriarchal systems of Jordan and Palestine, where the family often assumes the role of the state within the household due to cultural, legal, and political conditions.

In the absence of a robust welfare state and under authoritarian pressures, kinship networks dictate both familial and social life, reinforcing male guardianship. Fathers, husbands, and even brothers act as de facto state authorities, exerting control over women's mobility, employment, and legal rights. This manifests in concrete ways: in some cases, women require written permission from a male guardian to work (Human Rights Watch, 2023); inheritance laws favor men under Personal Status Laws (Amnesty International, 2023); women cannot pass nationality to their children (Equality Now, 2021); and marriage and divorce laws overwhelmingly privilege male authority (Amnesty International, 2023). Moreover, state intervention in domestic violence and sexual harassment remains limited, further entrenching women's vulnerability within these patriarchal structures (UNESCWA, 2013).

While Walby's distinction between private and public patriarchy provides a useful starting point for analyzing gendered power structures, it falls short in contexts like the Levant, where the family operates as a quasi-state institution. Her framework does not adequately address the hybrid nature of neo-patriarchy, where familial and state systems are deeply intertwined. By overlooking the politicization of the family and the role of kinship systems in governance, Walby's model risks oversimplifying the complexities of patriarchal systems in non-Western contexts. A more inclusive framework would need to account for how familial structures interact with state policies, global norms, and local cultural practices to perpetuate gendered inequalities.

This shows the politicization of the family, and oftentimes the extended family too. One example of how this manifests is vote 'purchasing.' While spending time in Saida, Lebanon in 2023, I was told an anecdote that it is common practice for politicians to purchase votes of an entire household from the 'patriarch' of that family in a sectarian "national" logic imposed by France and continually policed by the United States. This can range from a single household, or in the case of powerful male elders in a family, the households of his children and grandchildren as well. The men do not generally consult their wives or children regarding this matter, for which

he then receives monetary compensation for all of the household's sold votes (Ibn Tawfic, Personal Communication, 2023).

Hasso's 2011 work, *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East*, provides a useful point of intervention in understanding how Islam, state power, and colonial legacies intersect to sustain patriarchal structures in the Arab world. She argues that states often manipulate Islam as a political tool to legitimize patriarchal policies, even when these laws are historically and politically constructed rather than inherently Islamic. Colonial powers reinforced this by codifying "Islamic" family laws in ways that entrenched male dominance, leaving a lasting patriarchal legacy. At the same time, Hasso highlights the agency of women and marginalized groups who strategically engage with Islamic frameworks to challenge these norms. She critiques global feminist movements for imposing Western notions of gender equality, often ignoring local contexts and religious frameworks. Such universalist approaches, she argues, risk undermining meaningful, context-specific efforts for gender equity. Ultimately, she calls for a more critical analysis of how Islam, culture, and both foreign and local state agendas shape gendered power structures in the region (ibid., 131-150).

Colonial legacies, and thus Western feminism continues to operate as an arm of 'Global North' imperialism in the region through the channels of non-state agencies, aid agencies particularly, seeking to impose a version of gender equality that does little to tackle actual social and legislative oppression. Projects advocating for legislative changes in relation to women's status have been led by local feminist organizations and women's unions.

While much of the Western-origin feminist scholarship is helpful in numerous ways, it does in fact emerge from the operations, interests, and developments of modern Western states, themselves impossible without their colonizing and imperialist histories of violence and extraction. Too often, these theoretical and praxis approaches bypass the material and ideological impact of neo-colonialism and imperialism as tools of women's oppression in the Arabic-speaking world, especially by states. This is not to say that Western women as a group or individuals are the problems. Rather, an institutional and **multi-scalar** understanding of Western imperialism is necessary to understand the margins of action available in subordinated societies.

While these contradictions are often framed as ‘tradition versus modernity,’ they are in fact all “modern,” as in they are occurring within relational systems in which we all exist at the same time. Similarly, while cultures and cosmologies differ, they too exist in relation to material relations and ideologies that cannot be neatly bound. It is ridiculous, for example, to claim that women in the West are ‘free’ without taking into account the multifaceted systems that shape and delimit all lives, including gender, class and race, and certainly citizenship status and relative sovereign strength of the associated governments within the world system.

None of the Western feminist models take seriously the violence of settler-colonialism, imperialism, and war on Arab women broadly and on Palestinian bodies in particular. In 2023 to 2025, during the onslaught on Gaza and the West Bank, there is increasing discourse on a concept called ‘purple-washing’ or feminist-washing (Sayegh, 2024). Western feminist models often fail to account for the violence of settler-colonialism, imperialism, and war on Arab women, particularly Palestinian women. While concepts like purple-washing, the use of women’s rights rhetoric to obscure settler-colonial violence, and NGO feminism or neoliberal feminism have been critiqued in feminist scholarship (Puar 2007, 2017, Hasso 2011, amongst many others), their application to the current genocide in Palestine reveals how gender and sexuality are weaponized as ideological tools of imperialism and genocide. For instance, since October 7, 2023, Israeli state narratives have repeatedly invoked the protection of women’s rights to justify military aggression, while systematically erasing the gendered suffering of Palestinian women. This includes the targeted destruction of healthcare infrastructure, the displacement of pregnant women, and the weaponization of sexual violence as a tool of war. These tactics are not new; they are rooted in a long history of using feminist rhetoric to legitimize colonial violence, as Jasbir Puar (2024) elaborates in her lecture at the 17th Annual Duke Feminist Theory Workshop. Puar argues that the Israeli state’s deployment of feminist and LGBTQ+ rights discourses, what she terms “homonationalism (Farris, 2007)” and “pink-washing,” serves to obscure its settler-colonial agenda and dehumanize Palestinians. Similarly, the concept of purple-washing reflects how women’s rights are co-opted to deflect attention from the systemic violence inflicted on Palestinian women, whose experiences of displacement, loss, and bodily harm are rendered invisible. Some examples of Palestinian women’s gendered suffering include deprivation of sanitary products, c-sections with no

anesthesia, no neonatal care, and the murder of children who's entire lifespan began and ended within the time period of the genocide.

We see this theory enacted where violence moves beyond rhetoric into brutal material forms, particularly through the sexual abuse and torture of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons. Among them was Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh, a prominent Palestinian surgeon at al-Shifa Hospital during the genocide in Gaza. He was detained by the Israeli army in December 2023 while working at al-Awda Hospital and taken to Ofer prison, where he faced repeated physical and sexual abuse. He ultimately died from these injuries. A report states:

> The head of orthopaedics at Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital was working at the al-Awda Hospital in northern Gaza in December when he and other medics were arrested by the Israeli army for, they said, 'national security reasons.' Four months later, Ofer Prison guards dragged Al-Bursh and dumped him in the prison yard, naked from the waist down, bleeding and unable to stand, according to a statement provided by Israeli human rights organisation, HaMoked. Recognising him, some of the other prisoners carried Al-Bursh to a nearby room, and he died moments later (Cordall for Al Jazeera News, 2024).

Western media coverage diluted the violence, offering sanitized headlines like: "How a famous surgeon died in an Israeli prison after being taken from Gaza hospital" (Sky News, 2024), "Palestinian Deaths in Israeli Custody Fuel Allegations of Abuse" (WSJ, 2024), and "Leading Gaza surgeon Adnan Al-Bursh dies in Israeli prison" (CNN, 2024). These framings depoliticize and depersonalize the state's use of gendered, sexualized violence as a tool of domination and control.

This was not an isolated case. In 2024, the Sde Teiman detention facility in the Naqab desert became a site of mass abuse. CCTV footage aired by Israeli media appeared to show IDF soldiers sexually assaulting a Palestinian detainee while others lay face down. Ten soldiers from Force 100, responsible for riot control and transfers, were arrested on charges of sexual abuse (The Times of Israel, 2024); five were later released.

One soldier publicly justified the assault during an Israeli television tour, unmasked, framing it as a response to Palestinian resistance. His defense was echoed in the Israeli Knesset and supported by far-right commentators (Al Jazeera, 2024). Despite international condemnation, including from the UN Human Rights Office, which called the footage “shocking” and urged an independent investigation (Middle East Monitor, 2024), accountability remains elusive.

These cases expose how gendered and sexual violence function not simply through a man–woman binary but through broader hierarchies of power shaped by colonialism, militarism, and racism. The occupying ‘state’s’ agents, regardless of gender, enforce dominance through sexualized humiliation, targeting bodies not for who they are but for what they represent. Within these structures, gendered power operates as a tool of imperial violence, rather than through neatly defined categories of male oppressor and female victim.

Despite the gravity of these abuses, Western powers, and feminists, have remained conspicuously silent, failing to condemn or hold Israel accountable for these violations. This silence further emphasizes the compliance, and arguably complicity, of Western feminist and human rights frameworks in perpetuating imperialist violence, as they selectively and consistently ignore the suffering of Palestinian women and men when it contradicts geopolitical interests. By centering the actual gendered and sexualized violence of settler colonialism, there is an urgent need to dismantle the ideological frameworks that enable such violence and to hold perpetrators accountable.

Today, what I understand to be by design is that Palestine and the Palestinians have been fragmented into many spaces on Palestinian land. While this will be discussed further, here the concluding argument is that a structural and relational approach to understanding patriarchy is useful, necessary even, we cannot separate it from other superseding oppressions within a neo-imperial context such as in Palestine and Jordan. Even with the consideration that the substructures interact with one another, there exists realities where some of these concerns appear as privilege in comparison to others – as seen in Gaza in from 2023 to date. If a framework must be used in this study of gendered oppression, the encompassing aspects of neopatriarchy, within the concept of substructures in gender regimes, are both central.

All people are oppressed under patriarchal forms of power, but not all people are oppressed equally. This applies to both men and women and is highly dependent on socio-economic positionality. Superficially, patriarchy places a higher overall value of men over women; however, as this imbalance of power is inherently unnatural, it naturally results in practical and conceptual failure, largely due to the effects of neoliberal modernization. This thesis on gender in Jordan and Palestine situates patriarchal dynamics within three interconnected substructures of gendered oppression: state, society and self, translating to aspects of ideological, material, and institutional. These substructures encapsulate the dual aspects of oppression, idea and action, and contain further sub-substructures that sustain systemic inequalities. For example, ideological norms rooted in cultural and religious values shape material realities, such as labor practices and access to resources, which are further reinforced by institutional mechanisms, including legal and political systems. These substructures illustrate how gendered oppression is both a distinct category and an integral component of broader systems of domination. There is persistence and potential for change and resistance.

For the purposes of this thesis, I support the logic that patriarchy as previously understood is too simplistic to comprehend the intricate ways in which gendered oppression is expressed. Particularly in the Arabic-speaking world, the too often use of patriarchy as an analytical tool does little to address the dynamism of gendered oppression and ways it changes to accommodate contextual realities. A more useful framework is that of the neopatriarchy, which is understood as a system of gender regime. The neopatriarchy has distinctive features, all of which are regionally present including an inherent contradiction of both simultaneously improving gender equality efforts as well as finding new modalities of oppression. Kinship systems (families and tribes) are an important site to study the manifestations of neo-patriarchal violence as in the absence of the welfare state taking on the burden of care, as well as protecting women legislatively, the family becomes politicized. The family is also culturally important in the sense that it is the primary site of cultural knowledge and teaches women how to navigate in a generally unforgiving social terrain. While concepts of Western feminism can be useful, it generally disregards the violence committed against Palestinian and Jordanian men and women leading many to meet it with rejection.

Finally, from a perspective of a ‘lived reality’, research participant Bint Mimi from Jordan says, “It's just another mechanism, like capitalism for example, that essentially inhibits people from reaching their full potential and, to grow the way they want to, into the people they want to become. My personal belief is that everybody is entitled to their choices as long as it doesn't negatively affect others. The patriarchy basically inhibits women and other non cis-people from being able to thrive,” adding, “I have seen here and in the world a chilling entitlement from men to women's bodies, time, and work (Personal Communication, 2022).”

In this light, the insights shared by Palestinian feminist researcher Sarah Kaddoura deepens our understanding of how patriarchy operates as a multifaceted and adaptive system. Reflecting on the lived realities of women across different socioeconomic backgrounds, Kaddoura emphasizes how “in-your-face oppression” often obscures its intersection with other systemic forces, pushing individuals into survival mode in order to actively prevent broader structural critique. She points out that while patriarchy manifests universally, its impact varies significantly based on class and privilege (Personal Communication, 2022). For instance, wealthy women often have the means to delegate oppressive burdens, such as labor or societal expectations, effectively outsourcing their oppression to other, less privileged women. This dynamic not only reinforces class hierarchies but also illustrates how patriarchy adapts to and is perpetuated by existing economic systems.

Kaddoura’s observations resonate with Walby’s theorization of patriarchy as a set of entangled structures embedded within preexisting social systems, such as the state. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of Jordan and Palestine, where the state plays a central role in both reinforcing and mediating patriarchal norms. Colonial legacies and neocolonial realities have further entangled these systems with global economic and political forces, exacerbating inequalities and limiting women’s autonomy. In Palestine, women’s experiences of patriarchy are compounded by violence of the occupation, which intersects with geography, time, class and national identity to produce distinct forms of oppression. Similarly, in Jordan, neoliberal policies have deepened economic disparities, and colonial legacies and neocolonial interests are the hegemonic power. These dynamics emphasize the importance of understanding patriarchy not as

a monolithic force but as a system deeply enmeshed in other structures of power, evolving through the intersections of local and global influences.

One perspective from an interviewee concludes,“For me, this is all about hoarding wealth in the hands of men making things feel so natural, and making trust, and family so treacherous and hard to rely on that there are two options for women: be bitter and don't trust anyone and constantly depend only on yourself (this is awful!) or be in very precarious positions with your job, your family, your health etc… (Bint Khadra, West Bank Personal Communication, 2022).”

Genealogies of Corporeal and Civic Rights: Tracing ‘Modern’ Laws of Gender in Palestine and Jordan from Late Ottoman to the Present Period

This section examines the gradual degradation of bodily and civil rights for women in Jordan and Palestine, tracing the evolution from a ‘traditional’ patrilineal patriarchy under the Ottoman Empire to the emergence of neopatriarchy in the modern nation-state. It situates these transformations within broader historical and geopolitical shifts, arguing that the consolidation of familial power under patriarchal structures during the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, influenced by the Napoleonic Code, laid the groundwork for subsequent restrictions. These dynamics were exacerbated during the colonial period and further entrenched by contemporary legislative frameworks.

By focusing on the relationship between women and the state, this section contributes to the chapter’s overarching framework by exploring how these shifts in governance have systematically impacted women’s legal, social, and corporeal rights. Using historical and archival analysis, the section interrogates the ways colonial policies and legal systems reinforced patriarchal norms, overshadowing indigenous practices and encouraging stereotypes about the region’s culture and ‘religion’. Through this lens, the discussion seeks to challenge orientalist tropes that attribute gendered oppression solely to religion or cultural traditions, emphasizing instead the role of external power structures and governance models.

Similar to Kandiyoti's (2022) thinking, patriarchy, as she explains, has been absorbed, arguably has always been enveloped, into deeper social systems of oppression; it is sustained, replicated, and transformed through analysis within 'preexisting' structures such as 'the state'.

The evolving forms of patriarchy demonstrate a continuity of oppression, but also shifts in its mechanisms. Under the Ottoman Empire, patriarchy was rooted in familial structures, which were formalized through Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) influenced by European legal systems, specifically the Napoleonic Code (1804) leading to the rise of the modern nation-state. The colonial period intensified these restrictions, as foreign legal codes like the Napoleonic-inspired system introduced rigid family laws that subordinated women's rights to male guardianship. In contemporary Jordan and Palestine, this legacy persists in the form of discriminatory laws on citizenship, inheritance, and personal status, which reflect a compounding of colonial governance, local patriarchal traditions, and the state's role in regulating women's lives. As Hanna AlTaher explains, "Citizenship is one of the more tangible arenas to understand structures of state power, and despite the almost unavoidable tendency to speak of the state as an 'it,' the domain we call the state is not a thing, system, or subject but a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques (Al-Taher, 2023, citing Brown, 1995, 174)."

This history illustrates that gendered oppression is not a static or intrinsic feature of the region's culture but rather a constructed phenomenon shaped by power dynamics and external interventions. As research participant Bint Khadra reflects, "Tradition gets its flavors and methods and tools and language from power, and power has used the facade of religion for a very long time. But neither religion exists in an essentialized unchanging way nor do these traditions (Personal Communication, 2022)." This section highlights that the modern nation-state has deepened patriarchal structures rather than dismantling them, creating a neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1988) that continues to marginalize women It also frames the struggle for gender equity as part of a broader analysis of power, governance, and resistance, providing critical context for the thesis's exploration of the relationships between women, the state, their communities, and self.

The Ottoman Empire ruled over the lands of Palestine and Jordan from 1517 to 1917 after taking control from the Mamluks; the empire was divided into districts (sanjak) and governorates (vilayat) and both were initially governed under the 'Wilaya of Damascus.' Much of Palestine was later separated into the (mutasarrifate) district of Jerusalem, thus retaining somewhat of a special status as well as the Akka Sanjak and the Nablus Sanjak. Generally, the Ottoman empire ran their territories through simple measures of control and was mainly interested in trade routes and tax revenue (for example Rogan, 2002). The people were primarily governed through religious courts and trade courts. Islamic courts featured most prominently in daily life as the land was, and continues to be, majority Muslim. Separate religious courts were created for those of different faiths, particularly for Christians and Jews with their own religious leaders presiding (for example, Sonbol 2004 or Gerber 1994). The Jordanian government today (citing *History*, Government of Jordan) describes this period of history as quite stagnant and claims that Ottoman interest in Jordan existed almost solely for its location, on the way to Mecca, where Muslims gather for pilgrimage - with little investment into the local infrastructure. Palestine, due to its historical status as *a*, or rather, *the* holy land, faced political change that provided some kind of capacity for self-governance (al-Quds, al-Khalil, Gaza, Beer al-Saba', Akka, amongst others) under the independent Sanjak of Jerusalem.

Day-to-day governance of local disputes were traditionally (throughout the Mamluk reign onwards, for example) and continued to be resolved through Islamic courts. Generally, social systems did not change so drastically during this period.

Scholar Amira Sonbol (2003), through extensive analysis of archival materials from Islamic courts spanning the late-Mamluk to late-Ottoman period, examines the rights and social presence of women within these legal forums. Her study reveals that women were active participants in society and were entitled to many of the same legal privileges as men. Court cases included divorce (where women could initiate proceedings, unlike in many Sharia courts today) as well as custody, land, and inheritance disputes, suggesting a relative balance in legal agency. As she explains, "Men and women, going on with the business of living; buying, selling, and renting property; recording marriages, demanding divorce or child-custody; reporting rape, murders, thefts and other crimes; demanding restitution, diyya (bloodprice) compensation, or disputing

property rights and partnerships. All were normal functions that were disputed or recorded in court... Young and old, men and women, rich and poor, came to these courts, making court records a rich source for social history (Sonbol, 2003, 41–42)."

Other studies, for example, Pierce (1993, in Zilfi ed., 1997) and Faroqhi (in Zilfi ed., 1997), find that while women in the Ottoman empire did not participate in politics in a significant or sustained way, economically, and with respect to land and business ownership, a different story is told. Another finding relevant to this work is that there was no conception of 'law as a code' in Islamic jurisprudence, but rather a set of ethical, moral, and religious principles regarded as common law. Sonbol explains, "Unlike modern nation-states, the pre-modern state did not establish legal codes determining social relations; rather, it passed executive orders pertinent to collecting taxes, payment and amount of the diyya (blood-price), and various types of security measures (2003, 29)." This is important as it indicates that without clear laws for the citizen, each complaint must be understood individually and within context for a ruling to be made. Furthermore, it shows how social codes had and continues to have a significant influence in jurisprudence. The structure of the court differed from place to place, and the judge, generally a respected and educated member of the community, was usually a religious scholar from the same or similar 'socio-cultural and economic background' as those using the courts. For example, as Molly Greene points out:

> Local people also figured prominently in the proceedings of the Ottoman court, where many lines of authority converged. The kadi, or judge, routinely called upon local experts to assist him in investigating the cases that came before him, such as disputes over taxation. Impressed by the neat categories in Ottoman survey registers, we have failed to adequately appreciate that taxation was a complicated business. Palestinian olive trees, for example, were taxed differently depending on their age, which affected their fruit-bearing ability. It was unlikely that someone from Istanbul would have been able to determine the age of those trees (2005).

With respect to women in the region, many of the discriminatory laws that exist today, it seems, are indeed a byproduct of this and the subsequent colonial era (generally based on the

Napoleonic Code of 1804) and are not necessarily inherent to Arab or Muslim culture (Small, 2022).

Within both Mamluk-period and Ottoman (Islamic) courts, Sonbol explains:

> Women had clear rights to come and sue in court, the flexibility of the system allowed women to maneuver to determine their marriage contracts and the conditions under which they lived. They also had complete access to divorce a husband they did not want to continue with, a far cry from modern law that adopted rules of placing women under the full control of their husbands who had to agree before divorce could take place, the exception being lists set up by the state, which had to apply to a particular situation before divorce could be granted. Because Sharia court records were not used as precedent for modern Sharia courts, the rights of women, including the right to work and determine their marriage contracts, were lost. By rediscovering these rights through court records, contemporary personal status laws can be questioned. Particularly important here is questioning the religious sanctity that the state gives to personal status laws on the books in Muslim countries today (2003, 33).

This is important to understand, for today, the relationship between the contemporary Jordanian and Palestinian woman and the superstructure of the state is, in many cases, less just and less egalitarian. More importantly, modes of oppression commonly attributed to Islam, and more generally, 'Arab' tradition have different and multiple origins.

Under the branch of bodily rights is the tradition of veiling, for example, an important topic of international discussion considering restrictions on women who wear the veil in certain countries in the Global North today. While it is a custom of Islam, it is clear from the region's (and the world's) history that it *long* predates Islam.

In her critical work, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), Leila Ahmed traces the 'social' standing of women from ancient Mesopotamia to the contemporary discourse surrounding women. She finds evidence highlighting the use of the veil in Assyrian law, for example, as a

marker indicating a woman's socio-economic status. Specifically, the veil was used to express a woman's social status, i.e if a female sex-worker gets married, she is now required by law to wear a veil.

In a study on Women in 'Middle Assyrian law,' Fales et. al (2021) highlight different texts from the legal code that pertain to women (and their dress codes). The primary rule concerning veiling for women in Middle Assyrian laws is established at the beginning of paragraph 40: it states that the wives of a man, widows, or any Assyrian women who go out in public must wear a veil. This law clearly mandated veiling for married women, including widows, whenever they appeared in public, and extended to all women considered 'Assyrian.' Essentially, the law stipulated that any free, native-born woman, particularly if married, had to be identified by her veil when in public (ibid., 94). This social marker was important for both men and women and was taken into account while arranging for marriage. This is a social characteristic that has continued to exist well into our current time and is brought up by research participants and discussed further in the coming chapters.

Further to this, the social code surrounding the veil was complex, and in some abstract sense, fair. An 'elevated' social status could be achieved by a woman at any point in her life, even if she was not born into a 'higher-class' family. The same set of rules that applied to married women also extended to a 'concubine' (esirtu), who could reside within a household as a secondary sexual partner, even alongside the main wife. One specific law in this collection stated that a concubine could be raised to the status of a wife by a man, a transformation that required her to be veiled (ibid., 95).

These laws, some of the earliest in the world, and the region, carried through into future generations, and later, once again, into the region's monotheistic religions. The social order is still visible today, though the concept of concubines, even polygamy, is almost totally erased. But more than solely highlighting the use of the veil, the use of (multiple) witnesses, as used to legitimize a marriage between an Assyrian man and his concubine (ibid.), is something central to Islamic law (for example in Shari'a in order to prove premarital sex as a 'crime' four witnesses

must witness the act). These legal codes had a significant influence on the socio-cultural structure of regional society today.

Throughout the edited collection Keddie and Baron explain that while the origins of gender inequality in the ancient Near East are debated, it's clear that early hunter-gatherers and pre-agricultural societies were more gender-egalitarian than those who adopted agriculture. As economic surplus and technological advancements grew, so did class differences and slavery, which often restricted women to domestic roles. Further stating:

> Class differences developed among women as well as among men; some women were slaves with menial roles or sexual roles, or both, and others engaged in different degrees of non-domestic as well as domestic labor, while on top were primarily women who did not have to venture outside the home. Veiling and seclusion developed in the pre-Islamic near east and adjacent areas largely as a marker for upper-class women that showed they did not have to interact with strangers (Nashat in Keddie & Baron Eds. 1991, 79).

Specifically pertaining to the time period in discussion, an abundance of studies center on the lives of women in the Ottoman empire, and a key theme that is repeatedly raised is that the social visibility of the woman depended greatly on her social status (for example, ed. Zilfi, 1997, Boyar and Fleet, 2016). It is imperative to consider that during these times, slavery and sex work were both heavily featured in the social fabric. Historians highlight that female sex-workers and slaves did have a noticeable public presence and the inverse is also true; the higher a woman's social standing, the less likely she would exit the home unaccompanied or with exposed hair (or face in some cases) (Boyar and Fleet, 2016).

This emphasizes an imperative factor of contemporary restraints on Jordanian and Palestinian women, discussed extensively in Chapter 3, that of an 'unspoken' social code linking class to modesty, translating into eligibility. The veil, throughout its different contexts, did not always indicate 'oppression,' though it has been used as a tool of control over women's bodies as well as a social marker, one that we can still locate through the presence of conservatism in the bourgeoisie today.

What is both particularly interesting and imperative to the discussion is the autonomy and agency women had over their bodies in regards to sexual and reproductive health, a history that shames the contemporary gender order in the region, certainly, but maybe even in the Western world as well. In her important work, *Buried in the Red Dirt: Race, Reproduction and Death in Modern Palestine* (2021), Frances Hasso undertakes a detailed investigation, through both primary research and significant archival research, and pinpoints the general attitude of the 'state' towards Palestinian women (generally) regarding health and bodily autonomy. In the fourth chapter titled "Technically Illegal," she traces different aspects relating to a woman's physical autonomy and its socio-legislative implications, if any. First she investigates attitudes towards sexual intercourse in the Abrahamic religions, and she concludes that within Islam, and to some extent Judaism, permit, in some cases encourage, sexual intercourse for both pleasure and procreation. While Christianity contends with sex as the 'original sin,' thus intercourse is only acceptable for the purpose of procreation, pleasure in and of itself may be considered a sin, this is important when considering the later effects of largely Chrisitan colonial countries and their positionality on designing contemporary Arab legislation.

Following this, she "examines late Ottoman laws, policies, and priorities as they interacted with birth control practices," adding a summary of "British law on birth control in Mandate Palestine," and "the final section discusses Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian National Authority abortion laws and policies applicable since 1948 (ibid.)."

Building on regional tradition, Hasso highlights Islamic jurist rulings that recognized fathers' rights to control family size for economic stability, acknowledged the risks of childbirth, and noted that frequent pregnancies could lead to infant starvation. These rulings also justified birth control, including abortion, in times of war and insecurity to prevent children from being enslaved or forced to convert (Hasso, 2021, citing Musallam, 1981; Giladi, 2015).

This is in stark contrast to the contemporary context which will be discussed in the later sections of this work; the considerations around sexual and reproductive health at this time did involve a sense of dynamism, and relationality whereby numerous factors may or may not justify a

woman's ability to regulate her reproductive system. Through this we can begin to understand and conceptualize the gradual degradation of a woman's rights to her own body.

The use of contraception, a debate often had in the theology of the Abrahamic religions, reflects varying perspectives rooted in scriptural interpretation and historical context. In Judaism, the Talmud permits contraception under specific circumstances, such as health concerns or if pregnancy would endanger the mother, emphasizing family well-being (for example Resnicoff, 2008). Christianity, particularly within Catholicism, traditionally opposes artificial contraception, asserting that sexual activity must remain open to procreation, though Protestant perspectives are more diverse, with some denominations accepting its use within marriage for responsible family planning (McClory, 1995). Islam allows contraception if both partners consent and it does not cause harm, as long as it does not lead to permanent sterilization, aligning with broader principles of mutual agreement and responsibility (Musallam, 1983; Omran, 1992). These differing theological stances showcase the interplay between religious doctrines and the ethical considerations of reproductive control.

Hasso elaborates on some specificities, saying:

> In Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century, Basim F. Musallam finds that "intra-vaginal suppositories and tampons [to impede sperm] were the mainstay of medieval Arabic contraceptive medicine" as reflected in the detailed medical text published in the mid-ninth century CE in Persia, which "became the standard reference work of Arabic medicine" for centuries and was even used in fourteenth-century CE Spain (1983, 61, 62, 63). The "physical clogging capacity" of "honey and oil" were widely recognized and used, as were many other contraceptive and abortifacient methods (2021).

This highlights attitudes around sex and bodies that were much more innovative, dynamic, comprehensive and as much more 'lax' contrasting against what is found in Muslim and Arab societies today. The shift can be attributed to numerous socio-cultural factors. However, considering the longstanding traditions of women's self-autonomy regarding sexual and

reproductive health through, for example, through relegating the duties to midwives (exclusively women), the rise of the contemporary nation-state seems to be a key driver towards this oppressive shift.

The Ottoman empire saw a series of reforms (1839-1876) due to a combination of social pressure as well as the rise of the contemporary state, modeled after the Western European state.

> The empire sought to reform and modernise its institutions and society in line with the prevailing cultural, legal and political dominance of Europe. Libertarian ideas of the French Revolution found a favourable milieu among educated urban Ottomans, and the empire was called on to give way to the new philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment. These reforms, called the Tanẓīmāt, were intended to modernise the empire from an old theocratic system into a modern state similar to European states (Razai, 2019).

It was within this time frame that a shift in legal culture towards women's sexual and reproductive autonomy, in tandem with the fact that the Ottoman empire was actively seeking to increase its demography. Hasso describes a pivotal moment in legal history that took place in August 1858 when the Ottoman Penal Code began penalizing those who assisted with abortions. Article 193 imposed a prison sentence of six months to two years on anyone helping a woman to have an abortion or providing methods for it. Medical professionals like physicians, surgeons, or pharmacists who were involved faced the added penalty of forced labor. This law emerged after the Ottoman Empire adopted more Western-oriented policies following the Crimean War (1853-1856), in which they allied with the British and French against the Russians. The 1858 Penal Code incorporated elements from the 1810 French Penal Code, yet it still aligned with Islamic law by not penalizing women who underwent abortion voluntarily (Hasso, 2021, Chapter 4).

The French penal code of 1810 was based on Napoleon's legal initiative of 1804, which based many aspects of modern 'family law' on solidifying both the structure and thus the social role of the nuclear family, as well as ascribing by default gender roles too.

As explained by Guerry, “The Napoleonic Code of 1804, which was a fundamental element of the movement to codify civil law during the nineteenth century, spread to many European countries, and even beyond. It institutionalized the legal incapacity of married women, paternal and marital power, as well as the principle that as the head of the family, the husband or father determined the nationality of the family group: the spouse automatically took her husband’s nationality and lost her own (known as the ‘unitary’ system) (2020).”

These legal principles, particularly relating to nationality and guardianship, are present and are a great impediment to women in the Arab world today, particularly Jordan, presenting as an evolution from this base.

In her essay, Deanne Small (2022) isolates laws relating to family matters such as inheritance and finds that, though not explicitly in each case, the code was set to center the importance of the nuclear family as, essentially, a more easily controllable unit within society. This implied that a hierarchy of power was to be installed into family life, namely through that of the ‘husband’ as the head of a household. This in turn empowered the institution of marriage through different means, such as the exclusion of illegitimate children from inheritance rights. It also disempowered women, particularly single women, from many social rights that required a husband and his approval. It is widely accepted that the Napoleonic Code is the foundation of the legislative framework of the ‘modern’ European nation-state, and as a result of European colonization, the legislative framework for the former colonies of the Arab-speaking world. The Ottoman reforms, and later (primarily) British and French colonization, contributed to both legal and social changes in Palestine and Jordan (as well as other regional countries) today.

The Ottoman reforms came into more intense application shortly after the Tanzimat period. In 1908, the Young Turks, inspired by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), transitioned the Ottoman Empire from absolutist to constitutional governance. The 1911 Penal Code brought significant reforms to the 1858 Imperial Ottoman Penal Code, considered the most extensive changes enacted to date. Although influenced by the French Penal Code of 1810 in structure and classification, the Ottoman code diverged in its content. These reforms were part of a broader effort to centralize authority, strengthen the Ottoman bureaucracy, and diminish the influence of

Islamic courts and legal traditions in handling criminal matters (Bucknill & Utidjian, 1913; Schull, 2007, as cited in Hasso, 2021).

I would argue that this can be viewed as an early shift from existing frameworks to a more patriarchal system, implying a transition from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ (at the time) highlighting a ***temporal overlap*** in the conceptualization of neopatriarchy potentially then, a process. A traditional framework dismantled in favor of a ‘modern’ and consolidated a largely foreign power structure over a general population with focus on increasing demographics, and thus the birth rate, while simultaneously introducing new systems of biopolitical control. This is more apparent in the more recent temporal context but it is certainly an iteration of a change in the mechanisms of state power.

As seen in the historical record, the relationship between the state and the female citizen evolved, and arguably regressed, toward the end of the Ottoman Empire. Archival records from Sharia courts indicate that women maintained an active presence in public and legal life, often possessing greater legal agency than many enjoy today. However, the shift toward a more centralized, foreign-influenced governance system, coupled with policies aimed at increasing the empire’s population, began to erode women’s social and bodily autonomy.

This erosion was further compounded as the empire weakened and internal dissent grew, most notably through Arab uprisings in the Hijaz and Greater Syria, which sought to establish a unified Arab state. The ensuing period was marked by profound political and economic instability. While documentation on women’s roles during the interwar years (1920–1940) in Transjordan is limited, broader gendered patterns resemble those in neighboring Palestine, with similar structures of kinship, religion, and social organization continuing to shape women’s lives.

Efforts to improve access to education for girls in Jordan during the interwar period existed and may have progressed slowly primarily driven by missionary schools and initiatives from local elites. During the 1930s, urban areas began to center the importance of women’s literacy, in tandem with broader Arab sentiment that linked women's education to national progress, one that in some places is still present today. Missionary and government-supported education provided limited opportunities for young girls, often framed as preparation for domestic roles rather than

broader professional aspirations (for example Massad, 2001). This is largely echoed today, where oftentimes parents or guardians view education of girls and women as a factor for their eligibility for marriage rather than their own benefit. These reforms, though relatively minor, were pivotal in shaping the early foundations of women's public engagement in Jordanian society. Rural women in Jordan were indispensable to the agrarian economy, contributing significantly to agricultural labor, livestock care, and the management of household production. Women's involvement in such tasks illustrates the dual economic and domestic responsibilities they shouldered during this period (and arguably, still do today as a result of 'neopatriarchy'). While these roles were often undervalued in formal accounts, they highlight women's crucial contribution to sustaining livelihoods in rural areas (Sonbol, 2003). Although women in Jordan had limited formal political representation during the 1920s and 1930s, their involvement in nationalist movements and grassroots activism was significant. Women facilitated the logistics of resistance movements, such as the Arab Revolt, by organizing supplies, maintaining communication networks, and supporting fighters. These informal contributions exemplify their central and overlooked role in public life and resistance movements (Massad, 2001; Brand, 1998). The legal landscape reflected a blend of customary and Islamic laws, affording women rights in inheritance and property, though not in parity with men. Court records from the period demonstrate women's active use of Islamic legal systems to assert their rights, particularly in urban centers like Amman (Sonbol, 2003; Tucker, 1998). These dynamics highlight the interplay between traditional family roles and evolving legal consciousness among Jordanian women that continues today.

Jordanian researcher and academic Rana Husseini, who was interviewed for this thesis, locates central moments in women's social and political organization history. She explains in *Years of Struggle: The Women's Movement in Jordan:*

> From the first elections for the Legislative Council that were held during the period of the British Mandate (1921-1946), only males aged 18 or over had the right to vote. However, this systematic exclusion did not stop women from becoming actively involved in the Kingdom's social and political life especially as the British Mandate over Jordan in the early 1900s encouraged a group of educated middle and upper-class Jordanian women to

> unite and organize around nationalistic causes including calling for a free and independent country (2021, 19).

It was a regional trend for women, generally with economic means, to work together to create some kind of public space for themselves, usually through formalized women's movements. Women in rural areas were certainly concerned, but the social hierarchy away from capital cities was, and remains, different - particularly in terms of priorities as well as time.

Husseini adds, in December 1944, a group of women from the association traveled to Egypt for the first Arab women's meeting organized by the Egyptian General Arab Women Federation. Delegates from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine attended and agreed on recommendations to empower Arab women, including economic independence, equal pay, and social security policies. Their demands expanded to include controversial issues such as ending polygamy, amending the Personal Status Law, granting working women six-week maternity leave, and addressing discriminatory articles. The delegates also focused on political issues, particularly the growing sentiment for Arab unity (ibid. 20-1).

In essence, women have been fighting the personal status law since its inception, and unfortunately, it remains the most detrimental factor to women's equality in Jordan today, as will be discussed in further detail shortly.

In Palestine, history has taken a distinct trajectory, particularly since the 1948 Nakba, where Palestinians, both men and women, have endured an oppression with few historical parallels. This necessitates a unique approach to understanding social structures, shaped by a blend of patriarchy, neopatriarchy, colonization, and settler-colonialism. Within this context, women have often been confined to domestic roles, raising families under immense hardship, while simultaneously playing pivotal roles in the resistance. Figures such as Leila Khaled, who became an international symbol of armed struggle through her participation in airplane hijackings, and Dalal Mughrabi, who led the 1978 Coastal Road operation, highlight women's involvement in traditionally male-dominated realms of resistance. Meanwhile, others like Rasmea Odeh and Fatima Bernawi balanced their activism with roles as organizers, educators, and caregivers,

showcasing how women have navigated and challenged restrictive gender norms to contribute both at home and in the broader liberation movement.

Prior to the end of Ottoman rule, Palestinian society consisted of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities, along with smaller refugee groups such as Armenians and migrants from former Ottoman regions. The pre-Zionist Jewish population, known as the Old Yishuv, was largely concentrated in al-Quds (Jerusalem), al-Khalil (Hebron), Safad (Safed), and Tabariyeh (Tiberias). Deeply religious, these communities were economically reliant on foreign donations and were spiritually rather than politically tied to the land (Schölch, 1993).

From 1920–1940, Palestine remained a predominantly agrarian society rooted in kinship and tribal networks that governed land, labor, and conflict resolution. While Muslims were the majority, Christian and Jewish communities contributed to its pluralism (Doumani, 1995; Khalidi, 1997). Agriculture was, and arguably still is, a backbone of Palestinian livelihoods, with ‘peasants’ (*fallahin*) cultivating a variety of crops, often in large fields, including wheat, barley, olives, grape vines, lentils, figs, tomatoes, courgettes, and citrus fruits. Agriculture, despite challenges such as droughts, locusts, and heavy Ottoman taxation, connected rural producers to urban markets and regional economies (Pappé, 2006; Tamari, 2008).

Educational access was limited, especially in rural areas where children often attended *kuttab* schools for basic literacy. Local governance operated through village heads (*makhateer*) and religious courts, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish systems, reflecting the area's religious diversity (Sonbol, 2003; Doumani, 1995). Urban centers such as al-Quds, Yaffa, Nablus, and al-Khalil functioned as commercial and administrative hubs, offering limited elite education via missionary or private institutions. These areas witnessed growing unrest, especially as land sales to foreign buyers, particularly Zionist settlers, intensified displacement and inequality (Khalidi, 1997; Tamari, 2008).

Zionism emerged in Europe in the late 19th century as a political project aiming to replace native Palestinians with a Jewish state. Theodor Herzl's vision of Jewish nationalism gained support among European powers, including Britain. Unlike other colonial projects, the Zionist initiative sought the demographic and political erasure of Palestinians, turning the post-Sykes-Picot colonial experience into one of enduring and racialized displacement.

The *New Yishuv*, comprised mainly of European (Ashkenazi) immigrants, sought to establish a secular Jewish state, often clashing with both the *Old Yishuv* and Palestinian communities. Backed by entities like the Jewish National Fund and armed militias such as Irgun, Haganah, and the Stern Gang, the New Yishuv prioritized land acquisition and exclusionary settlement, displacing tenant farmers and intensifying colonial tensions (Khalidi, 1997).

As Hasso (2021) notes, the Palestinian colonial experience was distinct in facing not one, but two colonial projects: British imperialism and Zionist settler-colonialism. British authorities facilitated Zionist development in health, infrastructure, and education, bolstering Jewish demographics and Western legitimacy. Palestinians were left to resist both powers with limited resources, resulting in stark disparities in health, governance, and political representation.

The destruction of Palestinian life, familial, cultural, and economic, under these overlapping projects was profound. Biopolitical control continues to shape the bodies and futures of Palestinians, often through gendered logics tied to demographic anxieties and population control.

While Jordanians organized for independence, Palestinians including women across social classes mobilized against the British Mandate's legislative shifts. These changes marked a transition from traditional patriarchy to a form of colonial neopatriarchy, where women were stripped not only of rights under modern colonial law but also from customary roles and spaces that once offered them social agency. The colonial state imposed Western norms that erased longstanding systems of communal and gendered life.

Hasso (2021) outlines key social issues Palestinians faced during this period, many of which disproportionately affected women. The British colonization of Palestine came late in their imperial timeline and followed their established pattern of extracting far more from the colony than they invested. Colonized populations were expected to finance their own subjugation, leaving Palestinian resources drained while receiving little in return. Investments in healthcare and infrastructure, such as sanitation, water systems, and electricity, were only made when they directly benefited British interests. These priorities deepened poverty and worsened living conditions for Palestinians, resulting in widespread illness and shockingly high rates of infant and child mortality. British authorities seemed largely indifferent to the everyday struggles of the Palestinian population. Healthcare initiatives for maternal and child health were especially

limited, likely reflecting an unstated concern about controlling Muslim population growth. While violent suppression of uprisings and resistance was a clear feature of British rule, the more pervasive harm came from the grinding effects of poverty, hunger, and preventable deaths caused by systemic neglect. For Palestinians, life under British rule was shaped by relentless hardship, as imperial policies prioritized colonial dominance over the basic well-being of the people.

Palestine had long been a multi-faith society, but with the arrival of the 'New Yishuv' and the implementation of decontextualized British policies, people began to cling more fiercely to their religions and traditional ways of life. This dynamic is now widely recognized as a defining characteristic of the British Mandate period, which functioned, in part, to prepare the ground for the Zionist state. As research participant Bint Aysha from Ramallah points out, “Why the British became interested in religious groups and re-introduced the region to religion was also a capital move – one to oppress Palestinians and make way for the immigrating Jews in the benefit of European interests in the region (Personal Communication, 2022).” This ‘European interest’ was largely shaped by male-dominated power structures, as women were excluded from political roles at the time. The legacies of British rule, particularly in legal frameworks, continue to shape gendered citizenship today.

Bint Dima, another research participant, points out in relation to the contemporary Jordanian women’s inability to pass on her citizenship to her children, “Well, it exists because of the Brits; the Ottomans had better citizenship laws. The UK only got rid of it in the 1980s. I very much reject the notion that we are inherently sexist or misogynistic while they are not. They taught us this sexism (Personal Communication, 2022).”

As such, it comes as little surprise that Palestinian women were an active part in the uprisings against the British and their continued, and important, part of resistance today. One of my maternal grandmother’s earliest memories, she tells me, of when she was around six years old, is of participating in popular protests during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt in a rural Palestinian district in Al-Khalil. She also mentions this is around the time that the first schools began to open in the villages of the district in addition to the existing *kuttab*.

In their 2012 work on the role and presence of urban Palestinian women in the late Ottoman to the British Mandate period, Kark and Fischel paint a picture of the ways in which Bedouin, rural, and urban women went about their daily lives. They find that all three segments lived active and vibrant daily lives with each playing fundamental roles in the home. Rural women, whom they refer to as 'peasant women', played an important role in household economies by usually tending to the family fields, a primary form of income. Citing historian Tawfiq Canaan, the authors explain the labor as industrious, consisting of activities such as embroidery, selling and tending livestock, producing from this livestock, and going to and from the well supplying water to the household and crop, adding these tasks were generally gendered as female responsibilities. They explain, "In the villages, which were closer to townships, some went to town daily to work as household maids. Selling fresh agricultural produce (fruit, vegetables, and milk) in city markets was a specific part of the public sphere in which rural women were able to participate—albeit with a few restrictions (Kark and Fischel, 2012, 85)." Hasso (2021) arrives at similar conclusions in her introduction, emphasizing how structural limitations compounded these challenges: "Such unremitting work, combined with lack of money and limited transportation between hilly, distant villages and their town centers, limited girls' and women's access to midwives, doctors, hospitals, and medications (ibid.)."

In relation to Palestinian Bedouin women, similar to the general culture of other Bedouin peoples, Kark and Fischel explain that they were less secluded from settled Palestinian women and their dress code slightly differed. Though they were not veiled, they did wear a face-cover, a *niqab* or *burqa*, and did not often interact with men they were not familiar with, nor did they walk unaccompanied along main roads. The authors add, "As for their involvement in the public sphere, for example, in a few tribes that lived east of the Jordan River the ceremonial leaders of raids were young women; in other cases, young Bedouin women led rows of male dancers in ceremonies. Among other tribes, when a male came to visit and the head of the household was absent, the women entertained him; after the head of the household returned they could still listen to the conversation (Kark and Fischel, 2012, 84)."

Urban women, the focus of their study, from major cities such as Jerusalem, Yaffa, and Nablus, were involved in a number of occupations and participated in public life, as found in public

record. Urban Palestinian women took on various roles that connected both the public and private spheres of life. Some worked as intermediaries between merchants and buyers, earning a share of the profits from their efforts, while others were active as traders and investors in local markets. A smaller segment of urban women found opportunities in the public domain through these activities, although the majority provided crucial services within households. Many worked as servants, cooks, or laundresses, while some also took on roles as moneylenders within their extended families. Others managed different kinds of properties, including ones they personally owned, showcasing their involvement in household economic strategies. Additionally, women played a key role in sustaining their families through textile production and maintenance work. Despite their significant contributions, these efforts were largely confined to the private sphere and were typically unpaid (ibid. 87, see also Jad, 2007, eds. Irving, 2023).

Jewish terrorist groups, with their own settler-colonial agenda, intensified the already volatile conditions created by British imperialism. Women felt this pressure in all aspects of life, and as Hasso (2021) emphasizes in her research, particularly in relation to their sexual and reproductive health systems. These coalescing factors pushed Palestinian women to the foreground of civil unrest and popular protests. Hughes provides a recent and detailed examination of the role of rural women during this period, emphasizing that the countryside was the 'womb' of a three-year rural 'farmers' revolt,' which included a secondary urban-based general strike in 1936. Hughes argues that the revolt was fundamentally a rural insurgency, highlighting a hidden history of largely illiterate women who became involved as both victims, warriors, and supporters. These women experienced house destruction, beatings, shootings, and other forms of violence as a result of British military pacification (Hughes, 2019, 489). He continues and specifies the conditions that pushed women towards the popular movement, saying:

> Myriad village women joined rural *faz'a* alarm calls for intervillage mutual help in a conflict to support rebel forces, as when rebel band leader Fawzi al-Qawuqji escaped closing Army pincers in October 1936. Women protected their villages and resisted security force searches, and were beaten up and, occasionally, shot for their troubles. They paid government fines imposed for resistance with their dowries, four £P.5 notes in one case, and this was from villagers among whom a wage of £P.3–4 per month was

> considered a ‘large sum’; a £P.20 dowry equaled 250 days’ laboring by a village man at 80 mils per diem. Heavy fining and extensive village demolitions by British forces directly impacted the lives of Palestinian women, as did the mass detention of village menfolk. (ibid. 490).

And as such, women often participated in calls and action towards liberation from the exploitative British project and continued resistance until (and after) the Nakba in 1948.

Scholars have critiqued the romanticization of solidarity among Palestinian women during the British colonial period, emphasizing enduring class divisions (Hasso, 2021). Palestinian society was marked by ethnic, religious, and urban-rural differences, as well as class conflicts. Ted Swedenburg argues that urban elites often prioritized their interests over rural peasants, undermining collective solidarity (1995, 34). Islah Jad highlights how the urban middle class aligned with British calls for ‘modernization,’ reinforcing superiority over rural areas (2007, 9). Ellen Fleischmann notes that foreign missionary activities deepened divisions among women, particularly between reformists and traditionalists (2003, 112). These studies reveal the need to critically examine class, gender, and colonialism, rather than superficial cohesion.

As the British relinquished control over both Transjordan, which gained its independence as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the British Mandate of Palestine, Palestine did not experience the same liberation. This was largely due to the brutality of Jewish militias, such as the Irgun and Haganah, many of whose members were later absorbed into today’s Israeli national security apparatuses, who effectively terrorized the British into leaving through coordinated terrorist operations.

The bombing of the King David Hotel on July 22, 1946, (and its mediatization) was a pivotal event in the lead-up to the British withdrawal from Palestine. This attack, executed by the Jewish paramilitary group Irgun, resulted in the deaths of 91 people, including Palestinians, Jews, and British nationals. The operation targeted the British administrative headquarters housed in the hotel, and its graphic aftermath received extensive media coverage in the UK. The scale and mediatization of the brutal violence, combined with increasing pressure from the British public

and the Labour government, played a significant role in persuading the British to begin their withdrawal from Palestine. The scale of the attack shocked the British population and intensified the debate over the continuation of the mandate, revealing the severe repercussions of Britain's colonial presence. This withdrawal was aimed at relieving domestic political pressures and ending the mandate, which was becoming increasingly untenable due to the escalating violence and insurgency in the region (Hoffman, 2020; Pappé, 2006).

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948, known as the Nakba, was a catastrophic event that involved the systematic violence and expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from their homeland. Jewish terrorist groups such as Irgun, the Stern Gang, and others conducted targeted attacks on countless villages, often with the goal of instilling fear among the Palestinian population and expelling them, leaving them with nothing but their lives. One of the most infamous incidents was the Deir Yassin massacre on April 9, 1948, where Irgun and Stern forces attacked the village, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, including women and children (Pappé, 2006) (also see Tantoura Massacre, for example). This event was (and is) part of a broader strategy to depopulate Palestine and expand Jewish, Zionist, control over the territory.

Scholars like Walid Khalidi and Ilan Pappé, amongst numerous others, provide detailed accounts of the violence and ethnic cleansing campaigns that were carried out by these groups. According to Khalidi (1997), over 400 villages were depopulated, and at least 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes, marking one of the largest refugee crises of the 20th century. Pappé (2006) further details how these campaigns were systematic, involving massacres, bombings, and the destruction of entire villages. His book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* offers a comprehensive analysis of the strategies used by Jewish militias to expel Palestinians, including testimonies from survivors and declassified documents that reveal the planning and execution of these violent tactics.

The Nakba left an indelible mark on the Palestinian people, many of whom continue to live as refugees or in diaspora. The long-term consequences of these events are still felt today, shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Arab world, particularly in the Levant, as highlighted by on-going Israeli expansionism today. The necessity of understanding these historical events

through a critical, scholarly lens is crucial for grasping the roots of ongoing conflict and the continuous struggle for Palestinian rights (Khalidi, 1997, 2020; Pappé, 2006; Said, 1992).

The Nakba did not end in 1948. Israeli aggression and occupation policies have perpetuated the process of Palestinian dispossession. As Rabea Eghbariah explains, Israel's legal and military apparatus functions as a colonial regime designed to expand territorial control while denying Palestinians fundamental rights. Eghbariah points to practices like home demolitions, land confiscations, and restrictive residency laws as extensions of Nakba-era policies, aiming to fragment Palestinian identity and resistance. Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem remain under siege, reflecting what Eghbariah (2024) calls "a colonial present," where the mechanisms of occupation adapt but remain rooted in the original violence of 1948.

The 1967 'Six-Day War' or 'Arab-Israeli' war, where Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and Sinai, marked another wave of dispossession. The aftermath solidified military control over Palestinian territories, intensifying settlement building and further entrenching apartheid systems. These policies not only sustain physical oppression but also target cultural and political resilience, framing Palestinians as perpetual threats to justify military dominance.

The 1967 borders, internationally recognized as the basis for a two-state solution, remain a cornerstone of global consensus for addressing the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Despite this, Israel continues to annex land in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, while maintaining control over Gaza and carrying out cross-border operations into Lebanon and Syria. The construction of settlements, separation barriers, and military checkpoints not only reinforces apartheid-like systems but also perpetuates the dispossession and fragmentation of Palestinian society. As Noura Erakat (2019) argues, these practices constitute a form of structural violence that extends the logic of the Nakba, ensuring Palestinian subjugation while normalizing Israeli dominance. The international community's failure to hold Israel accountable has allowed these violations to persist and therefore an urgent need for a renewed commitment to justice and Palestinian self-determination.

This long arc of violence, from British colonialism to Zionist settler expansion, not only fractured the social fabric of Palestinian life (and stunted the development of Jordanian society and state) but also complicated collective feminist imaginaries. Within these ruptures, women continued to resist, often navigating between nationalist demands and the lived consequences of both colonial and patriarchal control.

The transition from Ottoman pluralism to British-imposed nation-state frameworks marked a steady erosion of women's civic and bodily autonomy. Rights to property, business, and family life were constrained; access to Shari'a courts politicized; and everyday freedoms, from reproductive choice to social mobility, narrowed. These transformations laid the groundwork for contemporary regimes of control and exclusion.

Contemporary "Cultural" Questions, Gender, and Legal Regimes in Jordan: Citizenship, Sex and Marriage, and Tribal 'Tradition'

"The fact remains that all these events, on condition they are repeated or integrated into new political structures, have effectively played a role in the genesis of national formations. This has precisely to do with their institutional character, with the fact that they cause the state to intervene in the form which it assumed at a particular moment. In other words, non-national state apparatuses aiming at quite other (for example, dynastic) objectives have progressively produced the elements of the nation-state or, if one prefers, they have been involuntarily 'nationalized' and have begun to nationalize society (Balibar, 1990, 88)."

Prior to delving into the discussion, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing violence and annexation in the Levant, or *Bilad al-Sham*, which makes it challenging, both personally and academically, to address the subjugation of women without recognizing the broader context of oppression faced by all peoples in the region. Beyond the disregard for the lives of innocent civilians in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, the imperial expansionist project continues to illegally annex lands and exploit resources. The gendered crimes, particularly the indiscriminate sexual violence committed against Palestinian men and women by Israeli forces, demand recognition as both a feminist issue and a severe violation of social and bodily rights. In the face of such systemic violence, efforts to advocate for justice can feel futile, as if shouting into a void that threatens to consume you. The intertwining of historical and contemporary injustices has created

global and local constraints that hinder meaningful organizing. Often, both the legislative injustices and the resistance to them are influenced or dictated by foreign powers. Despite these overwhelming realities, this work seeks to offer insights into the gendered status quo in Jordan, exploring how it has evolved into the contemporary character of the state and its social manifestations.

To understand the persistence of gendered dynamics in Jordan today, it is necessary to examine the policies, laws, and cultural conditions that enable them to thrive. A central element in this analysis is Jordan's tribalism, specifically, the exploitation of its tribal identity. Tribalism, deeply rooted in Arab tradition, shapes both personal and public decision-making, with these hierarchical structures being particularly entrenched within tribal communities.

Johnstone (2015) offers a detailed exploration of Bedouin tribal organization, noting that survival in the resource-scarce desert required strong collective bonds within independent family units. Citing Amira Sonbol, Johnstone highlights how close living conditions and interdependence fostered unity. This unity was reinforced by a shared sense of tribal honor, pride in the tribal name, and a hierarchical system rooted in loyalty and respect. Tribal solidarity was not optional; it was essential for the survival of all members. The largest grouping, the *ashira*, followed by the *hamulas*, can both be roughly translated as 'tribe' in English. These patrilineal structures, led by male shaykhs, were further divided into smaller clans (*khamsa*), headed by elders (*kabir*) (Johnstone, 2015, 3).

The colonial administration in Jordan capitalized on these patrilineal frameworks to solidify their governance strategy. By institutionalizing male-dominated tribal leadership, colonial powers reinforced the exclusion of women from political and public life, shaping governance and national identity around a masculine ideal. This manipulation of tribal hierarchies not only facilitated control over the population but also entrenched gendered inequalities that continue to affect Jordanian society today. Therefore, understanding these colonial roots is crucial when analyzing contemporary gender relations in Jordan.

In her study of the Jordanian woman and the state, Jabiri (2016) reflects on the implications of these dynamics:

> The formation of alliances among Bedouins, as Sharabi posits, was based on needs rather than ideology. As the British 'educators' were fulfilling the 'modernizing' needs of the tribes in Jordan, they developed the neo-patriarchy discourse, which not only affected women but also empowered the structure of the tribe at the expense of individuals. In such a structure, individuals are tied to their tribes in a way that their relationships with the state and political parties are managed and controlled by the tribe. It is in this sense that the tribe has been the most powerful unit in Jordan and is, therefore, still relevant to the question of power politics in the country. While relating neo-patriarchy to Western imperialism, Sharabi does not argue that patriarchy did not previously exist as part of the tribal structure; rather, he argues that colonialism gave patriarchy an authoritarian power and a modern character. The state that evolved from such a process, therefore, adopted a social and legal organization that represented a conciliation of Bedouin, modern, and neo-patriarchal identity (ibid., 7).

Jabiri's explanation emphasizes that the neo-patriarchal system, nurtured by colonialism, continues to exert influence in modern Jordan, shaping political and social structures in ways that limit individual agency, particularly for women. This enduring legacy of colonial manipulation can be further understood by examining the country's tribal system, which remains central to social, legal, and political decision-making. As Rowland (2009) explains, the tribal system operates as a hereditary framework of political power, reinforcing male dominance while ensuring internal cohesion within the tribe. The leadership, always male, follows a hierarchical structure with varying levels of sheikhdom, emphasizing the tribe's role in protecting its members from external threats. This not only strengthens internal unity but also solidifies the tribe's external authority (11).

While religion is often cited as the primary driver of gender inequity in Jordan, a closer look reveals how colonial powers capitalized on and modernized tribal structures to institutionalize systems of oppression. By reinforcing patriarchal frameworks, colonial authorities entrenched women's marginalization, and this intersection of tribal, colonial, and social forces continues to shape the restrictive environment for women today. As Johnstone (2015) explains, "As legal scholar-practitioners Chopra and Isser have pointed out, gender discrimination is not generally an

intrinsic part of any one particular justice system. Rather justice systems reflect and perpetuate aspects of the society in which they are embedded, such as asymmetric power relations between men and women (1)."

Jabiri (2016) further emphasizes the distinct nature of Jordan's colonial experience, noting:

> Jordan has been seen by different historians not as a postcolonial country, but as 'an external neo-colonial project.' This distinguishes Jordan's experience of colonialism from that of other countries in the region, as it is often regarded as 'Britain's most successful colonial project in the Middle East.' Unlike its neighbors, Jordan was governed peacefully under Britain's philosophy of indirect imperial rule (5).

This history of indirect rule shaped Jordan's social order, where tribalism was not merely preserved but strategically integrated into the state's governance to serve colonial interests. The colonial legacy of masculinizing the state reinforced male leadership as the central pillar of both social and political life.

In *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*, Joseph Massad (2001) explores how British colonial authorities manipulated tribal structures to create a state identity based on patriarchal authority. By embedding these patrilineal systems into the state's legal and military frameworks, the British ensured that patriarchal norms would persist long after the colonial period. This process, Massad argues, was central to the colonial strategy of control, as it reinforced a masculinized national identity and entrenched male dominance within the fabric of the Jordanian state.

Thus, the intersection of tribalism, colonialism, and patriarchy has had a profound and lasting impact on gender relations in Jordan. The tribal system, bolstered by colonial rule, remains a central force in shaping both the public and private spheres, ensuring the continued marginalization of women. Understanding this historical context is crucial for analyzing contemporary gender dynamics and the persistent barriers that women face in Jordan today.

Within this framework, women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere, their agency systematically excluded from the public and political domains. This marginalization not only limited women's participation in shaping the national project but also reinforced societal

perceptions of gender roles, which continue to shape contemporary realities for women in Jordan. For instance, while women in Jordan today enjoy relatively high literacy rates and increasing access to education, their representation in political and economic spheres remains disproportionately low.

In saying this, Jordan's governance is largely shaped by the interplay between Sharia law, religion, and state power. This connection is central to understanding women's social standing and their perceptions of themselves in society. Factors such as tribal dynamics, religion, and the law work together, influencing how gender roles are constructed and maintained.

While the majority of women in Jordan adhere to conservative values rooted in both culture and religion, gender-discriminatory practices may not always be perceived as problematic. Given the strong connection between religion and state, it is crucial to understand how these elements impact individuals' views on gender equality. Sonbol (2003) highlights the tension surrounding Sharia law, where calls for reform are often driven by feminist and Westernized perspectives that criticize its role in maintaining patriarchal structures. On the other hand, conservative factions demand strict adherence to traditional interpretations of Islam, which include the subjugation of women, limiting their public presence and independence. In many Muslim countries, including Jordan, the legal system reflects a compromise between these two extremes, resulting in laws that both restrict and allow women's rights in various spheres.

Sonbol further notes that, although modern legal frameworks have allowed women to enter the workforce, these rights are often conditional, such as requiring approval from a husband. This shift has affected the traditional marriage contract, where a husband's financial responsibility has been reduced. Furthermore, women face significant challenges when seeking divorce, with many needing their husband's consent or specific justifications, like financial neglect, to initiate the process (2003, 31).

Johnstone (2015) explains that Jordan's justice system is complex, consisting of tribal dispute resolution, Sharia courts, and state courts. Despite legal advancements for gender equity, women continue to face challenges in accessing justice, including financial constraints, limited legal aid, and a lack of trust in state institutions. The relationship between tribal dispute resolution and women's access to justice remains underexplored, though tribal affiliations continue to influence

the country's identity and legal practices. Johnstone notes that, although Sharia and state laws have largely replaced tribal codes, the core principles of tribal justice still shape Jordanian society (2).

Warrick (2005) adds that legal systems reflect shared notions of justice and morality, which are crucial to the legitimacy of states. In tribal societies, these concepts often exclude women, who are viewed as property and integral to their family's honor. This dynamic is particularly visible in the practice of honor killings, which continue to be a tragic reality in Jordan. A recent report by Human Rights Watch estimates that 15 to 20 honor killings occur annually in Jordan (Coogle for HRW, 2016). Warrick (2005) explains that:

> Honor killings are murders carried out by family members against girls and women believed to have committed sexual behavior that besmirches the honor of the family. The concept of honor (sharaf) has to do with social standing on the basis of moral behavior; men's honor is intimately connected to the sexual chastity of their female relatives (322).

These killings often result from perceived breaches of family honor, with men feeling compelled to restore it through violent means. Younger male relatives often commit these crimes because minors receive lighter sentences (ibid., 324). The true extent of honor killings is difficult to determine, as many cases are not reported, and victims are sometimes buried in secret or falsely classified as suicides (Nabbout, 2017).

To understand what exactly constitutes as tribal honor in regards to women, activist Hala Abu Ajam, working for a local NGO *Ayn Naqif* (Where do we stand?), cites, "We conducted several surveys for over two years and most people we interviewed stated that they understand 'honor' as a concept that only relates to women and that is mostly linked to their chastity and reputation (Nabbout, 2017)." She continues, "Male members of many families in the country believe that if their reputation is tarnished by a female, the only way to clear their name and get rid of the so-called shame she has brought on to the family is to simply end her life." One escaped victim from such a crime says, "Things like this are never acceptable in our families; we belong to tribes and to them honor is everything; not even a human being's life is more valuable than honor (ibid.)."

What constitutes a breach of honor depends on each individual tribe; some of the larger and more traditional tribes will take action against their women for even a rumor. Indeed, these crimes are often committed without an actual 'breach in honor' ever happening. While the intention may be to 'preserve' a woman's honor, the logic is clearly faulted, and human life is often the cost. However, as discussed, Bedouin culture is not always shaped by these norms. For example, in some tribal settings, women can host male delegations as part of customary hospitality practices, demonstrating that gender roles and honor are not universally rigid (Abu-Lughod, 2011, Kark and Fischel, 2012). In line with global trajectories, it is but a matter of time before neighboring countries follow suit and eradicate similar laws.

A comparable practice was forgiven in US law until the 1970's. Warrick explains, "[..] statutes in Texas, New Mexico, and Utah recognized a husband's discovery of his wife's adultery as grounds for justifiable homicide (2005, 323 citing Weinstein, 1986; Miccio, 2000)." However, the presence of these exemptions in U.S. law differs from the Jordanian case, although both are misogynistic in their own right. In the United States and other Western contexts, the 'passion-rage' argument is designed to legally excuse men who kill a spouse's adultery partner in a state of rage, while women are never afforded the same leniency. In fact, women, often acting in self-defense against domestic violence, frequently receive extended sentences. Similar practices exist in other countries in different forms, reflecting a nearly universal (but now declining) patriarchal claim of a man over the women in his family.

In Jordanian Bedouin culture, as found in society, one key sociological factor shaping both men's and women's roles is the concept of *ird*. *Ird* is closely tied to reputation and strength; a man's ability to protect his women from violation is seen as a sign of his strength. If a man fails to control the sexual behavior of the women under his care, he risks being considered effeminate by his peers. Thus, *ird* does not refer to women's honor directly but rather to the honor of the men with whom they are related (Johnstone, 2015).

This concept, similar to *sharaf*, can lead to violent acts against women. According to tribal logic, the loss of *ird* is irredeemable by women themselves and can only be restored through male action, typically by a close male relative. In cases of perceived dishonor, marriage between the

individuals involved may be seen as a way to ‘cleanse’ the situation, regardless of whether the sexual act was consensual. What sometimes happens, however, the dishonor can only be considered erased if the woman is killed by a male relative, a practice known as ‘honor killing’ or intra-family femicide (ibid.).

The state's response to this issue is deeply flawed. In some cases, to protect women from the threat of honor killings, police detain them for their safety. However, reports indicate that these women are often housed with criminals, including drug addicts, thieves, and sometimes murderers. This environment can lead to further trauma, with victims sometimes being incarcerated indefinitely due to a lack of alternative services, such as shelters for women (Thompson, 2017). A notable case is that of ‘Rehab’, who was detained for seven months in Amman’s Jwaideh prison for protection from her abusive husband. She described her experience as ‘going through hell,’ witnessing severe violence in the prison (Thompson, 2017). The legality of this practice is questionable, as authorities often choose to detain the victim rather than the potential perpetrator. Warrick (2005) notes that detaining a male relative is often ineffective in preventing honor crimes, as another male relative may carry out the act. In some cases, women are kept in custody for years, as honor killings sometimes occur long after the initial incident.

The lack of effective legal protection for women is evident in a 2018 UN study on gender dynamics and the law in Jordan. The national assessment focuses on Criminal, Personal Status, and Labor laws, particularly within Personal Status laws, where significant improvements are needed. One critical issue is the guardianship system, which requires an unmarried woman to obtain formal approval from a male relative to marry, travel, or, in some cases, enter higher education (UNDP, 2018). This system severely limits women’s mobility and autonomy, as they must obtain permission from a male guardian for basic rights such as travel or marriage.

This guardianship system not only affects women’s public lives but also their private lives, particularly in family dynamics. In cases of marriage or divorce, the father holds sole guardianship over the children. If parents divorce, the mother retains custody only until the child turns 15, at which point custody automatically shifts to the father. Within a marriage, men and women do not have equal rights; men can marry multiple wives, but women cannot, and a woman is legally obligated to obey her husband. In contrast, Sharia law mandates that a man is

financially responsible for supporting his wife (Nasir, 2009). This financial responsibility is often used as justification for discriminatory practices in Jordan's personal status laws. While a man can divorce his wife unilaterally through *talaq* (a form of repudiation), a woman can only obtain a divorce under much more difficult conditions. *Talaq* allows a man to dissolve a marriage by simply declaring it, but both parties have a legal right to reverse the decision within three months if they reconcile (Dogarawa, 2009). In contrast, women face a much harder process to obtain a divorce (Nasir, 2009).

Citing the rights of both husband and wife according to Sharia law mapped out by Dogarawa, who references teachings from the primary scholars of Islamic Jurisprudence:

> The rights of the wife over the husband are as follows: (i) The dowry (mahr) (ii) Support/maintenance (iii) Kind and proper treatment (iv) Marital relations (v) Not to be beaten (vi) Privacy (vii) Justice between multiple wives (viii) To be taught her religion (ix) Defense of her honor. The rights of the husband over the wife on the other hand, are: (i) Have a home and soft relaxing atmosphere in which both can live together smoothly, happily and enjoyably (ii) Being head of the household48 (iii) To be obeyed in all that is not disobedience (iv) To be answered for marital relations (v) Not to allow anyone in the house of whom he disapproves (vi) Not to leave the house without his permission (vii) That she cook for him, keep his house and properly manage the household (viii) That she remained faithful, loyal and devoted (ix) To be thanked for his efforts and not to be confronted with too many demand (x) That she not observe a voluntary fast without his permission if he I resident, not on a journey (sic. 2009,13-14).

Religion and the law also affect the amount of inheritance a woman is legally able to receive. In sum, a woman is entitled to only half of that of her male siblings. The justification for this, as mentioned above, is that if the woman is married, her husband is financially responsible for her (Nasir, 2009). If not, they will use the inverse of this argument and say that her male siblings must legally provide for their wives and for them should they not have an alternative guardian. While in theory these systems act like a structure, which if nothing else, has some balance, in practice, it is not always the same.

Another crucial factor on women's social and legal standing in Jordan are the nationality laws, specifically a mother's inability to pass her nationality to her children. This practice is not unique to Jordan; it persists across the region in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, for example (Sayegh, 2018). Such legislation institutionalizes gendered citizenship and reflects broader anxieties about lineage, identity, and state control.

Historically, Jordan's nationality laws have excluded women from full participation in the national project. The 1928 Nationality Law, modeled on British legal frameworks, bluntly stated: "The wife of a foreigner is a foreigner," effectively stripping Jordanian women of their nationality upon marrying non-Jordanians. Amendments in 1961 and 1963 offered limited revisions, but women could not retain their nationality independently until 1987. The 1954 Nationality Law, still in effect, upholds this exclusion. Article 6 grants nationality to children of Jordanian fathers, regardless of birthplace, while denying it to children of Jordanian mothers married to non-Jordanians, solidifying patrilineality and marginalizing the maternal line.

Despite long-standing activism, the inequality endures. In 2014, the government introduced limited civil entitlements, such as access to education and healthcare, for children of Jordanian women married to foreigners (referred to as *abna'a al ordoniyat*). Yet full citizenship remains out of reach. The initiative was framed as a humanitarian gesture to "end the suffering" of these children, rather than an acknowledgement of legal discrimination. As Jabiri (2016, 7–8) argues, the discourse revealed how women's citizenship is still rooted in their "Otherness," contingent on their relationship to male nationals. With over 60,000 women and 356,000 children affected (for example, Al Haj Ahmad, 2019 or Sayegh, 2018), these policies prioritize demographic concerns over human rights, reinforcing women's marginalization under the pretext of safeguarding national identity.

This framing, where women's rights are positioned as threats to demographic stability, has obstructed reforms across the board. Advocacy for equal nationality rights is met with alarmist projections: that one legal concession might spiral into a cascade of demands. As Jabiri further notes, this resistance shows an unwillingness to dismantle the patrilineal logic that holds together citizenship and kinship in the state's legal imaginary. In such a system, women are tasked with

upholding societal norms while being systematically denied the rights those norms claim to protect.

Discriminatory structures extend well beyond nationality law. While legislation nominally protects women from trafficking, domestic violence, and extramarital rape, it continues to leave significant gaps. Marital rape remains unaddressed, and abortion is criminalized except to save a mother's life. Article 321 of the Penal Code prescribes imprisonment for women who self-induce abortion, with even harsher penalties for those assisting them, including medical professionals (Husseini, 2009, 25). These restrictions funnel women toward unsafe, secret procedures, heightening rather than mitigating risk.

Until recently, Article 308 allowed rapists to escape punishment by marrying their victims, provided the victim was over 15. While the article was repealed in 2017, its existence, defended for decades, reveals the deep effects of tribal values and male authority over female autonomy (Sayegh, 2018). The logic behind the article rested not in justice but in reputation management: protecting the family's honor rather than addressing the crime. As Warrick notes, "The marriage loophole… privileges broader social interests, especially those of the victim's relatives, over the interests of the victim herself (2005, 321)."

Such legal norms are often attributed to 'third-world backwardness,' yet they are, in many cases, colonial inheritances. Article 308's origins are traceable to the Ottoman legal system, which had adopted elements of the French penal code. French colonial policies, in turn, reinforced patriarchal systems by delegating domestic control to local male elites in exchange for political loyalty. Colonial authorities formed a 'gentlemen's agreement' with local patriarchs, embedding misogyny within the legal structure itself. A similar law existed in France until 1980, highlighting the colonial double bind: European powers implanted patriarchal laws in their colonies, then shame and condemn those same societies for the consequences (Surkis, 2019, Stoler, 2002).

This layered legacy still shapes women's lives in Jordan today. Legal reforms are often framed not as rights owed, but as compromises reluctantly granted prompted by culture and politics. The resulting legal patchwork offers partial protections, always offset by structural loopholes and social backlash.

In the labor market, the gendered stratification persists. Women remain concentrated in traditionally low-paid sectors, reinforcing wage inequality. According to the Department of Statistics, in 2019 the average female wage in both public and private sectors was JD446, compared to JD499 for men, a gap of JD53 ("Jordanian Women's Report on the occasion of the International Women's Day," 2019). While the law nominally guarantees equality in hiring, practice tells another story. Cultural expectations and structural biases skew the allocation of state benefits. As Husseini (2009) notes, a married man with children receives a monthly allowance, while a woman only qualifies if she is widowed or her husband is disabled. This disparity is rooted in the assumption, legal, cultural, and religious, that women are dependents by default.

Ultimately, what emerges is a pattern: the legal system offers women conditional recognition, contingent upon their compliance with patriarchal norms. Whether in citizenship, bodily autonomy, or economic participation, women in Jordan navigate a compounding of exclusions that are often framed as protections. Until the foundational assumptions of male entitlement and lineage are reexamined, reforms will continue to be cosmetic, partial, and politically convenient.

Slow Legal Reform in Jordan and Palestine: Neocolonialism, Settler-colonialism, and Occupation

The context of Palestine is brutally dictated by the ongoing struggle for self-determination and survival under the settler-colonial project. While there are some cultural and legislative parallels between Palestine and neighboring Jordan, Palestinians contend with a whole set of different, and unique, challenges due to more than seven decades of ethnic cleansing, occupation, forced displacement, systemic oppression, and now, genocide. Although both Palestine and Jordan share historical ties, the impact of Israel's settler-colonial policies on Palestinian land, rights, and identity differentiates the conditions in each region. Palestine is both culturally and (in some areas) legislatively similar to that of Jordan. The cultures share common elements, particularly in terms of trends in education, employment, familial culture, and religion. Both territories have diverse social segments and groups such as Bedouin tribes. Thus, the basic building blocks of the social fabric in these regions are largely similar.

However, since the Nakba in 1948, Palestinians have faced continual upheavals and systemic injustice. The establishment of a Jewish 'ethno-national democracy' in what was historically Palestinian land has been widely recognized as a settler-colonial endeavor, heavily influenced by white Ashkenazi settlers. This ongoing struggle, which remains as painful today as it was in 1948, has forcefully positioned Palestinian women as necessary figures in resisting colonial dominance. Palestinians were expelled from their homes during the Nakba, and forced to live in exile, primarily in neighboring countries. While Palestinians share significant cultural commonalities with Jordan, and the wider Levant region including family structures and religious practices, the occupation has disrupted any sense of normalcy Palestinian society. This forced fragmentation of the Palestinian identity continues to have repercussions today. Nevertheless, Palestinian women have been at the forefront of resisting settler-colonialism, maintaining a collective identity despite fragmentation. Despite the challenges of this fragmentation, Palestinians have managed to absorb and incorporate these experiences into their collective identity, as seen in recent events in Gaza (2023 to date), where Palestinian solidarity remains strong.

The relationship between gender and the state in Palestine is complex, particularly due to divisions within Palestinian society. The West Bank, Gaza, and 1948 Palestine each operate under different legal and political frameworks, leading to varying degrees of rights and protections for Palestinian women. This fragmentation affects gender equality, as the legal systems governing each region influence women's access to resources, education, and healthcare.

In the West Bank, the legal system is influenced by Jordanian legal codes, with some elements of Palestinian Authority law. However, the ongoing Israeli military occupation denies actual Palestinian sovereignty, making it difficult to implement reforms or protect the rights of Palestinian women. The gendered impact of occupation is profound, with Palestinian women facing violence, discrimination, and systemic marginalization in all areas of life. As Bint Aysha from Ramallah explains, "There is no current Palestinian state or free government; essentially, they are an extension of the occupation that takes over a managerial role (referring to PA). Women in the West Bank versus the women in 1948 Palestine are both under different intersectional violence from one another, but this is just another method of separation and,

ultimately, control (Personal Communication, 2022)." She adds, "It is paradoxical to be a Palestinian woman; when we protest and fight the occupation, we have to stand side-by-side with those that are maintaining their privilege and thus participating in our oppression. But at the end of the day, we are fighting a bigger oppressor. I just believe we need to make our demands clear; the emancipation of women is a political tool that we need to use (Personal Communication, 2022)."

In 1948 Palestine, the legal system operates within the framework of Israeli law. While Palestinian citizens of Israel have certain rights, these are often undermined by racial and religious discrimination and exclusion. Palestinian women in 1948 Palestine face the dual burden of gender and national oppression, with their rights subordinated to those of Jewish citizens. Women in 1948 Palestine, those with Israeli citizenship, face challenges distinct from those in the West Bank or Gaza. Palestinian women with Israeli citizenship may have certain legislative entitlements, but they face a lifetime of identity assaults as Palestinians. These divisions have led to fragmentation, but there remains an unwavering sense of solidarity between Palestinians, especially Palestinian women, who continue to unite in resistance against the overarching oppressor.

The Egyptian Penal Code (1883) has significantly influenced the legal system in Gaza, particularly in shaping criminal laws and procedures. Meanwhile, Ottoman legal traditions, British colonial relics, and Islamic jurisprudence continue to govern family law, inheritance, and personal status. However, the Palestinian Criminal Code and the British Mandate Criminal Code further complicate Gaza's legal structure, leading to diverse legal interpretations and practices (Palestine (Gaza) Penal Code, 1947). The legal complexity in Gaza has profound implications for gender equality as they face navigating a fragmented legal system, with inconsistent application of laws related to personal status, inheritance, and family matters (Rought-Brooks, 2015). The lack of a unified legal framework has sparked calls for comprehensive legal reforms to address these inconsistencies and improve the legal standing of women (ibid.). The violence Palestinians are subject to particularly in Gaza, remains the central issue. The "live-streamed genocide" in Gaza centers the brutality of the occupation in both plain view and real time. However, this violence is not new, it is protracted both temporally and spatially; Palestinians

have faced systematic oppression for over 75 years with limited international intervention. The settler-colonial violence perpetuated by Israel remains the most pressing challenge for Palestinian women, whose bodies are forced into being sites of both violence and resistance.

In Palestinian refugee camps yet another set of challenges shaped by their displaced status, compounded by both the legal framework in Gaza and the West Bank, and further complicated for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and the broader socio-political environment. Refugee camps are spaces where legal protections are often minimal, and women experience compounded vulnerability due to the ongoing occupation, limited resources, and the weakened governance structures in place. In Gaza, despite the legal influence of the Egyptian Penal Code and Palestinian laws, the situation for refugee women is further exacerbated by the lack of access to justice, economic hardship, and patriarchal norms (Hanafi & Long, 2010). In refugee camps, women often lack access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and legal support worsened by the ongoing siege and military operations in Gaza. In refugee camps, Palestinian women often lack access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and legal support, conditions that have been further degraded by the ongoing siege and repeated military assaults on Gaza. The fragmented legal system, combined with social restrictions and deteriorating infrastructure, creates an environment in which refugee women face multiple, compounding layers of oppression (Aghabekian, 2017, or Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, & Hussein, 2010). Displacement also intensifies the risks of gender-based violence, with limited access to legal recourse or protection services (Veronese et al., 2025, or UNFPA 2024). Despite these hardships, women in refugee camps have played crucial roles in sustaining resistance movements, linking their personal struggles to the broader Palestinian national cause. Their activism, often carried out under immense personal and political strain, shows both the centrality of refugee camps to the Palestinian right of return and the profound costs borne by women at the frontlines of occupation and displacement.

In examining the social and gender metrics typically used to measure gender inequality, these tools become almost irrelevant in the context of Palestine. Conventional measures of gender equality hold little weight when considering the broader reality of occupation, settler-colonialism, and the existential threats Palestinians face.

Education, for example, can serve as an illustration of this complexity. Despite educational progress, Palestinian women, especially in Gaza and the West Bank, face barriers rooted in the settler-colonial violence and social restrictions imposed by occupation. Similarly, access to sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) is highly limited in both contexts, further exacerbating the structural inequity.

The Palestinian education system is highly fragmented, reflecting the broader political and geographical divisions imposed by the Israeli occupation, the governance systems in Gaza and the West Bank, and the role of UNRWA in refugee camps. These systems share a common goal of preserving Palestinian identity under adverse conditions but vary significantly in structure, curriculum, and administration. In the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority (PA), the curriculum was developed to emphasize Palestinian history, culture, and identity. Schools in the West Bank face challenges from Israeli military occupation, including restrictions on movement and attacks on schools. The curriculum integrates national narratives but is constrained by limited funding and resources (UNRWA, n.d, 2025). Private schools exist, offering alternative curricula, often with a focus on international standards.

Within Gaza's education system the curriculum largely mirrors that of the PA. The system struggles with severe resource shortages due to the ongoing Israeli blockade. Despite these challenges, Gaza’s education system emphasizes resistance and national identity in its curriculum, reflecting the sociopolitical context. Religious studies are more prominent in Gaza than in the West Bank, influenced by the governance structure (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003). Also, private schools, often run by religious organizations, provide additional educational options. UNRWA oversees education for Palestinian refugees in both Gaza and the West Bank, in addition to other ‘areas of operation’ such as Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, creating one of the largest public education systems in the region (Irfan, 2019, 2021). Its curriculum aligns with PA standards but is adapted to meet international requirements, focusing on human rights, tolerance, and ‘neutrality’ to avoid political contention. UNRWA schools serve as critical spaces for refugees, yet they face criticism for sometimes downplaying the Palestinian struggle in favor of international donor expectations; I can attest to witnessing this (in Beirut at UNRWA in 2014).

Palestinian-Arab schools in Israel are run by the Israeli Ministry of Education and follow a curriculum that prioritizes Israeli history and identity, often marginalizing Palestinian narratives. Despite this, some schools incorporate private initiatives to teach Palestinian history and culture informally. Resources in these schools are significantly lower compared to Jewish-Israeli schools, reflecting systemic discrimination (Mahamid, 2017).

Despite the shared challenges of occupation, limited resources, and political instability, the education systems collectively reflect Palestinian resilience and the prioritization of education as a form of resistance and identity preservation. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have a literacy rate of over 98 percent, amongst the highest in the world (World Bank, 2025).

Introducing and discussing her book, *Refuge and Resistance* (2023) Anne Irfan explains:

> Particularly but not exclusively in the Middle East, Palestinians have long had a reputation as high-performing graduates, often proficient in at least two languages, and frequently going on to pursue successful careers in engineering, business, or medicine. At the same time, the Palestinians are the world's largest refugee population, with the longest-running case of protracted displacement. How did it happen, then, that a large-scale refugee population, many of whom survived for decades in refugee camps, became so highly educated? (Irfan, 2023).

However, despite these individual efforts at betterment, which eventually became a new face to the Palestinian cross-national identity, the structural barriers are overwhelming.

In addition to this 'silent' violence against both men and women, physical and psychological violence in many forms are present. Abu-Rabia Queder elaborates on the nature of violence against Palestinian men and women, attributing it to the settler-colonial Zionist project. She argues:

> The settler's primary goal is to establish sovereignty and property rights over lands and territory through the logic of 'eliminating' the natives, an objective achieved through biopolitics aimed at administration and regulation of the population – as individuals and collectives – including practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, disciplining, selection, and elimination (2017).

The settler-colonial project employs both direct and indirect violence, including forced displacement, militarized genocide, cultural erasure, and segregation, to subjugate and control the indigenous Palestinian population. These tactics, often justified under the guise of modernization or development, aim to dismantle Palestinian identity and autonomy. Containment measures, such as the division of public spaces, further marginalize communities, while body politics extend control over physical spaces to individual and collective bodies, reinforcing systems of domination (Glenn, 2015; Abu-Rabia Queder, 2017).

This violence not only enforces subjugation but also reshapes gender roles, as Palestinian women navigate both repression and resistance. Their active participation in the struggle challenges and redefines traditional gender dynamics, creating spaces of resilience and agency. However, conventional metrics for measuring gender equality fail to capture the complexities of Palestinian women's lived experiences under occupation, as these frameworks cannot account for the unique intersections of colonial violence and gendered oppression.

In her analysis of the ways in which Zionist colonialism and violence manifest in Palestine, particularly through the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), Rabab Abdulhadi (2019) writes:

> The Zionist erasure and construction of Indigenous Palestinians as inferior, backward, and exceptionally misogynist has been part and parcel with Zionist ideology that has existed since long before the establishment of Israel in 1948. These practices of feminist-washing are not exceptional to Zionism or Israel but have been a necessary ingredient in many settler-colonial projects, including as enacted by the United States. Simultaneously, Israel has prioritized its public image as a 'civilized,' modern,

> feminist-friendly, and LGBTQI+ safe haven, accommodating the growth of the queer justice movement as a matter of national security (570).

As previously discussed, the Zionist project employs 'feminist-washing,' or purple-washing, as a strategic tool to obscure the violence and repression faced by Palestinian women. This tactic was particularly evident during the recent assault on Gaza, where gender was weaponized through fabricated claims of rape by resistance fighters. These narratives aimed to divert attention from the verified sexual violence perpetrated by Israeli forces against Gazan men and women. Despite being debunked by authoritative figures, this propaganda served as a shield, deflecting from the horrific testimonies and physical evidence of sexual violence committed against Palestinians during the genocide—acts that have been met with denial and dismissal (Sayegh, 2024).

As Abdulhadi (2019) argues, this 'feminist-washing' reinforces Israeli settler colonialism by controlling Palestinian men while rendering Palestinian women invisible. However, if Palestinian women's voices were acknowledged, their narratives of resistance to torture and incarceration would disrupt the colonial equation of power and domination (Abdulhadi, 2019, 556).

Abu-Rabia Queder (2017) further highlights how women's bodies are instrumentalized as tools of colonial control, both directly and indirectly. Patriarchal structures are manipulated to legitimize sexual violence, while cases of violence against native women are systematically ignored. Colonial rhetoric often frames native women as "polluted" and "rapable," portraying them as internal threats to security and social order (Stoler, 2002; Smith, 2015, Puar, 2017, Abdulhadi, 2019). This narrative of saving native women from native men is then used to justify colonial intervention and control over land and space (Abu-Lughod, 2013, Abu-Rabia Queder, 2017, 59).

Abdulhadi (2019) underscores the systemic nature of sexual violence under the Israeli occupation, citing historical and contemporary examples. From the rape of Palestinian women and girls by Zionist militias during the Nakba to the public testimonies of freed prisoner Rasmea Odeh, who detailed her rape by Israeli interrogators, these acts reveal the pervasive use of sexual violence as a tool of domination (565).

The violence against Palestinian women, including sexual violence, continues to be a direct manifestation of the settler-colonial project, and women's bodies remain central to both the violence and the resistance. This continues prominently and apparently today, with testimonies recorded from local and international organizations highlighting the extent of this.

While education, for example, serves as a cornerstone of resilience, structural barriers and colonial policies perpetuate violence and marginalization. Tactics like feminist-washing and manipulating patriarchal norms are used to justify repression, particularly against women, whose bodies are targeted as tools of control. Despite this, Palestinian women actively challenge these dynamics, asserting their agency and resilience in the face of occupation and oppression.

Continuing from this reality, the discussion will move to focus on the slow pace of legal reform in Jordan and Palestine highlighting the need for other, supportive, structural change. Despite recent changes, such as the repeal of laws that allowed rapists to marry their victims, these reforms often fail to fully address the deeper systemic issues of gender inequality. The persistence of outdated laws, societal norms, and judicial practices shows that while progress has been made, it remains fragmented and insufficient. This section will examine different legislative changes over the past few years to illustrate how these reforms are necessary first steps towards structural change. It will also emphasize that these changes need to be supported by grassroots ideas and community-led initiatives to create a more comprehensive approach to gender equality.

Legal frameworks in Jordan and Palestine reveal (neo)patriarchal norms that limit women's rights across personal, economic, and legal domains. Sara Kaddoura (expert research participant) observes, “In many countries, legal changes have made some considerable difference, but I think, personally, that the change made more impact when it came from judiciary sites, in disregarding laws and preventing persecutions (whether they are pressured by human rights orgs or not) (Personal Communication, 2022).” Without the alignment of legislative reform with judicial enforcement and societal shifts, progress risks being superficial and unsustainable rather than transformative, leaving structural inequalities intact.

Jordan's legal framework has undergone gradual reforms aimed at addressing gender-based violence and encouraging gender equity. These reforms have been shaped by a combination of internal advocacy, international pressure, and shifting societal attitudes, particularly in the last decade. While the repeal of the infamous **Article 308** (the 'marry-your-rapist' law) of the Jordan Penal Code was critical, challenges remain within the labor code, penal provisions, and nationality laws (Sayegh, 2018). Here we will look at some of the recent changes in different contexts; This includes, violence against women, gendered labor laws, nationality laws, amongst others.

First, the repeal of **Article 308** of the Jordanian Penal Code in 2017. This was hailed, and was a landmark achievement. This law had previously allowed rapists to escape prosecution if they married their victims, perpetuating female suffering and male impunity within society and legislation. Advocacy by women's rights groups, international pressure, and increased public awareness were pivotal in achieving this change. According to UN Women, "The repeal of Article 308 reflects a growing acknowledgment of the harm such provisions cause and the importance of prioritizing survivors' rights over societal 'honor' norms (2021)."

However, as discussed, these changes must be coupled with other social support networks. Bint Nadia explains, "While understanding the rape laws have been repealed in some places, and that is an important step, what really does this do for women who are victims of rape today? There still is a long way to go in terms of women's protection (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Article 340 of Jordan's Penal Code allowed reduced sentences for men who kill or harm their wives or female relatives under allegations of adultery or engaging in acts deemed "unlawful." While this was slightly amended in 2017 to remove leniency, it has limited practical effects (Fakhoury, 2023). Even when these specific criteria are not met, perpetrators can benefit from leniency under **Article 98,** which reduces penalties for crimes committed in a "fit of fury" triggered by the victim's actions. **Article 97** exacerbates this, permitting sentences for premeditated murder to be reduced to as little as one year when this defense is applied. Additionally, **Article 99** allows courts to halve sentences when families of victims request leniency, a common occurrence in honor-related killings due to familial complicity.

Marital rape is explicitly exempted from prosecution under Jordanian law, as **Article 292** states that rape (a minimum sentence of 5 years hard labour) is defined as forced intercourse with a female "other than his wife," effectively permitting sexual violence within marriage.

Article 293 states, "Rape of a Vulnerable Female: Any person who has forced sexual intercourse with a female, **other than his wife**, who cannot defend herself due to a physical disability, a cognitive impairment, or as a result of any form of deception, shall be sentenced to temporary hard labour." **Article 151** severely restricts abortion access, permitting it only when the pregnancy endangers the woman's life or health, with no exceptions for rape or incest survivors. **Article 321** further criminalizes abortion by imposing a six-month to three-year prison sentence on women who induce their own abortions. Meanwhile, **Article 322** mandates one to three years of imprisonment for those performing abortions with a woman's consent, and **Article 324** provides mitigating circumstances for abortions performed to preserve "honor."

However, **Article 332** shows systemic injustice:

> A mother who causes, through an intentional act or omission, the death of her newborn child to avoid dishonor in the case of incest shall be sentenced to detention for a period of no less than five (5) years.

This provision highlights the brutal penalization of victims of incest, reflecting the prioritization of societal honor over justice for women.

Jordan's gradual legal reforms echo global trends but highlight significant gaps in ensuring comprehensive gender equity. The leniency granted under **Articles 98** and **340** parallels the reduced sentences for "crimes of passion" historically seen in Western legal systems. In Italy, for example, crimes of passion were grounds for sentence mitigation until repealed in 1981. However, some researchers and international bodies still cite femicide as a present and genuine concern in Italy with at least 109 women killed in 2023 alone (as in other European states i.e. France and Germany with similar numbers) (Khrebtan-Hörhager, 2024).

Information from the World Population Review, using data from 2021, estimating the rate of femicide per 100,000 women, centers that violence against women is not a specifically localized phenomenon. For example, while the rate in Jordan is 0.6 and Palestine 0.3, the rate in the US is 2.9, Germany 0.8, and France 0.7 (2025).

Saadeh et al. (2021) explain, "Abortion in Jordan is based on French colonial law, which allows abortion to save the life or preserve the health of a woman. In 1971, a public health law in Jordan allowed abortion for mental health reasons. However, like other countries in the region, Jordan's culture is changing, and new behaviors have frequently been emerging, making people's opinions on such issues unpredictable."

Jordan's **Public Health Law No. 47 of 2008**, which is an evolution of earlier legal frameworks including the 1971 Public Health Law, permits abortion under specific conditions, such as when a woman's mental health is at risk. This provision acknowledges mental health as a critical factor, alongside physical health, in determining eligibility for abortion. In practice, the law requires verification by a varied medical panel, which assesses the mental health risks and ensures the procedure complies with the legal framework (ibid., Maffi and Tønnessen, 2019). However, still, in general, cultural and institutional barriers often limit accessibility to such services, with many women encountering delays or denial of SHRS services. These challenges reflect broader attitudes toward reproductive health and rights in Jordan, emphasizing the need for clearer mechanisms to ensure that mental health considerations are effectively and wholly addressed (for example AlHamawi et al., 2023).

In the economic domain, gender-discriminatory labor laws have limited women's participation in the workforce. **Articles 72** and **73** of the Jordanian Labor Law (1960) prohibited women from working night shifts and restricted their access to industries such as mining. These provisions were repealed in 2020, allowing women broader employment opportunities (for example Tarzi, 2020).

Despite these changes, systemic barriers persist. Workplace discrimination, wage gaps, and limited maternity protections remain significant challenges, with cultural norms often discouraging women's economic independence. We discussed issues of harassment and discrimination in the workplace with Bint Reem's testimony highlighting the extent in which gendered discrimination exists, even as a business owner.

A change that must be made, but is complicated in Jordan, and other countries in the Levant is a woman's inability to pass her nationality to her child. Under **Article 12** of the **Jordanian Nationality Law (1954)**, Jordanian women are still unable to pass their nationality to their children or foreign spouses, a right granted only to Jordanian men. As a child of a Jordanian mother myself, I can testify to how problematic it is to daily life; particularly for those living in Jordan. The 355,000 (to 500,000) *Abna al-Urduniyat* refers to individuals born to Jordanian mothers and foreign fathers (a substantial number married to Palestinians). These children are affected by Jordan's patrilineal nationality laws, which do not grant citizenship through the mother. As a result, they are only allowed limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. They also encounter obstacles in obtaining property rights, driver's licenses, or legal residency, and face challenges acquiring work permits (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Mauvais, 2022).

The registration process for these children requires the Jordanian mother to prove she has lived in the country for at least five consecutive years. Although some reforms in 2014 were intended to improve the situation, these changes have not been fully implemented. The reforms have not addressed the core issue: the failure to grant citizenship through the maternal line despite local and international human rights pressure (Human Rights Watch, 2023, Alhaj Ahmad, 2019, Mauvais 2022, Equality Now, 2021).

Bint Nadia stresses, this intangible violence is the most problematic and must be undone in order for ideological work to take true hold. She says, "I would say in some aspects we have moved forward and progressed but in others I feel like we've gone backwards. There is an inherent violence towards women in the region in so many aspects. One example is a woman cannot pass

on her nationality to her children and while this is violence at the very least it is not aggressive (Personal Communication, 2022)."

This discriminatory practice aligns with broader patterns seen globally, though significant progress has been made elsewhere. For instance, France only reformed its nationality laws in 1994 to grant women equal rights in this domain, while Italy and Brazil enacted similar changes in the late 20th century (Council of Europe, 1997).

Palestine's legal system has long struggled with local and imported patriarchal norms, colonial legacies, and political instability. Despite these challenges, legal reform aimed at advancing gender equality has made strides, particularly in areas of family law, violence against women, and access to justice. However, the legal reforms implemented thus far remain limited and are often suffocated at the intersection of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian customary laws, and societal policing.

The **Palestinian Penal Code**, which is an adoption of the Jordanian Penal Code in the West Bank, has criminalized domestic violence, and in 2018, the Palestinian Legislative Council passed a law specifically aimed at protecting women from violence. However, despite this, the **Family Protection Law** (2018), while important, has yet to be fully implemented and continues to face opposition from conservative societal actors. In 2019, the Palestinian Authority officially raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 for both men and women, which was a significant legal change aimed at protecting girls from early and forced marriages. However, exceptions still exist: the law permits marriages under the age of 18 if a judge approves and if the girl is deemed to have the maturity for marriage.

One of the most significant legislative changes was the repeal of the 'honor' crimes provision in the Palestinian Penal Code. Under the previous law (**Article 308**), perpetrators of honor-based violence (including murders) could be granted leniency if they claimed to have acted to protect their family's honor. This loophole allowed many violent acts to go unpunished. The legal reforms that emerged in 2011 in both Palestine and Jordan mirrored broader global and regional trends of abolishing leniency for 'honor' crimes (Sayegh, 2017). However, these changes have yet to fully be implemented or enacted despite its approval.

Despite this progress, as is the case in Jordan, there remain certain loopholes that are not overtly related to the concept of honor and are often used in cases relating to gender-based violence (Hattab and Abualrob, 2023).

This mirrors global patterns of legal leniency toward gendered violence, such as “crimes of passion” in Western nation-states, where perpetrators often receive reduced sentences due to ‘emotional duress’ arguments (for example Brunke, 2024). However, since 11 May 2020, when the Palestinian Council of Ministers approved a draft law on family protection against violence by first reading, the Palestinian social and legal debate escalated again regarding the aim and value of the CEDAW, and whether the draft law on protection against domestic violence is a requirement of the CEDAW rather than a national need (for example Hattab and Mahamid, 2024, or Hasso, 2009). Palestinian women have long fought for reforms in family law, which can be considered a patchwork of Jordanian law, old Ottoman influences, British mandate remnants, and customary practices. It must also navigate the apartheid settler-colonial practices imposed against them by Israel. The Palestinian family law system, largely inherited from the **Jordanian Family Law of 1976**, grants women limited rights, particularly in marriage, divorce, and custody matters. For example, men can unilaterally divorce their wives without their consent, while women must prove their case in court to obtain a divorce (as is the case in Jordan as well).

In both the cases of Jordan and Palestine, as well as neighboring countries where family courts are governed by religion, “Arab countries have implemented their domestic **Personal Status Law** or **Family Law** in accordance with Sharia law, which deals with personal status and domestic issues such as marriage, age of capacity, inheritance, divorce, guardianship, and child custody (citing Hattab, 2019; Jaffal et al., 2022). Accordingly, most Arab governments or authorities have consistently avoided making any significant changes to their Personal Status and Family Law, especially in areas where traditional Muslim scholars and religious leaders consider it inconsistent with Sharia law (Hattab and Abularob, 2023).” In general, religious courts are set-up and each individual (within the scope of family law) is subject to their religion’s court rulings.

Palestinian women’s groups, such as the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), have continued to advocate for legal reforms that would, among other things, expand

women's access to family courts and grant them more equitable rights in marriage and divorce. In essence, returning to a more egalitarian framework, as the one that existed prior to the British Mandate period.

Access to sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) in Palestine remains limited, especially in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, its frequent assaults, and its current practice of ethnic cleansing is the primary source of oppression, gendered or otherwise. A lack of access, in addition to inhumane living conditions this past year, compounded by all the accounts of sexual violence must be tackled from different actors first. Despite efforts to integrate family planning and reproductive health into public health programs, services are often inadequate, especially for unmarried women or those living under the blockade (for example Hanieh, 2022, 2023).

In the West Bank, reproductive rights are more accessible, but women continue to face barriers such as some cultural attitudes toward contraception, sexual education, and abortion. Abortion is only permitted in Palestine in cases where the woman's life is at risk, or if the pregnancy results from rape or incest, which is often difficult to prove in practice. "A draft Palestinian Public Health Law, debated in Parliament before the 2006 legislative elections, allows abortion in cases of risk to the woman's life and health (citing Personal communication, Rita Giacaman, Community Health Programme, Birzeit University, 2006) (Saadeh et al. 2021)." Access to contraception is more readily available in the West Bank than in Gaza, where socio-political constraints limit women's choices. According to a UNFPA report (Savridis et al., 2023), Palestinian women still significantly face challenges in accessing family planning services, and these issues are exacerbated by the fragmented political environment and the occupation's restrictions on movement and resources.

In Palestine, the situation is greatly exacerbated by the Israeli occupation, which severely restricts the availability of medical resources, especially in Gaza. The ongoing blockade hinders access to essential medicines and equipment, while the forced divide between the West Bank and Gaza results in inconsistent healthcare services. Furthermore, the historical and contemporary assaults on Gaza and its people are the biggest barriers; it is difficult to analyze the situation without taking this into consideration.

While it may seem that the West has made significant strides, and in many places and senses it has, particularly in relation to reproductive rights, we must understand recent trends such as the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the U.S. in 2022. This exposes the fragility of these advances (Guttmacher Institute, 2024). In several U.S. states, age of consent laws remain under 18, and access to abortion is now severely restricted in certain areas, often disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalized women (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2023). This is to say that these challenges are not unique to the Arab world but reflect broader, systemic gender inequities rooted in patriarchal legal traditions.

These changes, while substantive and significant, are not enough to be even considered true structural change, though it is showing motion triggered by individuals and women's collectives. If an overhaul of the hegemonic system is a practical impossibility, with the resources available, there is little to do except dismantle it one 'cog' at a time. What seems to be a more realistic recourse for this is to educate both men and women through innovative methods to the importance of gender equity for a functional and healthy household and society. In this way, a cultural shift can then influence, at the very least, the speed of which the system is restructured through the effects of individual action and an increase in the size of the collective. As individual actions accumulate, they will gradually influence the pace at which the system transforms, pushing towards a more equitable society.

I think it is both interesting and important to note the differences in legal frameworks between the West and the Arab world and how it treats certain crimes and its repercussions on gendered crime.

In both Jordan and Palestine, the death penalty can be applied to aggravated abuse or crimes resulting in death, and in some extreme cases, even rape could lead to capital punishment. As such, mass abuse, for instance, would likely be considered a severe assault, leading to harsher sentencing, potentially including the death penalty, depending on the specifics of the case.

To illustrate the differences in legal frameworks, consider the case of Dominique Pelicot in France, who drugged his wife, Gisèle, over several years to facilitate her rape by more than 80 men. This horrifying situation came to light in 2020, with the police uncovering over 20,000

photos and videos of the assaults. Investigations revealed that at least 92 rapes were committed by 83 men. Pélicot, now 72, has admitted to mixing sedatives into his wife's food and drink, leaving her unconscious for these acts. Despite the absolutely debased nature of his crime, Pelicot faces only a 20-year sentence, which has sparked public outcry and debates about whether the punishment matches the crime (Le Monde with AFP, 2024). While this is only speculative, If such an act were committed in Jordan or Palestine, the response would likely be very different, given the region's continued use of the death penalty for severe crimes involving mass violence. In these countries, gender-based violence specifically this kind of abuse, framed as premeditated or resulting in death, could lead to capital punishment, highlighting the contrast in legal outcomes. This is not to say one framework is superior to another, not by any means, but that it is a relative phenomenon that can and often does reproduce itself under different contexts and presents itself differently.

The gendered liberation of Palestinian women is inseparably tied to the structural reform of Palestinian and Jordanian societies. Women's demands for equal citizenship and social, political, and bodily rights challenge the entrenched hegemonic systems that sustain their subordination. However, meaningful progress requires transformative reform across legal, educational, and societal frameworks. As Bint Nadia observes, "When you see younger women struggling with something like this, I understand, but it's much deeper than simply stating 'be rebellious.' We need to have a system in place that protects this rebelliousness; otherwise, they will be in danger. We really need to drive this narrative of reformation home, and as much as they drilled in the toxic ideas into her head, we can add more positive narratives as well (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Here, she inadvertently explains precariousness of change under neopatriarchical systems, where neoliberal demands reshape but do not fully dismantle 'traditional' patriarchal practices. While younger generations push for empowerment and autonomy, these efforts often occur within systems that remain resistant to meaningful change. Without the necessary safeguards, their rebellion risks personal harm. Bint Nadia adds on the importance of mentorship and systemic support, saying, "It's not just about teaching women to rebel; it's about ensuring that the system provides a safety net for those who take that risk. Without that support, their rebellion may lead to personal harm (ibid.)."

She continues and highlights the crucial role of institutional accountability, stating, “There definitely needs to be more accountability, and there needs to be some sort of reformation of the education system in terms of traditional and cultural narratives. While there are more resources, there needs to be greater accessibility to these resources (ibid.).” This reflects a pressing need for structural changes that ensure resources and social protections are both more accessible and impactful.

Similarly, Bint Shadda reflects on the need for stronger laws to protect women’s individual autonomy, “Especially, I would hope that we eventually have better laws to protect people’s individual choices and opportunities. I keep coming back to this because it was such a struggle in my family, and the lack of opportunities early on shaped so much of what I had to fight for (Bint Shadda, Personal Communication, 2022).” She expresses the same sentiment in a somewhat different manner with the same implications as her counterpart: a presence of systemic gaps in providing opportunities and a supportive legal framework, illustrating how this lack of support not only limits individual potential but perpetuates cycles of struggle within the family structure.

These discussions meet at a clear intersection, structural reform is essential for ensuring that societal transformation is both sustainable and protective. Legal and policy frameworks must prioritize equal citizenship and comprehensive rights to foster cultural change effectively. To achieve this, reform must address the educational system, which often perpetuates harmful narratives, and create environments where women can challenge patriarchal norms without fear of retribution. The inverse is also true as both legislative change and cultural shifts as necessary in tandem for true and sustainable gender equity.

Murad-Garlick elaborates on the interplay between neoliberal pressures and patriarchal structures, explaining, “Empowerment of women is incomplete because it adds to the burden of women without alleviating any of their care responsibilities or institutionalizing a reformed social order. We are in transition, and the transition has meant that men are questioning the demands of masculinity and the patriarchal order but are also not able to provide for their families in the same way under the demands of increased consumerism (or increased need for capital) (Personal Communication, 2022).”

This transitional nature of neopatriarchy expresses itself through this conflict and contradiction neoliberal demands are eroding traditional practices of patriarchy without offering an equitable alternative. This replication, while its superficial form may have changed, still simultaneously demanding women meet traditional gender role expectations, and conform to neoliberal socio-capital demands as well.

This creates an uneven terrain where gains in empowerment coexist with conforming to another imposed agenda. For men, shifting roles lead to identity crises and challenges in fulfilling societal expectations, oftentimes straining a relationship as women are not as financially reliant on men, more often than not both incomes are needed to support a household.

Socio-cultural safeguards must accompany legal reform to ensure that progress is enduring. The liberation of Palestinian women, indeed all women, requires a dual focus: dismantling systemic oppression and fostering environments where rebellion against injustice becomes a safe and supported act of resistance.

Contradictions between Lived and State: Institutional, “International” and NGO Feminisms

Feminism as a unifying or rather universal concept is simultaneously gaining and losing ground in the Arab region, including Jordan and Palestine. The dominant forms of feminist projects in the region are tied to government, “non-governmental”, corporate, and Western foreign funders who attach many limits to them. While state and NGO interventions often present themselves as allies in advancing women’s rights, many women across Jordan and Palestine encounter these institutional feminisms as extractive, alienating, or decontextualized and irrelevant. This section explores how such frameworks, generally shaped by donor agendas, universal mandates, and externally imposed values, often override the lived realities and priorities of the women they claim to serve. Drawing on conversations with women who witness and/or are subject to these interventions, this discussion centers on how feminist language has been depoliticized, instrumentalized, and at times rejected altogether. Rather than dismiss these reactions as resistance to feminism itself, they reveal tensions between imposed institutional paradigms and the everyday strategies women are compelled to use to navigate oppression. What happens when

feminism is filtered through structures that are themselves complicit in the very forms of violence they purport to address?

Islah Jad discusses the disconnect between Western and local feminist agendas, emphasizing how the appropriation of feminism by international NGOs and donor agencies often distorts the feminist discourse by prioritizing superficial reforms over substantive change (2003). In the context of Palestine, she highlights how these external influences lead to tokenistic engagements with gender issues, where local voices are dismissed and feminism is reduced to a tool of external governance rather than a genuine movement for social change. This approach creates a paradox, often found in neopatriarchal contexts, where local women's political and organizing priorities are undermined by the same structures that claim to support their emancipation.

Feminism in Palestine and Jordan is shaped by both lived experiences and institutional frameworks, with women contend with oppression in ways that reflect their specific political and social realities. Palestinian women face the dual struggle of resisting Israeli violence and occupation while also challenging patriarchal norms within their communities, where access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities is further strained, if not eradicated, by the larger status quo. In Jordan, women confront legal and social restrictions that limit their rights and difficult economic conditions.

The concept of intersectionality, as discussed by Dorlin (2021, 679–682), has undergone significant transformation since its inception, particularly in the French context which has relevance to the approach taken towards the 'Global South' as well. Originally a radical framework for analyzing overlapping systems of oppression, such as gender, race, and class, it has increasingly been institutionalized, leading to its depoliticization. In academic and funding circles, it is often reduced to a buzzword, stripped of its critical edge and used as a superficial gesture, moral posturing even, rather than a tool for systemic change. Despite this, intersectionality has revitalized feminist studies in France, sparking debates and clarifying divisions between research perspectives and disciplines. However, it has also faced significant ideological backlash, particularly from proponents of paternalistic positivism and nationalist republicanism, who view it as a threat to French universalism and "Western values." This reactionary critique, often rooted in antifeminist and racist ideologies, has led to censorship,

disciplinary actions, and the cancellation of academic events. Her analysis contrasts the ongoing struggle to preserve intersectionality's transformative potential amidst co-optation and ideological resistance. These dynamics are further complicated by the rise of femonationalism, where feminist rhetoric is co-opted to justify nationalist and anti-immigrant agendas.

These struggles illustrate how overlapping systems of oppression shape their experiences, a dynamic that Dorlin (2021) discusses in relation to intersectionality. While institutional feminism has led to legal reforms through organizations like the Jordanian National Commission for Women and Palestinian women's groups (WLAC for example), these efforts are often constrained by political realities, whether through the prioritization of national security over gender rights in Jordan or the exclusion of Palestinians from the discourse of global human rights. Feminist rhetoric is also vulnerable to co-optation by nationalist or neoliberal agendas, echoing what Sahar Farris (2017) describes as femonationalism. Western-funded initiatives, for example, often frame "empowerment" in ways that align with donor priorities rather than addressing structural issues like occupation or economic inequality. As Dorlin (2021, 681–2) explains, the institutionalization of intersectionality often weakens its radical potential, reducing it to a tokenistic framework rather than a tool for real change. This is evident in how international organizations and governments often impose top-down solutions, sidelining Palestinian and Jordanian women's voices in the process.

Understanding Palestinian and Jordanian women's struggles requires recognizing how gender oppression is entangled with colonialism, nationalism, and global capitalism. Palestinian women's activism is inherently political, resisting both Israeli occupation and patriarchal structures, while Jordanian women contend with legal and social constraints that shape their daily realities. Refugee women in Jordan face additional layers of marginalization, dealing with economic precarity and restricted rights. Their experiences reflect the constant tension between grassroots resistance and institutional feminism, where movements risk depoliticization when absorbed into state or international agendas. Feminist struggles in these contexts must push back against this co-optation, ensuring that they remain rooted in the lived realities of the women they claim to represent. Her critique is a reminder to stay alert to how feminist discourse can be diluted, particularly when women's liberation is inseparable from the broader structures of oppression that shape their lives.

As a result, the practical application of ‘institutional’ and ‘intersectional’ feminism in this context is limited. This disconnect is compounded by a significant stigma attached to the term itself, as well as both deeply personal and varied interpretations among primary participants. Bint Dima says, “I’m not sure what feminism means to me either. In our regional context I see men are just as much victims of oppression as women, if not more in some places. *Akeed* (of course) the system that oppresses us both is a patriarchal system but I don’t know, I don’t think I give feminism great importance regionally (Personal Communication, 2022).” The outlier interviewee also elaborates on this abstraction saying, “I don't know what that is really. I found my own version of whatever that is naturally in some ways, I would pick on small things, like in al-Khalil, women were not allowed to go to the coffeeshops to play cards or billiards and I would make it a point to defy that and go see my father or uncles there. I would compete with the men in school or work, I wanted to beat them at their own game. I had to prove I could do what they could and more (Bint Najla, Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Nour from Ramallah tells me, “Feminism is very important to me, both my parents are feminists and raised me to be as well. Basically that I can do whatever I want and should be able to. I feel like it’s been appropriated to new meanings, particularly in the West, where actual issues are deprioritized over other things. Sex-work, while I am not against it, can rarely be applied in the context of empowerment – or a right to ‘plastic surgery’ problematic to center these things as priorities when there are other things we need to do first (Personal Communication, 2024).”

Bint Maya from Jordan adds, “There are so many ways to think and talk about feminism. From my father’s perspective, this means marrying me off to an open-minded husband, this is feminist to him. In his house the set of rules are different and stricter, at my ‘husbands’ I would be free and that is fine. When they marry a victim of rape to her attacker, in society, it has a negative effect on your psyche. It messes you up in the head, law is definitely more important in women’s rights today than an abstract concept of feminism (Personal Communication, 2022).” Adding, “It would be refreshing to see anyone in legislation work towards making women’s rights law without a hidden agenda that so far has served a select group of men (ibid,).”

With Bint Nour adding, “Belief in yourself and some sort of empowerment, knowing that I can do anything – it's much more present in the ‘professionalized class (sic.)’ particularly in the (defacto) capital cities (Amman, Ramallah) but even then you can see there are issues with harassment and being intimidated by strong women even in those sectors (Personal Communication, 2024).” Bint Mimi also notes the class dimensions of feminism, stating, “There is some feminist thought or feminism generally concentrated in the upper class or the bourgeoisie, but essentially in the whole country, there is an effort by some women to empower themselves within their own context (Personal Communication, 2022).” These comments and observations reflect and mirror broader critiques of feminism’s perceived elitism and its failure to address the intersectional realities of class, race, and nationality (even within the ‘elite’ class themselves).

This fragmented and often stigmatized perception of feminism exposes the limitations imposed by neoliberal funding mechanisms. Projects that aim to address gender inequality are frequently confined to specific deliverables, inhibiting their capacity to foster long-term growth or to challenge deeply ingrained societal norms. The issue of the hijab **exemplifies** the complex, double-edged nature of feminism in the Arab region and beyond. In some European Union countries, policies targeting the hijab are framed as liberating women from oppressive practices, yet they often strip women of agency by dictating what they can or cannot wear. Bint Nadia highlights this tension, stating, “Feminism means women being able to make choices for themselves without anybody there to overrule them. For example, if a woman wants to wear a hijab, let her; if she doesn’t, let her (Personal Communication, 2022).” Through personal communication with a French-Algerian woman studying aerospace engineering in France, she tells me she must remove the veil in her car before entering the university campus. Her colleagues in class treated her quite well until they one day saw her putting the veil back on, again in her car, and the next day the class of 10 all treated her with some sort of disdain (2023). The ‘double-edged sword’ of the hijab debate highlights how Western narratives can influence perceptions of feminism in the Arab world. In countries where laws have been passed restricting the wearing of the hijab, for example, many Muslim women feel they are being singled out and their choices restricted in the name of protecting ‘gender equality’. This reinforces the binary of ‘liberated’ Western women versus ‘oppressed’ non-Western women, further complicating the

feminist discourse in Arab societies. Fanon's essay "Algeria Unveiled", still resonates profoundly, and an important point still stands, "The woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, she does not give herself, she does not offer herself (1959, 48)."

Nadia Fadil's 2011 article, "Not-/unveiling as an Ethical Practice," examines how second-generation Maghrebi Muslims in Belgium navigate identity through bodily practices like veiling and unveiling. She argues that these practices are intertwined with European discourses on secularism, liberalism, and Muslim identity. Fadil suggests that veiling and unveiling are "techniques of the self," allowing individuals to assert agency and engage with cultural and political contexts. By framing these acts as forms of self-fashioning, she challenges views that attribute unveiling solely to external pressures. Fadil explores how the hijab becomes politicized in debates on multiculturalism, secularism, and integration, with wearing or not wearing it symbolizing resistance, identity, or compliance. Her perspective moves beyond binaries of oppression versus empowerment, highlighting the multiplicity of meanings that veiling holds for Muslim women in Europe.

Ruba Salih extends this discussion to Palestinian women under occupation and in the diaspora. In "Bodies that walk, bodies that talk, bodies that love," Salih explores how Palestinian women shape their identities through memory, trauma, and lived experiences within the constraints of colonialism and external frameworks like Western feminism (2016). This aligns with Fadil's framing of agency, as both scholars challenge oversimplified portrayals of women's actions as entirely empowering or oppressive. Salih critiques Western feminist paradigms that fail to capture the complexities of local experiences, advocating for feminist solidarity that centers Palestinian women's agency.

By linking veiling and resistance, the work of Fadil and Salih reveals the broader socio-political dimensions of gendered practices. Farris' concept of femonationalism provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. She argues that the portrayal of Muslim women as passive victims needing protection perpetuates colonial narratives and diverts attention from structural inequalities affecting both Western and non-Western women. Furthermore, the reliance

on NGO-driven initiatives risks prioritizing short-term goals over systemic change. Farris explains:

> Neoliberal governments have seized on the opportunity opened up by the identification of women's rights as a 'migrant/Muslim woman-only issue' to decrease funds for more universal programs aimed at tackling gender injustice more generally. Instead of helping it to gain more visibility, the widespread resort to the theme of women's rights as a 'civilizational' battle demotes it from the rubric of general societal problems (2017, 9).

Spivak's work is critical in understanding how Western feminism, often constructed through a colonial lens, marginalizes and homogenizes non-Western experiences. In the context of Palestine and the broader Arab world, her insights are crucial in addressing the dangers of 'femonationalism' and 'purple-washing,' where feminism is used as a tool to legitimize state policies rather than empower local women. Spivak's argument that subaltern voices, those of marginalized and oppressed populations, are systematically excluded from the dialogue is evident in the selective visibility of gender issues in the Arab world. The narrative of Muslim women as 'victims' who need saving from their men, as discussed by Abu-Lughod (2013) and others, reflects Spivak's critique of how Western feminists often speak for rather than with non-Western women (1988). By appropriating feminism in this way, the focus is shifted from a genuine effort to gender equity to a performative solidarity that serves Western geopolitical interests, thus limiting the potential for authentic, grassroots feminist movements in the Arab world. In the context of Palestine and the broader Arab world, her insights are crucial in addressing the dangers of 'femonationalism' and 'purple-washing,' where feminism is used as a tool to legitimize state policies, and in the case of Israel, state violence, rather than developing an equitable society.

In this context, the abstract nature of feminism as a concept becomes both a strength and a weakness. On one hand, its flexibility allows individuals to define it in ways that resonate with their personal experiences and priorities. As Bint Nadia notes, "Feminism is more than just equality; it is justice, it's opportunity, it's healing (Personal Communication, 2022)." On the other hand, this lack of a unified definition or priorities even hinders collective action and contributes to the perception of feminism as an imported, foreign ideology.

This emphasis on autonomy is echoed by Bint Bee, “Feminism is the common sense that we lack in the region. I think there are a lot more conversations about the topic, and people are more aware of the situation, but the majority are still stuck and scared (Personal Communication, 2022).” She expresses her frustration with societal pushback, noting that when she criticizes conservative norms, her peers dismiss her concerns as incompatible with societal values. Bint Yasmin says, “It angers me and frustrates me when that excuse is used to silence me. I am a part of this society and I have a right to be too,” she states, reflecting on the personal toll of navigating these tensions. Adding, “As for feminism, yes it resonates with me a lot. I have called myself a feminist for years and years. I support women and girls’ free will to decide their futures, free of fear or pressure. That doesn’t necessarily mean I agree with their decisions, but I support their right to do that. Do I see it visible in Palestine and Jordan? In pockets, in all honesty. Is it more visible on social media than in reality? (ibid.)”

Bint Maya, reflecting on the cultural landscape, states, “Women standing together and speaking out for themselves could make THAT difference in the world. Feminism as a movement, yes, I believe it could get us somewhere eventually, but it needs consistency. A lot of women stand up for one another and fight for their rights.” However, she also critiques the lack of clear, actionable agendas, emphasizing that “simply claiming yourself to be a feminist doesn’t really get anything done. We need more organization (Personal Communication, 2022).”

The contradictions between lived and institutional feminisms in Palestine and Jordan reveal the ongoing struggle to define feminism beyond the confines of state-sanctioned narratives and donor-driven agendas. Women in the region navigate gendered oppression through deeply personal acts of defiance, legal battles, and community organizing, yet these efforts are frequently overshadowed or co-opted by frameworks that serve external interests rather than local priorities. The neoliberal emphasis on measurable “empowerment” projects, often detached from structural realities, risks depoliticizing feminist struggles by reducing them to technocratic interventions.

As seen in the perspectives of the research participants, feminism is simultaneously necessary and alienating, a term full of ideological baggage yet inseparable from daily survival and negotiation. This paradox shows the difficulty of reconciling a feminism that is imposed with

one that emerges organically from lived experiences. Rather than discarding feminism altogether, the challenge lies in reclaiming it from its institutionalized constraints, grounding it in the material realities of Palestinian and Jordanian women while resisting its exploitation for nationalist or neoliberal ends.

The testimonies express a desire for feminism that is fluid, pragmatic, and sometimes skeptical; one that prioritizes legal protections over abstract ideals and acknowledges class and political hierarchies in shaping women's agency. These contradictions do not weaken feminism's relevance but rather highlight its contested and evolving nature. If feminism is to hold any meaning in this context, it must remain a tool of resistance rather than a performance of progress, ensuring that women's struggles are not sanitized for palatability but recognized as inherently political acts.

In this chapter we have traced the complex evolution of patriarchal systems in Jordan and Palestine, positioning the state as both the architect and enforcer of gendered oppression. By rethinking patriarchy as a dynamic, as an institutionalized structure rather than a static cultural artifact, it becomes clear that colonial and postcolonial legal regimes systematically marginalized women, eroding the historical agency they once held in early Islamic societies. Archival evidence shows the contrast between women's once-strong legal standing in areas like property, divorce, and reproductive rights, against the hybrid legal systems crafted under colonial rule. These systems merged tribal customs with foreign impositions, casting women as both subjects of reform and targets of control, a duality entrenched through "modernizing" legal frameworks.

The critique extends to institutionalized feminism, where NGO and donor-driven initiatives, despite their feminist rhetoric, often replicate structural violence by maintaining the status quo. Women's testimonies expose the dissonance between these frameworks and their daily lives, showing how empowerment discourses become tools to legitimize state and donor agendas without addressing the root causes of oppression.

In Jordan, sluggish legal reforms in family law and citizenship rights mirror Palestine's fragmented legal landscape, where occupation enforces a chaotic patchwork of jurisdictions. Both contexts illustrate how patriarchal power adapts, leveraging colonial legacies and neoliberal reforms to maintain control.

As we move into Chapter 2, this structural analysis transitions to the interpersonal: how macro-level oppression infiltrates private spheres, shaping domestic roles and community dynamics. By linking institutional frameworks to everyday realities, the next chapter will explore the dialectic of ‘agency’ and negotiation, revealing how gendered power is both imposed and contested in the minutiae of daily life. This transition emphasizes the necessity of a dialectical approach, one that critically evaluates both the broad structural forces that shape society and the nuanced interpersonal strategies that emerge in the face of such enduring power.

Chapter 2. Obligated Agents: Individual Interpersonal Bargains, Coping Strategies, and Incremental Changes

Abstract

Primarily relying on interviews, but situated within relevant scholarly theoretical debates, this chapter examines how Palestinian and Jordanian women negotiate and strategize individually within their societies (workplaces, families, and other settings) and what Pierre Bourdieu termed 'habitus' is constructed and utilized. These are delimited by the confines imposed by a neoliberal state with limited welfare support and the operations of patriarchy, especially through law, discussed in Chapter 1. Essentially, women maneuver through structural norms and codes while attempting to enact incremental changes individually. Using thematic coding and comparative methods, the thesis determined patterns in how women bargain in domains such as marriage, religiosity, and education to arrive at a situation that is closer to what they prefer. The chapter argues that these bargains simultaneously challenge patriarchal norms and reinforce them by remaining within their general logic and by operating individually rather than collectively. It identifies more equitable family and friendship dynamics and intergenerational attitudes, including more reproductive agency, shared (or outsourced) household work, mobility freedom for girls and women, less sexist attitudes, and changes in childrearing practices in comparison to parents'. However, as both the negotiations and the shifts are deeply individualized, it is not possible to isolate nor dissect a direct causal relationship with visible social change but certainly centers the process itself.

This chapter moves from the state's architecture of oppression to the intimate arenas where women negotiate its terms. Palestinian and Jordanian women emerge here as obligated agents who, despite entrenched neopatriarchal structures, deploy individualized bargains, acts of compromise, defiance, and quiet recalibration of their habitus, to carve out incremental freedoms. Building on Chapter 1's mapping of legal and institutional patriarchy, we now examine how power is lived and contested in workplaces, homes, and communal spaces specifically through the lens of bargain and sacrifice.

Drawing on Bourdieu's habitus and Sewell's schemas, I revisit Kandiyoti's notion of patriarchal bargaining at the micro level. Rather than collective pacts, this chapter centers on the everyday decisions women describe: extending curfews by leveraging academic success, invoking piety to justify career moves, or outsourcing childcare to afford paid work. Though these maneuvers may feel private or isolated, they accumulate into intergenerational shifts in expectations and practice, reshaping the symbolic and material contours of gendered life.

Interview data reveal three interrelated patterns of substructural change. First, nearly every participant contrasts her experience with her mother's generation, noting expanded autonomy in education, mobility, and marital choice. This 'change of times' signals a change and relief of domestic constraints, a substructural shift rooted in older women's concerted efforts to relieve social pressures on their daughters. Second, exposure to new knowledge via the internet, paired with shifting capital demands, has morphed women's habitus. These transformations echo national trends, declining birth rates since the 1970s, yet unfold unevenly across class lines. Third, class itself proves surprisingly malleable. In contexts of economic volatility, women move between 'petty bourgeoisie' and precarious wage-earners, using financial means to bypass certain bargains. Outsourcing domestic labor, be it to migrant or lower-income female kin, emerges as a widespread strategy that grants autonomy for some while reproducing class and ethnic hierarchies.

The chapter unpacks these findings in two movements. First, I analyze the neopatriarchal bargaining process in detail, tracing how individual choices both conform to and contest structural rules. Then, I turn to the substructural changes that participants connect to shifting

habitus and schemas, showing how personal strategies, though far from revolutionary, signify material reconfigurations of power within families and communities.

Throughout, these narratives present a paradox: gains in personal liberty can reinforce broader systems of inequality when pursued in isolation. Neoliberal imperatives of self-reliance fracture collective possibilities, while militarized occupation in Palestine layers additional constraints such as checkpoints, permit regimes, economic suffocation, that reshape what women can negotiate.

By centering lived experience as a site of knowledge production, this chapter challenges deterministic models of emancipation. It argues that agency under patriarchy is a fraught dialectic, daily acts of survival and small-scale resistance that chip away at norms without collapsing them. These fragmented advances matter because they reveal where and how oppression is internalized, managed, and occasionally unsettled.

This exploration of interpersonal bargains lays the groundwork for Chapter 3's focus on internalization: how women absorb, reproduce, or resist patriarchal logics within their own dispositions. Together, these analyses map the terrain of social change in Jordan and Palestine, from the law to daily life highlighting the interplay of structure, agency, and uneven work of social transformation.

Theories of Structure, Reproduction and Agency

Theories of structure, agency, and power are often linked to one another in order to accurately explain the processes and logics of social reproduction. This section and its literature offers some insight into the manner in which the bargaining process, through both gains and losses, research participants discuss through its practical application. The ways in which patriarchy as a (super)structure, entangled within itself through other social structures and individual action work to reproduce, resist, or overturn itself. This attempts to provide both insight and theoretical context into how women in the Arab world practically navigate oppression, particularly using the neopatriarchal bargain to offset interpersonal pressures that arise as a result of institutional inequity.

First we will discuss the ways in which superstructures operate, specifically the duality of structure, and the effects, if any, of individual action in this context. The discussion will then expand into the concepts of agency and agentic activity within this scope. It will continue using 'neopatriarchy' as a case study of self-sustaining oppressive structure and thus shed light on the uses of the 'neopatriarchal bargain'. Finally, a brief discussion of power dynamics in order to fully express the workings of structure and agency.

Patriarchy operates not as a static institution but as a relational superstructure, intertwined with capitalism, colonialism, and cultural norms that shape and is shaped by daily practices. The discussion begins with structuralist frameworks that expose patriarchy's systemic roots, then turns to post-structural critiques that reveal how agency negotiates, reinforces, or subverts these structures. Central to this analysis is neopatriarchy – a hybrid system in Arab societies where modernity and tradition collide to reproduce gendered contradictions.

Early structuralist theories (e.g., Saussure, Lévi-Strauss) framed social systems through rigid binaries (male/female, tradition/modernity), reducing patriarchy to a fixed hierarchy. However, such models faltered by ignoring the fluidity of power and the role of human action. Post-structuralism introduced a "third order," a symbolic space where structures and agency intersect to theorize how actors navigate, reinterpret, or contest norms. This shift reframed patriarchy not as immutable but as a dynamic process sustained through repetition and contestation.

The third order proves to be an important concept that has been added to structuralist thought in an attempt to define the imagined space where realities and potentialities meet; it is also referred to as the symbolic order. This addition provided an avenue into considering the actor/subject as multifaceted, capable of agency (situated within hegemonic contexts), and accounts for different socio-economic factors. Removing the 'either or' binary allows for an analysis of the subject as fluid and not fixed.

To contextualize this process of change, and one of the key differences between structuralist and poststructuralist thought, is illustrated through the work of Anthony Giddens Structuration Theory (1984) vis-à-vis the elaboration of his work through the writing of William Sewell Jr.

(1992). Further contested by Anna Kyrlova's (2023) recent intervention and relevant criticisms. The discussion of agency will be supplemented by Joseph's (2012) thinking on intentionality as well as the insights from the research of Saba Mahmood (2005, 2011), amongst others.

Anthony Giddens' structuration theory presents a 'third order': structures (rules/resources) and agency (actors' practices) are mutually constitutive. For example, patriarchal norms (moral rules) and material inequalities (resources) constrain women's choices, yet their daily negotiations, complying with guardianship laws while pursuing education, may reshape those structures incrementally. William Sewell expands this by emphasizing schemas (socio-cultural scripts) and habitus (internal scripts). In Jordan and Palestine, women deploy schemas of "piety" or "modernity" to navigate neopatriarchal systems, often adopting "double lives" to secure autonomy without overt defiance (discussed further in Chapter 3).

Yet structuration's emphasis on agency risks obscuring the effects of systemic oppression. Anna Krylova (2023) argues that such micro-level bargaining rarely dismantles oppressive superstructures such as patriarchy; instead, it reinforces ideological frameworks. Similarly, Hisham Sharabi's neopatriarchy illustrates how hybrid structures (e.g., secular laws coexisting with tribal customs) trap actors in cycles of negotiation that stabilize oppression. State mechanisms like the *mukhabarat* (secret police) enforce compliance, while contradictory demands fracture resistance (Sharabi, 1988). Here, patriarchy reproduces not through unconscious habit (Bourdieu) but through coercive adaptability; absorbing dissent to maintain dominance.

Saba Mahmood's concept of docile agency challenges assumptions that empowerment requires rebellion. In Egypt, women embracing religious norms (for example veiling) redefine moral worth within patriarchy, exposing how compliance can be strategic (as well as desired). Suad Joseph's (2012) distinction between agency (observable acts) and intentionality (motivations) further complicates this. For example, a Jordanian mother enforcing gendered norms on her daughter may unintentionally (pressure to marry) reproduce patriarchy while resisting it economically (pressure for education).

Giddens (1984) suggests that society is made up of both structure and actors and are wholly contingent on each other. Structure, here, meant to represent 'social' structure, he explains, cannot exist without actors *engaging* with it and reproducing its output. The structure does not exist without the actor, and without the structure the actor has no action to *enact*.

The actor expends their agency on either maintaining, transforming, or erasing the structure based on two factors: 'rules and resources.' He explains, "rules and resources, organized as properties of social systems (1984, 25)," dividing rules into performance and practice, and resources as personal and authoritarian.

The 'procedural' rules, refer to the ways in which a practice is performed; moral rules referring to what is socially, legally, culturally, permissible. Material resources is the distribution of material to communities, projects, and individuals; and resources of authorities which refers to a plethora of ways that power is distributed among individuals such as organization of time, space, and labor, social mobility, production and reproduction, etc. (ibid.). The sites in which the actor and structure meet, Giddens terms **'structuration**'; which can be understood as the post-structuralist 'third order' mediator. The interplay between these two concepts is essentially what creates social change or stagnation. He insists, this is an ongoing process which continues in perpetuity. This sheds light, particularly in the context of this chapter, on the ways in which the interchange between individual women in Palestinian and Jordanian and social structures, without collective organization, gives way to a potentialities in transformation of 'structure.'

In some ways this **methodology** allows us 'new' ways of thinking about society and the role that social actors play in the construction of our current realities. It defies the notion that individuals are just subject to the rules of existing social structures, such as religion, the states, the family unit, amongst others - thus also expanding on aspects of human agency. The most critical part of this theory is the dynamism that it introduces into comprehension of society; through bypassing the false notion that individuals are not active agents, but mainly the notion that structures are permanent.

While Giddens work was, for the most part, well received, some criticisms include the lack of comprehension of the contexts of agency in which an individual can operate. His description assumes that all actors are dealt the same set of cards, so to speak. He explains:

> Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place. Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened. Action is a continuous process, a flow… (Giddens, 1984, 9).

The problem here is the assumption is slightly simplistic and arguably Eurocentric; an actor is free to expend agency in all areas of life, at any time of their choosing, and the use of agency delineates subsequent change. This assumes numerous factors including from the agent's willingness and ability, decision-making, power, and privilege in different areas (for example, Baber, 1991; Jones & Karsten, 2008). Furthermore, it does not account for the unequal allocation of resources in any given community. Without also considering the varied ways in which agency can or cannot be enacted proves difficult for studying marginalized groups and prevents a conducive class analysis. I believe that **this** understanding of agency ultimately presupposes an equal distribution of autonomy and often disregards the question of ideologies in any given time and space.

Autonomy can be understood here to refer to the capacity of the actor to expend agency in a socio-cultural, legal, environment, which does not impose rules on the extent of self-governance.

This is a critical point this thesis seeks to raise, the use of agency is contingent on autonomy, and a guarantee of human security or the conscious, and often dangerous, disregard of it.

However, the thinking of structure as a duality, with a relationship between actor and structure, remains both relevant and important. William Sewell Jr. builds on Giddens work and adds

several concepts to address some discrepancies. Mainly adding to the ways in which these rules and resources are able to exist both virtually, as well as practically. He says:

> If the duality of structure is to be saved – and as far as I am concerned the notion of duality of structure is the main attraction of Giddens's theory – we must take the other alternative and conceive of structure as having a dual character. Structure, then, should be defined as composed simultaneously of schemas, which are virtual, and of resources, which are actual (1992, 12).

The concept of schemas is interesting and adds value to this research through offering the importance and variety of the actors' across different cultural milieus. It also offers an alternative to the presupposed equal distribution of resources as well as the assumption of a singular perception of 'rules.' Schemas, as he explains, consists of 'rules' but also the accumulation of socio-cultural knowledge.

In his essay Sewell (1992) largely adopts Giddens general definition for aspects of theory and retains most of its logical mechanisms, however, he does make some additions to concepts, most notably elaborating on defining schemas, expanding the conceptualization of rules, as well as incorporating Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1968, 1977). While there is no extensive discussion on agency, Sewells' 'reconceptualization; with using new terminology, does provide more room to address socio-economic, cultural, and national discrepancies between communities and their ability to use agency depending on these contexts; and the actors autonomy.

In essence, Sewell redefines rules to be schemas, namely, to highlight the malleable nature of the concept, rather than the rigidity presented in the word 'rule.' He explains:

> This generalizability or transposability of schemas is the reason they must be understood as virtual. To say that schemas are virtual is to say that they cannot be reduced to their existence in any particular practice or any particular location, space and time: they can be actualized in potentially broad and un-predetermined (sic.) range of situations (1992, 8).

For Sewell, schemas contain the knowledgeability of the actor in all its facets; it includes general and cultural knowledge, as well as the individual's contextual and interpersonal knowledge. This information, he argues, has the ability to be applied in different areas and situations i.e. the knowledge is retained outside practice and can be applied in a manner of their choosing. This is critical for analysis in this thesis to comprehend how women use schemas as a protective barrier while engaging in a (neo)patriarchal bargain. This application of multiple schemas is discussed through an internal lens in the next chapter through identifying the phenomenon of 'double lives.'

To understand how schemas develop, Sewell turns to Pierre Bordieu's (1977, 1984) concept of habitus; one that proves critical in understanding how an individual actor can contribute to structural change on both a micro and macro level simultaneously. Habitus refers to the way actors behave, an individual's modus operandi in different situations. The habitus, as Sewell argues, is the set of schemas an individual has and uses. Using Bordieu's definition it is, "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions and no others (1992, 15)."

As Bordieu further details and specifies that the habitus of any given individual is not consciously constructed but rather:

> Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these structures. In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence… without any conscious concentration' (1984, 170).

He continues to suggest that structural change may occur slowly through time through a transformation of the habitus, the details are relatively vague in how that would come to be. Sewell notes this, and continues, that actor's knowledge essentially creates the schemas which then creates the habitus, thus an increase in knowledge can very well lead to a change in habitus.

But in this context, that of women in the Arab world under a generations-long oppressive state (and thus societal) relationships, there can be no substitute from structural change from the top-down, which is unlikely to happen due to the persisting hegemonic power held by the 'state', or through (unlikely but certainly possible) radical change from a grassroots level.

Nonetheless the work of the post-structuralists, specifying the 'third order' in which engagements between theory and praxis takes place is an important analytical tool towards understanding the bargaining process and the change that can ensue. Here, it will be used **with** the concept of autonomy, or lack thereof, through understanding that autonomy is the ability to enact agency **and** to **which degree it can be assumed.**

Sewell stresses on an individuals knowledge, as well as agency, to highlight several ways structural change is possible; **first,** the multiplicity of structure in any society, formal and informal, are essentially a result of an actors habitus; this emphasizes the heterogeneity in the ways habitus and schema are used; that these structures often **overlap** as well also serves to this point. The fact that schemas are virtual implies that an actor creates them in a **subjective** manner indicating room for variations in an actor's comprehension, and as a result providing a certain **unpredictability** in behavior. He also argues that the applicability of different schemas into different areas and structural interaction implies different outcomes as well. Finally, that actors cannot predict a 'resource consequence' through the enactment of a schema through habitus indicates areas for a variety of results and thus a variety of changes (1992, 19).

It is here that we recognize that the actor's agency is different in its conceptualization between Bordieu and Sewell and understand that expending agency is the largest indicator, or trigger, for change; though the scale of this is not often specified.

Sewell says:

> Agents are empowered to act with and against others by structures: they have knowledge of the schemas that inform social life and have access to some measure

> of human and non-human resources. Agency arises from the actor's knowledge of schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts (ibid. 20).

However, once again, as is the fault with most of this conceptualization is the assumption that each actor is afforded the same amount of autonomy by which they are free to use their agency. As found in numerous marginalized groups and communities, individuals always have the capacity to be agents, however, not all actors are protected in the process. This often leads to an outcome in the 'negative' where expending agency and free will can result in psychological or bodily harm.

Considering the system of guardianship placed upon women in the region generally, but specifically in Jordan and Palestine, women are free to negotiate within and between structures, however, there is a risk factor unaccounted for in these theories. Women must use their agency in a more discreet and innovative manner in order to effect the change they seek. The system of guardianship quite literally removes the autonomy of women and places it under the control of male guardians, while this is not something that applies to all aspects of their existence, it is certainly present. Nonetheless, this is but another structure than can be, eventually, transformed through individual, but more effectively and efficiently, through collective negotiations.

An interesting intervention into Giddens' Structuration Theory, and more particularly into Sewell's conceptualization of agency, specifically in regards to historical analysis, is the intervention by Anna Krylova (2023). While he states that all have the equal ability to utilize their agency and resources, she argues that the imagining of agency has become too broad of a category and has come to be understood as a universal given and a 'characteristic of all persons.' She contends that this rejects the importance of geopolitical, social, and economic contexts and their relationship with the power dynamics at play. She says while 'agency' raises a new mode of conceptualization, it fails to address conscious intent and the radical re-programming of the 'habitus' that is present in true 'historical protagonists.' She says:

> For, if being an agent means to learn and utilize existing societal rules, norms, conventions, habits of thought, and societal practicalities resourcefully, defiantly, and creatively, I wonder whether the challenge for historians has recently become not to find a historical subject with agency but to find a historical subject without it. How useful is such an indiscriminately expanded category that no longer asks historians to make choices in their analyses? And, second and as importantly, the novelty of the present situation consists of the possibility to identify affirmatively—that is, without reservation—historical protagonists' learned societal competence as agentic (ibid., 885-6).

She continues and elaborates on her thesis through a layered Marxist lens that explains the theoretical (and in some sense practical) conundrum in understanding true agency, one that consists of more than a daily social negotiation process. The act of contesting, renegotiating, and defying, where individuals repurpose their values, ideas, and institutional knowledge as tools of resistance, much like contemporary figures, has long been a source of theoretical and political unease. This unease was rooted in a core Marxist concern: that people's ability to navigate society, whether in daily life or revolutionary struggle, is inherently shaped by social structures and, therefore, ideologically conditioned. As a result, this competence not only mediates their understanding of themselves and the world but also reinforces existing power structures. In other words, resisting and reshaping the conditions of one's oppression does not necessarily mean breaking free from their ideological underpinnings or generating entirely new ideological frameworks of power and knowledge. However, this specific Marxist anxiety has largely faded from contemporary discourse (ibid.).

According to Krylova (2023), the question and conceptualization of agency cannot be divorced from the widely accepted fact that this agency is built on a foundation of ideologically coded knowledge bank as well as from a (different) contexts made of different resources and scripts. She explains that the notion that individuals can only exercise agency using "existing cultural tools" shaped by forces beyond their control and within "certain [ideological] parameters" that limit their possibilities. She says "This expanded contemporary view of human agency, however, carries a significant—and arguably conservative—limitation. While it has enabled scholars to

examine a vast array of human actions and strategies, it has also marginalized the idea of individuals as active agents in creating structural and ideological changes. What has been sidelined, then, is the radical essence of agency and politics: not just how people navigate, resist, or adapt to cultural constraints, but how they reshape those constraints and transform dominant ideologies (ibid, 886-7)."

This very important point when considering agency and agentic activity is certainly worth investigating further within the context of both history as well as structural transformation. She is careful not to remove agency as a 'human characteristic,' but emphasizes that the 'human characteristic' discussed may refer to a different concept rather than agency and agentic activity. I understand her argument as an emphasis on agency as a 'human capability' instead, and in order to be understood as 'agency' it must contend with disrupting the overarching ideological positions of any given context. Furthermore, the main contention that structural change cannot always be possible solely through 'the use of one's agency' is imperative, particularly under the context of a neopatriarchy or generally authoritarian form of governance. Historical protagonists under these contexts undergo a frequently repeated use of their agency in a radical way through practically and ideologically reforming (usually a need to entirely destroy) oppressive structures. In this sense, we cannot only interpret and experience the world, we must change it too. Agency must be able to imagine a world outside the superstructures of oppression, a structural overturning. Agency as it is frequently theorized, reads as a neoliberal term that 'forecloses such change by confusing adaptation (a type of agency) as power (Hasso, Personal Communication, 2025).' The personal and physical risk is considered, and in some way, it is a prerequisite to structural transformation. This is certainly true and relevant in the majority of contexts, but in the face of centuries long gendered oppression within such socio-political proliferation of this 'ideology' the likelihood of a 'true agent' appearing is unlikely under the current status quo. It echoes the framework of power and resistance to power imagined by Foucault in that resisting structures cannot exist outside the structure. However, the creative and, often risky, ways in which women negotiate despite this cannot be disregarded. Finally, as she deepens the question of agency, it becomes apparent that assuming 'agency' as an inherent human capacity erodes the absolute importance of questioning context and thus why oppressive structures are reproduced.

If Krylova questions whether daily negotiations can ever dismantle patriarchy, Saba Mahmood's research answers by showing how agency can preserve it. Egyptian women's pious practices, though agentic, rely on patriarchal frameworks (e.g., male-led mosques, gendered interpretations of scripture). Their 'docile agency' thus exemplifies Krylova's argument: patriarchal systems absorb dissent by rewarding compliance, ensuring their reproduction.

Mahmood's work (2005) provides a point of union for agency and reproduction and contention with structure through her research on women in Egypt. In some lens, she explains that while it may apparently seem that an individual, specifically women in the Arabic-speaking world, may be reinforcing 'oppressive' ideology (here referring to Islamic piety), in the case of the women she interviews, it is the contrary. In their individual cases many of their family members were non-practicing or areligious. Thus they were largely required to dislocate and subsequent from their (familial) dominant ideological frameworks and in essence advocate for their right to piety. In a 2011 interview reflecting on her anthropological method, Mahmood restates her commitment to decentering Western assumptions:

> The traditional aim of socio-cultural anthropology was to study the primitive other in order to reflect upon the peculiarity and often superiority of Western cultural and social norms... [Anthropologists] moved to think critically about the question of difference not just cultural difference but how different histories, traditions, and arrangements of power force people to live and experience life in heterogeneous ways (Schneider and Mahmood, 2011).

This framing allows Mahmood to challenge the moral posturing common in mainstream feminist critiques of Muslim women's religiosity. Rather than cast pious adherence as inherently submissive, she insists on a more nuanced reading of agency, one that includes discipline, self-cultivation, and the ethical striving that occurs within, rather than against, normative systems. She says:

> To the extent that feminist scholarship emphasizes this politically subversive form of agency, it has ignored other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not

> captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse (Mahmood, 2005, 153–154).

She proposes an expanded understanding of agency, not as something that only emerges in opposition to power but as something constituted through practices. Desires and emotions are not simply expressed through action; they are shaped by it.

Her concept of 'docile agency' encompasses this; where agency operates not through defiance, but through submission, discipline, and ethical cultivation within a religious framework. This directly critiques liberal feminist paradigms that equate agency solely with resistance:

> The analytical separation of the subject from the traces of power that constitute it... forecloses an inquiry into the specific mechanisms by which subordination is sustained and challenged... In the context of the mosque movement, the women's practices of piety suggest a different understanding of agency... located in the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited... This form of agency... is about the cultivation of a virtuous self through practices of discipline and submission to divine will (ibid., 14–15).

Mahmood's work destabilizes the binary between resistance and subordination. While liberal feminist frameworks often associate agency with resistance, Mahmood reveals how disciplined piety can constitute agency without opposing power. Yet, this form of agency, rooted in religious submission and its ethical framework, does not dismantle patriarchal structures; rather, it can **operate** through them.

This directly complements Krylova's argument that what appears as agency may not challenge oppressive structures but be subsumed by it. Oppressive systems, of which patriarchy is included, as she suggests, absorb dissent not by erasing it, but by rewarding forms of compliance that reinforce their logic. Mahmood's concept of 'docile agency,'s illustrates this point, as she writes, "action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them (Mahmood, 2005, 157)."

Practices like veiling or prayer, then, may represent meaningful self-formation, but they do so within structures that remain intact. Mahmood does not deny agency here, but redefines its

contours. Krylova pushes this further, questioning whether such actions can even be called agentic if they ultimately serve the reproduction of patriarchal systems.

What emerges is not a celebration of 'empowerment', but a reckoning: that agency and complicity are not exact opposites. Women's embrace of religious norms can carry moral weight and personal transformation, but still reinscribe patriarchal boundaries. It is precisely this contradiction between internal conviction and external structure that complicates narratives of liberation. Mahmood shows agency within power; Krylova asks if that still counts.

Building on this, Joseph (2012) offers an intervention: feminist scholarship often conflates agency (observable actions) with intentionality (the motivations and relational contexts that precede and accompany action). She writes: "Agency, as it is approached, is attached to the subject in the aftermath of observing actions. Intentionality invites a probe into before and during actions (ibid., 1)."

She critiques the classical psychoanalytic frame, especially Freud's drive theory, for treating intention as a biologically determined outcome: pleasure-seeking, reproduction, instinct. That logic folds neatly into "Cartesian dualisms" that separate the mind from the body, the rational from the emotional, and in doing so, misses the social terrain where decisions actually unfold. In contexts like Jordan, what looks like an individual choice is often shaped by fears of social punishment, family shame, economic vulnerability, or even love and acceptance. That act doesn't necessarily signal false consciousness or betrayal; it could just as easily reflect a careful negotiation of harm. This reframing problematizes the binary lens that so often dominates feminist readings. When a mother insists her daughter avoid certain behaviors or adhere to a particular dress code, we're not witnessing submission or resistance in a vacuum. We're seeing an attempt (however constrained) to protect, to guide, or to minimize damage. Mahmood's exploration of women in piety movements similarly complicates the story: what liberal feminism might read as passive obedience might instead be a deeply intentional cultivation of ethical selfhood. The question isn't whether such acts are liberatory by Western standards, but how intentionality is shaped through, and not outside of, structure. Joseph problematizes tropes that depict Arab women through stereotyping (one way or the other), emphasizing the need for methodologies that consider the dynamism between individual agency and collective

relationality. Importantly she asks, “Can feminists understand how oppressed women are oppressed; respond to oppression; are complicit in oppression; may not see actions as oppression; may not experience oppression; may oppress others; resist oppression—and how they understand for themselves all the above, without understanding intentionality? (2012, 3-4).”

Joseph’s intervention parallels Foucault’s understanding of power as productive and relational, not merely repressive. Power, for Foucault, operates through dispersed networks and produces the very subjects it governs. This conceptualization centers on how power is not only repressive but also (re)productive, creating subjects who internalize and reproduce dominant ideologies. In this same vein, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault develops the concept of biopower, which regulates populations through norms rather than explicit control. He says, “Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (Foucault, 1978, 93).” Later formalizing the concept of biopower and politics a concept useful for analyzing not only the gendered subordination that takes place in the Arab-speaking world and Global South generally, but the imperialist, neocolonial, mechanisms of regulating bodies of all people in the region; this was highlighted in the previous chapter specifically control through gendered bodily rights, for example. Through these mechanisms, institutions and systems condition individuals to reproduce societal structures, embedding power relations into the fabric of daily life.

Foucault also complicates traditional understandings of agency by illustrating how power and resistance are defacto intertwined. He contends that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault, 1978, 95).” What this means is that acts of resistance are themselves shaped by the same power structures they oppose, thus reproducing, even while challenging, existing norms. For instance, resistance to gendered labor within capitalist systems may contest specific practices without dismantling the underlying framework of exploitation, much like Sharabi’s conceptualizations on neopatriarchy. By situating power within networks of relationships, Foucault shows how systems perpetuate themselves not only through compliance but also through contested agency, thus sustaining cycles of social reproduction.

Resistance does not emerge from a space outside of power but from within it. Women who live "double lives," publicly conforming to gendered expectations while privately subverting them, illustrate this entanglement of constraint, likely a reproduction of patriarchy, as well as intentionality. Their choices may not be overtly rebellious, yet they are neither fully complicit. Joseph pushes us to ask: can we understand Arab women's complicity in gender hierarchies without flattening their motivations into submission? And can we make sense of their resistance without necessitating it to behave as liberatory?

By integrating Foucault's insights with these differing feminist perspectives, it becomes evident that individual agency is both constrained and constructed by pervasive power relations. These power dynamics are reproduced through daily practices and institutional structures, perpetuating social hierarchies and limiting the potential for transformative change. Foucault's framework, combined with feminist analyses, offers a wholesome lens for understanding the complexities of social reproduction and the tensions between power, resistance, and agency.

While often framed as a detriment within gendered analyses, given its occurrence within and between (neo)patriarchal structure, negotiation in these contexts can, as scholars like Saba Mahmood (2005), Fadil (2011), Abu-Lughod (2013), Rawat (2014), and Kabeer (2016), for example, have shown, offers space for exercising agency and personal freedom. These negotiations are not easy, nor should they be romanticized, but in the face of rigid patriarchal authority, they carry weight and consequence. Recognizing them as meaningful gains, without glorifying or dismissing the compromises required, demands a more nuanced lens (Dayan-Herzbrun, 2005). Ultimately, what these thinkers offer is a vital reorientation of agency itself: not as a binary between submission and empowerment, but as a complex, relational terrain shaped by power, affect, survival, and history. In this framework, actions cannot be understood in isolation from the intentions, constraints, and ethical landscapes that give rise to them.

Bargaining in the Neopatriarchy

While Sewell and Bourdieu theorize how social structures are reproduced through schemas and habitus, Sharabi's neopatriarchy reveals what specific structures sustain gendered oppression in Arab societies. The mukhabarat state apparatus, familial guardianship laws,

and schizophrenic cultural demands (piety vs. modernity) create a system where women's daily negotiations reproduce patriarchy even as they seek autonomy; Sharabi highlights coercive institutional power as a key reproductive mechanism.

This work was expanded upon or applied by different authors and has since become a useful tool for analysis and often couples well with Butler's thesis of the performativity of gender (1999, 2004, 2011) when thinking about today's (neo)patriarchal bargain. It is a meeting point to deepen the concept of 'habitus' as a potential propellent for social change. In the scope of this work, however, it has come to be understood as a slow, unremarkable, process (often influenced by the general social/geopolitical context) that can accumulate into a change that is not necessarily radical but does immediately benefit the individual; there is no replacement for top-down structural changes.

The context of the (neo)patriarchy, particularly in the Arab-speaking world, it is difficult to both identify as well as isolate the structures within a system as they are both constantly in flux and interacting/reinforcing one another.

In this context, women's actions are not simply acts of resistance or submission but are part of an ongoing, negotiated bargain, a micro-level navigation that I refer to as the **individual (neo)patriarchal bargain**. While these negotiations might yield some personal benefit or intergenerational shift, they rarely prompt radical structural change. Instead, they illustrate how agency is constrained by, and simultaneously reproduces, coercive norms. Even as women engage with mechanisms of patriarchy whether by adapting to, or subtly contesting, imposed roles the broader system remains largely unaffected, a point that resonates with Krylova's critique of agency and Mahmood's notion of "docile agency."

Sharabi himself emphasizes the critical, extra-academic role of scholarship in deconstructing this complex order. He writes of his intention not merely to catalogue the attributes of neopatriarchal society but to offer new analytical perspectives and vocabulary useful for its dismantling. In highlighting the "longing, regret, and mourning" that fracture this society, he illuminates how neopatriarchy also functions as a negative, dialectical concept that shapes both institutions and the psychology of those subjected to them.

The neopatriarchal state is not traditional, nor fully modern. It lacks the communal cohesion of *Gemeinschaft* and the rational organization of *Gesellschaft*. As Sharabi writes:

> Neopatriarchy, from the standpoints of both modernity and traditionality, is neither modern nor traditional... It is an entropic social formation characterized by its transitory nature and by specific kinds of underdevelopment and nonmodernity—visible in its economy and class structure as well as its political, social, and cultural organization... riven by inner contradictions and conflicts—torn, as a contemporary Lebanese writer put it, by 'longing, regret, and mourning (Sharabi, 1988, 4).

This *longing* marks the dialectical tension at the heart of the neopatriarchal condition , not simply a political structure, but a negative philosophical abstraction. Its contradictions reflect not only institutional failure but psychological fragmentation. These contradictions are made most visible in the figure of the petty bourgeoisie, where modern and traditional values coexist without synergy:

> In this class can be found the most contradictory values and tendencies coexisting without conscious resolution or synthesis, producing the kind of disjointed and contradictory structures and practices that are most typical of this society (ibid., 8).

One of the most enduring features of this formation is the centrality of the *mukhabarat*, or internal security apparatus, a key component of what Sharabi calls the “two-state” system:

> A two-state system prevails in all neopatriarchal regimes, a military-bureaucratic structure alongside a secret police structure, and the latter dominates everyday life, serving as the ultimate regulator of civil and political existence (ibid., 7).

In practice, this leads to a culture of internalized surveillance, a psychology of self-censorship and double (or triple) lives, particularly among women who must constantly navigate familial, societal, and state-imposed constraints. This fracturing of the self is not simply a gendered experience but it is profoundly gendered in its consequences. The modernized façade of civil legal systems, which claim gender neutrality, simultaneously uphold male guardianship, restrict female mobility, and erode women’s access to public power. The Arab ‘petty bourgeoisie, he

argues, most vividly embodies this duality, modernity's aspirations and traditionalism's constraints in unresolved and often dissonant ways.

This process of gendered containment is not accidental. In Sharabi's reading, it was a postcolonial strategy of control, a masculinization of national identity (Massad, 2001) aimed at restoring patriarchal authority in the wake of colonial humiliation. It implements 'external conditions' under the guise of national development while structurally disempowering women.

Gallagher's (2007) analysis of women in rural Syria applies Sewell's theory of structure and agency to explore how gendered work is negotiated:

> It specifies the centrality of social position and of power in relation to gender, class, and education, to structure and form the limits of human agency. Moreover, it highlights the centrality of deeply held moral frameworks about what is good and right for women and their families in the process of obtaining and managing resources (244).

This reinforces the idea that agency is always situated; bound by structural limits and cultural schemas, but also capable of generating new forms of social meaning. However, in contexts marked by sharp surveillance, legal inequity, and deep-rooted patriarchal codes, the space for agency is narrow. The battle, as this study shows, is often subversive, incremental, and waged within private life rather than through organized mass movements.

Krylova's notion of the "historical protagonist," the rare figure who shifts the course of collective history, may emerge at times. But in the contemporary moment, particularly in Jordan and Palestine, gendered transformation tends to occur at the level of the micro: in the slow reshaping of habitus, the reconfiguration of familial relations, and the muted refusal to conform. These are the contradictory inheritances of the neopatriarchal condition, at once a site of stagnation and the shadow of possibility.

Yet even this process is fraught. The same bargain that allows for partial autonomy can also reproduce oppression. For example, embodying both religious piety and Western beauty standards reflects the schizophrenic demands placed on Arab women. These contradictions are not anomalies; they are essential to how neopatriarchy reproduces itself. It is precisely through

this capacity to hold and normalize contradiction that the system sustains its power. The (neo)patriarchal bargain does not immediately change the broader social context of gendered oppression in a radical way, but it does, often, within the smallest unit of social interaction; the family. This can potentially work upwards to affect the tribal/clan perceptions and relationships with women, however, what is most likely to occur, probably a lesser observed trend, is the intergenerational change that happens as a result. It seems that, in line with the character of neo-patriarchy and its contradictions, a neopatriarchal bargain can also lead to contradictory results, or a contradictory use of agency that can lead to an outcome in the 'negative.'

Marriage, Feigned Piety, Education & Employment

The following two subsections, a discussion of the interview responses through narrative discourse analysis highlights the **main** findings, in sum:

First, all the interview participants cite an increase of personal liberties vis-a-vis their mothers; this indicates that (sub)structural change is taking place within the home on an intergenerational level. This change indicates an increased awareness and effort of older generations of women to relieve some of the social pressures from their daughters. Certainly this is not the case in every household context, however, this has been elaborated upon from the perspectives of the research participants. This finding is not one that is usually recorded but has come to be understood as a 'change of times' influenced by both internal and external factors.

Second, the internet in tandem with capital demand has elicited significant amounts of socio-cultural change due to actors being exposed to new knowledge as well as demands, leading to a change in habitus, morphing certain structures and thus substructural change. This relates in some ways to a lower fertility rate (particularly amongst the 'petty bourgeoisie' but also national trends show a general decline since the 1970's (more prominent in Jordan than in Palestine).

Third, socio-economic situations, or 'class,' is much more malleable than conceived in the sense that an individual, particularly in an economically unstable region, can belong to

different ‘classes,’ in their lifetimes. This means, in the context of the women interviewed, that certain bargaining processes can be bypassed with financial means. This is also visible through high levels of education and a need for a dual income household to sustain a certain quality of life. For example, the phenomenon of domestic labor being outsourced is highly common in the region across the board.

The first part analyzes both the neopatriarchal bargaining process in detail, the following section then draws on substructual social changes that have developed (discussed by interview participants) and though I make no claim of a directly causal relationship, the discussions highlight that changing *habitus* (and schemas) have contributed.

The changing nature of the world itself specifically in context to gender, and particularly considering the rapid change that has occurred over the last few decades has caused women internationally, as well as their specified local contexts to innovate ways of dealing with their counterparts.

The discussion section will highlight substructural changes to inter family relations/dynamics in context to women, substructural changes with regards to education and employment, and personal liberties; all conducted through a bargaining process and a morphing habitus.

In this section, the findings highlight other themes of oppression, which I have understood to fall under certain categories as sub-structures, though within the Palestinian and Jordanian contexts, they can even be understood as separate structures as well. There are frequent overlaps between topics that indicate a fluidity in mechanisms of both oppression and resistance. This section highlights the multiplicity of both structure and perspective and provides insight into the way an individual's schema and habitus can morph accordingly. It focuses on both ‘agency’ of the actors, as well as, within this context, a lack of autonomy to exercise this agency in predictable ways.

In one way or another, research participants understood the concept of (neo)patriarchal bargaining, and many explained it as an ongoing, daily process particularly through the lens of

‘personal sacrifice’. While not all the participants understood it in a theoretical sense, many related to the process – ‘the patriarchy’ in general seems to have affected all the participants interviewed.

(Neo)Patriarchal bargaining is understood contextually as a necessity for survival and independence; this suggests it is much more common practice and thus greatly varies from woman to woman. It implies concessions to values, behaviors, and decisions, in exchange for others due to the highly oppressive gendered environment. In exchange, women are able to attain their personal priorities within the constraints of the patriarchal structures working against them.

Furthermore, while many women use this tool within the households, the majority of the participants cited that much of their bargaining is done to appease society, and in turn protecting them from harm to their ‘reputation’ as well as their families. It is important to note that, in Arab society generally, and particularly in the Jordanian (slightly less so in the Palestinian) contexts, personal decisions do not only affect the individual but the entire family unit. Bint Yasmin (30), a Palestinian (Jerusalemite) mother of one, and a PhD candidate living in Germany, explains the consciousness needed in order to walk this metaphorical tight-rope. She says:

> Since I was a girl I often felt so judged and restricted in what I could do or what I can’t do. I was made to feel like all that mattered about me was my “reputation.” In other ways, I was often also made to feel like the outside world was full of men ready to harass you and as a result I had to make sure I’m covered, I don’t stay out at night, I am not alone, etc. that in itself was very oppressing. Then when I was single, graduated and working, I also felt pressures that I had to settle and so on. What was very bad during that time was men my age were just as judgmental as the women, it often felt if you sexually rejected them, they would try to destroy you - of course through tarnishing your “reputation” (Personal Communication, 2022).

Reputation in the Arab context is important; it refers to a family’s standing in society. Whether they are respected or not, based on values such as politeness and generosity, education, modesty, success, and oftentimes religiosity too, amongst other factors. The public perception of each

individual member of the household contributes to the perception of the family as a whole. Generally, families in the region maintain close contact with both paternal and maternal extended family members. Additionally, it is not uncommon for families as whole to befriend other families. These friendships and connections are maintained intergenerationally. As such, the fabric of society in the region is significantly more closely knit than their Western counterparts and the notion of collectives, on this social level, is more pronounced. Sacrifice remains a foreign concept for many, particularly among Western societies. Yet, as recent events in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon reveal, sacrifice is often essential for survival in neo-imperial contexts. This necessity also extends to micro-level settings, where the survival of the collective, whether within a family, extended kin networks, or even the state, depends on acts of sacrifice.

Women are quite aware of their status as second-class citizens in the state which in turn can make them perceived as liabilities in the society and family units. In this sense, our every action, our very existence, and where we assert our agency, is not simply a bargain, but often a challenge to patriarchal structures. This implies that any woman or girl, wishing to conduct an activity that breaches socio-cultural norms will have to do so using the bargaining process to allow for a layer of protection, and oftentimes keep the matter completely hidden. Expert research participant, Nermeen Murad-Garlick, who has decades of experiences working on gender in Jordan and Palestine explains:

> The pressure is so persistent on women to conform and to stay under the control of their parents or male siblings, husbands and the men of the family under the social formula of what is honorable behavior and acceptable of women. We therefore find women are making some concessions in order to gain some freedom, especially freedom of movement and to study (Personal Communication, 2022).

This brings to light what many women referred to as leading a ‘double life,’ so to speak: a coping mechanism for living in a neo-patriarchal society, which will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. However, this highlights that the process of bargaining is a coping mechanism which cuts through class and other contextual differences, though, it is important to

insist that economic well-being is a clear bonus to the bargaining power a woman has, as well as her age and upbringing.

The data suggests that marriage functions as a (neo)patriarchal bargain and even within these constraints, women remain compelled to negotiate its terms, revealing both their agency and the structural limitations they navigate. While there are internal and external pressures to marry, women are still mandated to choose from a specific pool of potential partners. The threefold bargain consists of: marriage as a pathway to independence, marriage with a partner approved by one's primary household, and marriage as a negotiated route to motherhood. It is important to emphasize that the adoption of minimum legal ages for marriage and intercourse, globally and in both Jordan and Palestine, has contributed to expanding women's bargaining power in this domain. As several participants noted (such as Bint Najla and Bint Sophia, Personal Communication, 2022), previous generations were often married shortly after their first menstruation, becoming mothers well before reaching what is now considered the legal threshold.

Today, marriage as a bargain has changed significantly, though it still remains a bargain. A predominant aspect of this negotiation that was raised by multiple participants is that many women marry before they are ready in order to gain independence from the pressures and restrictions of their primary household. A 27 year-old participant from Ramallah, Palestine, explains:

> The biggest bargain was getting married; I am not allowed to live alone or have a boyfriend, live away from my city. Getting married gave me a larger margin of freedom to express myself more. There is still a mentality that the husband is the head of the household, and in turn the 'governor (translated from Arabic)' of his wife. Although I have to say my family does not really think this way, they still limit what I can and cannot do. But the boundaries have widened from my parents, however slightly (Bint Aysha, Personal Communication, 2022).

This holds true for the vast majority of women in Palestine and Jordan; the notion of a woman living on her own is not a commonplace occurrence with the exceptions of studying or employment abroad and marriage.

Bint Aisha (29), her unwed counterpart in Gaza explains, “Most girls do get married to get more independent but I feel like with my generation women are much more daring and outspoken no matter how much conservative their families are. I see them traveling and moving abroad - which wasn’t a ‘thing’ 20 years ago (Personal Communication, 2022).”

While this highlights an increased fluidity and leniency, she also adds that in her context, as she is still unwed she feels that the, “Biggest pressure is to get married, [my mother] says that I am the one who helps her the most in life, meaning that she does appreciate me being thoughtful and helpful, but I still feel [her] resentment about marriage. In her defense she wants me to be happy and not end up alone (ibid.).”

We find internal pressures to marry in exchange for independence, but also to relieve pressures from the primary household to wed, indicating that women are still viewed as economic and legal liabilities. However, despite the domestic pressure, it is still a practical impossibility for women to have relationships, to date men, before they marry. This is true across classes, but particularly relevant to lower-income households. This is very much due to a cultural fixation on a woman’s virginity. Her sexuality is not to be displayed in any way for fear of acknowledging sexual activity. Sexual expression is not just ‘frowned upon’, it is often familially, socially, and legislatively punished. While this is theoretically true for both genders, women receive a disproportionate amount of attention and therefore garner more visceral reactions. Again, as women are viewed and treated as ‘dependents’ for the entirety of their existence, at the very least within a legal framework, they are often viewed as objects, and not subjects. It is not uncommon for women to be shunned, disowned, and even killed for referencing a sexual life. This is also applicable in relation to sexuality; homosexuality is severely punished. As a result, an individual’s sexual expression is only ever done so in privacy for the sake of security.

Bint Nadia (24), from a much more liberal household and fiscally secure background, explains:

> In relation to marriage, for example, she insists that I get to know the man well before marrying him. I agree, and tell her that I would like to travel and maybe live with my partner before settling down. She has mixed feelings on the subject but insists that I keep it very hidden and only tell her. I have to point out in our case it doesn't come from religion but cultural tradition. It is a very rigid worldview on the judgment of our society on women that are independent in this sense (Personal Communication, 2022).

She adds that her male siblings are not subject to this and it is no issue for them to live with their partner, for example, before marriage. This double standard certainly exists, and in this case, as many others, men are not as limited. However, this is more applicable for individuals living abroad; in many Arab states it is still illegal to live with the opposite sex if unwed (for example).

Bint Shadda (27), very recently married, adds:

> Even a negotiation with my mother, for example, dating. Dating when I was younger wasn't really too acceptable because it's separate from marriage and doesn't immediately imply marriage. It's just something you do for experience which doesn't really seem 'correct' to her (Personal Communication, 2022).

As such, despite both the internal and external pressures finding and choosing the right partner is encompassed with barriers; though in tandem, the median age for marriage has increased highlighting some sort of structural change (Jordanian DoS, 2018).

The 2018 report cites:

> Just over half (56%) of women in Jordan age 15-49 are married. Fifteen percent of women age 25-49 were married by age 18 and 30% were married by age 20. Women marry at a median age of 22.7. Men (age 30- 59) marry about 5 years later, at a median age of 27.9. There is some variation in age at first marriage by nationality: Jordanian women marry at a median age of 22.9, while the median age of first marriage among

> Syrians is 3 years earlier, at 19.6. Women have their first birth at a median age of 24.6. Median age at first birth is also young.

For clarification the legal age for men and women to wed is 18 years-old; however, as a report from French NGO, Terres des Hommes (TdH) indicates:

> The minimum legal age for marriage in Jordan is 18 years, however, according to Personal Status Law (No 36) of 2010, Article 10, marriages can be registered in Shari'a courts with permission from a court judge from 15 years of age under 'exceptional circumstances' (Hutchison (for TdH), 2020).

Previous generations, as highlighted by one 'outlier' research participant in her sixties, explains that her mother was married by the age of 14 and had her first child at 16 (Bint Najla, Personal Communication, 2022). This was also echoed by participants that discussed the experiences of their grandmothers (for example Bint Nehal, Personal Communication, 2022). They discussed the absolute deprivation of choice that existed in the context of marriage. Women had no say in who they married, when they married, and when they became mothers; this has significantly improved today and research participants displayed an awareness of this fact. Most women, particularly the younger research participants, indicated that choice of partner, and a woman's ability to choose for herself in general, has widened. This implies that through external change women today, at the very least, have increasing bargaining power.

For example, Bint Yasmin's experience highlights how there is more space vis-à-vis previous generations, but still within a web of oppressive structures. She says:

> When it came to my husband (who is German and Christian), my father did ask that he convert to Islam on paper, he asked for us to conduct the engagement-marriage ceremony in Jerusalem. My husband did so as well, for me really. But my father insisted on this so people don't talk about us/me. So, even though he is open minded in terms of me studying outside, living by myself, there were some things he was often worried about.

> It's ironic because my dad claims he is an atheist but it did matter to him that my husband is at least on paper a "Muslim" (Personal Communication, 2022).

In this instance, while it was acceptable to marry a foreigner outside of the household faith, it was done with clear concessions. This also highlights social pressures, outside of the home, revolving around the concept of social 'reputation' over personal belief systems.

There is also another perspective that was raised, and while may not be overtly, directly related, likely contributes to the pressures of marriage as a bargain. Adoption, in the Western sense, is not permitted regionally (for example Büchler and Kayasseh 2018) (fostering is accepted); this implies that the only way a woman can have children is with their husbands. While adoption across the world is often granted to two parent household, it still further limits women in living lives of their design.

In general, the regional society has not yet adapted to untraditional family models; as such, for the very large majority of women, the traditional route is the only one available to them if they desire to have children. As such, marriage is also a bargain to **motherhood**.

However, as Bint Aysha, Bint Bee, and Bint Yasmin, amongst others, noted above, the independence is palpable and societal judgment significantly lessened upon marriage. Ultimately, marriage is thought of as a tool towards some kind of liberation, but can only come to fruition through concessions.

Overt religiosity in many communities in Jordan and Palestine is a necessity for women in particular. As the entirety of these subcommunities conform to this tradition, one not necessarily rooted in religious belief, but rather a mandate of group behavior, in many cases both women and men conform to a certain standard of public habitus. For women and men this standard revolves largely around the concept of modesty and respectability. Modesty implies a certain dress code for both men and women; men are expected to dress modestly too - in some subcommunities, shorts, for example, are frowned upon. Men are also not permitted to wear gold-colored jewelry. Other subcommunities, such as the bedouins, for example, have both genders wearing traditional

garments. For women, no skin is to be exposed other than the hands, feet, and face/hair; this is not applicable across the contexts. In capital cities, such as Amman and Ramallah, it is significantly less pronounced. It is also worth noting that in the below cases the pressures are societal and not wholly familial nor religious.

This is best highlighted by participants from or living in Gaza where marginalization of the entire community has led to religiosity through dominant, widely-respected, resistance movements against the blockade and the occupation. Bint Aisha highlights:

> The pressure to wear the hijab in Gaza is very real! Many families make their daughters wear it because it's the norm here. The exact families that impose this may not mind much if these girls remove it abroad. When you live in a society where more than 97% of women wear it then it would make your life significantly harder not to wear it (Personal Communication, 2022).

She also adds, "I know many girls who removed it after getting married and they're parents didn't object. These same parents believe that if they're daughters don't wear the hijab it decreases their chances to get married (ibid)."

Bint Bee (31), a former Gazan resident, now working as a teacher in Belgium, adds:

> I can also say that I wore the hijab when I was in university in Gaza just to be able to move around freely without any harassment on the street, or not, because I still got into terrible situations. Other than that I think I had it fair (Personal Communication, 2022).

It becomes a matter of personal well-being to adopt in-group behavior (Tajfel and Turner 1979) to add a layer of safety in society. Oftentimes, parents will insist on this behavior not out of religiosity but, in this instance, perceived social necessity.

She included that, "I would say that I was lucky enough to have a good amount of freedom to live my life and make my own choices but as someone who grew up in a patriarchal society these

choices that I made were never extreme especially when I was living in the region, I never disturbed the peace let's say (ibid.)”

This of course differs across the context of cities and governorates, but it emphasizes a social pressure to conform to overt religiosity as a protective social mechanism; one that exists across numerous national contexts. There exists an impression that women will be harassed to a lesser extent if they are perceived as conservative. Of course, this does not in any way ensure the safety of women, as noted above, in a meaningful way.

This highlights a clear bargain with patriarchal structures, in this case culture and state (to an informal extent). It is also imperative to note that in religion and in the state contexts of the research participants, wearing the veil is not imposed or mandatory in a legislative manner as was the case in Saudi Arabia for example. In tandem, there is not much in legislation that protects women either.

To highlight the *social* stressor this actually is, Bint Bee explains, “I started to make different decisions once I moved to Europe with my family. For example, I moved out of my parents house and had more privacy. I would have never been able to do that back home (ibid.)”

This important information stresses a salience in regards to religiosity, in some households, according to the environment an individual or a household exists in.

Finally, Bint Aysha, describes her experience in growing up in Ramallah:

> My biggest trauma was having to wear a hijab in the 8th grade. I wore it as a bargain, not for myself but for the entire family to be safe from gossip. Particularly, my younger sisters had a new layer of protection, in that they were not obliged to wear it as me doing so was enough to spare the entire family's ‘reputation’ (Personal Communication, 2022).

In this instance, the eldest daughter of a family, was obligated, very much against her will, to wear the hijab to display not only her religiosity and modesty, but that of her siblings as well as

the remainder of her family. Though she did not have much say in the matter, she explains that she did not have to wear it for too long, she is no longer veiled, and in turn her sisters were not obligated to do so.

As previously mentioned education in the region is well ingrained; the literacy rate in Jordan is roughly 98.5 percent and in Palestine 99 percent; furthermore, the rate of higher education is impressive for both (Qumsiyeh & Issac, 2012). A significant amount of the population are also bilingual or trilingual as a result of colonial legacies. In recent generations women have been seeking and excelling at obtaining academic opportunities domestically and internationally.

Today this fact has evolved socially, it presents as both a necessity but also a symbol of social status. This ‘schema’ is used in today’s neopatriarchal bargaining process as a tool of increased bargaining power depending on the nature and extent of the education. The data shows that education as a bargain is multifaceted quite similarly to marriage as a bargain. While the simplest model of this explains that women seek education opportunities domestically and locally to improve their social and economic standing, and in turn create more bargaining power for themselves; the dynamic can be more complex.

To highlight the importance of education and work, and a type of ‘bargain’ women must undertake is this chilling example where settler-colonial violence introduces another (major) factor to contend with. In a recent podcast Ma' Hrebat (2024), a member of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in Ramallah, explains how often women are subject to sexual harassment when crossing Israeli ‘checkpoints’ in the West Bank. Many do not disclose these incidents to their spouses, families, or authorities because doing so could trigger protective restrictions from their communities, preventing them from continuing to work or attend school for their safety. One example involved a woman crossing a checkpoint for work: a male soldier stepped out of the camera’s view, exposed himself, and told her to “come here.” This form of coercive violence, deliberately staged as humiliation by Zionist soldiers, operates within the logic of the patriarchal bargain. By remaining silent, women negotiate continued access to mobility and survival under occupation.

An example on the personal efforts towards education and liberty relating to it through bargaining and subsequent socio-economic shift is from a generation preceding the research sample, Bint Najla explains:

> I was the first one in the family to complete a Bachelor's degree, though my sister got an Associate's degree before me. I had a lot of flexibility but it all came with some sort of price. I wasn't allowed to study in the US despite receiving two full scholarships to do so. I was eventually permitted to go study in the UK. My sister and her husband were living there, as well as some colleagues of my father's, where they could theoretically 'keep an eye' on me. Still, I cannot say my mother had even remotely the same upbringing. She was quickly tied down to her husband (as a young teenager) then her children, eventually, after becoming a widow, she had to worry about her children, and very much what society would say to or about her. I am not entirely sure if she even finished 8th grade (Personal Communication, 2022).

In this instance, the participant explains that she did not put the same restrictions on her children and instead put pressure on them to pursue higher education; this highlights how experience, in this case Bint Najla's struggle, can change outcomes for coming generations.
This same negotiation is present today but to a lesser extent;

Bint Shadda explains, "For my Master's degree that took a lot of convincing about two years for it to happen but once it did, I could open the doors for other things; my sister went abroad quite easily once I did. Once I got my PhD funding I was off, so I think it was a matter of opening the door, so to speak (Personal Communication, 2022)." She also explains how her male siblings did not have to face this barrier. Furthermore, she says she was employed for the time leading up to her continuing her education as a 'trade' or bargaining tool as well.

Another form of this bargain that is apparent today, highlighted by several participants, is the utility of education and employment for liberties presented in a multiscalar manner, emphasized here. Bint Aysha explains candidly, "I can't tell you how many times I have had to use intellectual justification for social behavior. i.e. all my activities had to have a level of 'self-benefit.' For example, volunteering at a film festival in another city and staying the night, I

would have to justify this with writing an article and essentially begging, telling them this would be good for my career (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Yet another participant explains that while she was able to pursue higher education, her choice of study was made for her. She says, "I wasted 3.5 years in engineering and then another semester in another engineering major when I didn't even want or like engineering. I switched majors and was late to graduate from management sciences. It took me 10 years to graduate from university but I don't really consider it bad because the way I see things now at work is different (Bint Maya, Personal Communication, 2022)."

In this instance, while self-betterment was encouraged, it came with a cost that removed the participants choice in the matter. While it is clear she eventually moved on to something she was invested in, it was somewhat of a struggle to do so.

And while some women bargain to obtain higher education, for others, it is not much of a choice. Furthermore, as discussed below, the motivation for this pressure is not always in direct favor of the woman. Education has become socially viewed as a form of increased 'status.' Bint Nariman (26), from Ramallah now in the UK, explains:

> My mother grew up in a household where education was important because of social status (class) and my dad grew up with nothing so education was his savior so for different reasons my parents wanted education but it was really pushed on me aggressively, yes largely for status (Personal Communication, 2022).

She adds for context that, "My mother is from a middle upper class family. She also pushed me to learn piano to be more of a lady; And later in life she was in tears when I told her I want to do a PhD because who would marry someone more educated than them? Or how would I find a husband while I was so focused on studying. My dad, because education saved him from staying a *'falah* (translate farmer),' always pushed for me to get a PhD (Personal Communication, 2022)."

The emphasis on education among respondents often reflects a gendered paradox: while higher education is framed as a means of individual empowerment, its value is frequently tied to marriage eligibility rather than personal or professional fulfillment. Across the narratives, parents, especially mothers, position education as a strategic tool, not necessarily for intellectual autonomy but as a mechanism to enhance their daughters' desirability within marriage markets. This duality is particularly pronounced in middle- and upper-class families, where educational attainment is perceived as both an asset and a liability. While a degree signals prestige and class distinction, surpassing a potential husband's educational level disrupts traditional expectations of gendered hierarchy within marriage. The linguistic framing of education as a ‘necessity’ yet a ‘risk’ in these accounts explain the persistent tension between social mobility and patriarchal constraints, shaping how women navigate their aspirations within familial and societal expectations.

Unfortunately, I can personally attest to this phenomenon; while I certainly have unconditional support from my immediate family, unlike many of my peers this is not reflected across the extended family or general social circle. My extended family very frequently preach the same sentiment of being ‘too educated’ for a man, or wasting time with research over finding a partner. This is also a double edged sword, as in order to justify living so far away from my family, they feign pride in my academic pursuits to those inquiring, to preserve my ‘reputation.’

The obstacles and barriers women face within each structure of oppression varies significantly from one case to another; however, it is clear that education is both an obligation and a privilege simultaneously for many. While the methodology of the bargain will differ, women are cognizant of their wants and needs as well as their circumstance and will, if they are able, to bargain towards an education (or its associated freedoms) which they deem fulfilling.

Family Size, Intergenerational Liberties, Resisting and Sustaining Double Standards

A very preliminary point of departure for the research was the statistical indication of a significant decline in family size since the 1970’s. The past half a century saw a slow but

significant decline in what is referred to as the fertility rate (number of children per woman) from 8 children in 1970, to less than 3 children in 2020 in Jordan.

The global trend indicates that since the 1950's the fertility rate has reduced by 50 percent, a report by the WEF:

> In several MENA countries, fertility standstills or even increases in fertility (fertility stalls) have been observed during the transition from high to low fertility (Engelhardt et al., 2018; Krafft et al., 2021). An intriguing observation is that these fertility stalls occur toward the end of the fertility transition (Krafft et al., 2021) and not in the early phases of the transition, like in many sub-Saharan African countries (Schoumaker, 2019). Egypt and Jordan are both interesting cases in this matter. While Egypt experienced a temporary increase in the total fertility rate (TFR) from 3.0 in 2008 to 3.5 in 2014 (Al Zalak & Goujon, 2017; Ambrosetti et al., 2021), Jordan is the first MENA country where a long fertility stall (of around 3.8 children per woman) ended, and since 2012, fertility decline has resumed (Cetorelli & Leone, 2012; Krafft et al., 2021) (Friedrich, 2023, 3).

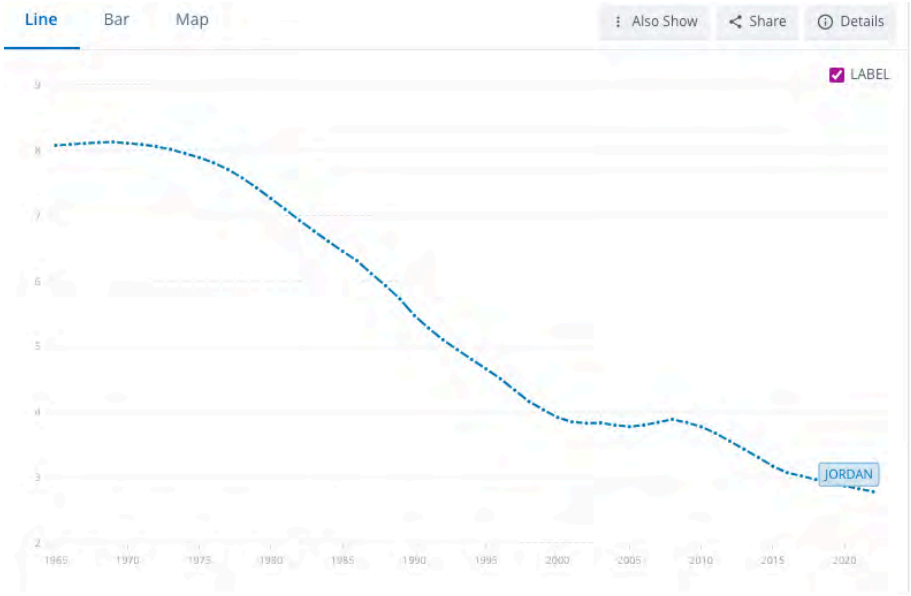

Fig. 3 Fertility Rate in Jordan (1965-2022). Data aggregated from (1) United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision; (2) Statistical databases and publications from national statistical offices; (3) Eurostat: Demographic Statistics.

A 2018 Jordanian Family and Population study created for the national Department for Statistics, provides insights into the shift in family size; the study elaborates on important indicators:

> Currently, women in Jordan have an average of 2.7 children. Fertility declined steadily from 1990 to 2002, stabilised from 2002 to 2012, and decreased again between 2012 and 2017-18. Fertility varies by governorate. Women in Mafraq have the most children (4.1 on average) while women in Amman and Karak have the fewest (2.3). Fertility also differs by nationality. Jordanian women have an average of 2.6 children, while Syrian women have an average of two more children (4.7) (Jordanian DoS, 2018).

The report stresses: "**Fertility decreases household wealth*.** Women in the poorest households have 3.9 children, on average, while women in the wealthiest households have an average of 1.4 children (ibid.)." This is not to say that it is the sole reason for decreased household wealth nor that it is directly causal. Different people in different contexts may have structural issues that perpetuate poverty; for example in certain states where education and general welfare support is provided by governments, fertility rate and poverty indicators remain stable highlighting that multiple factors contribute to poverty. However, a greater number of children to care for equates to greater expenses.

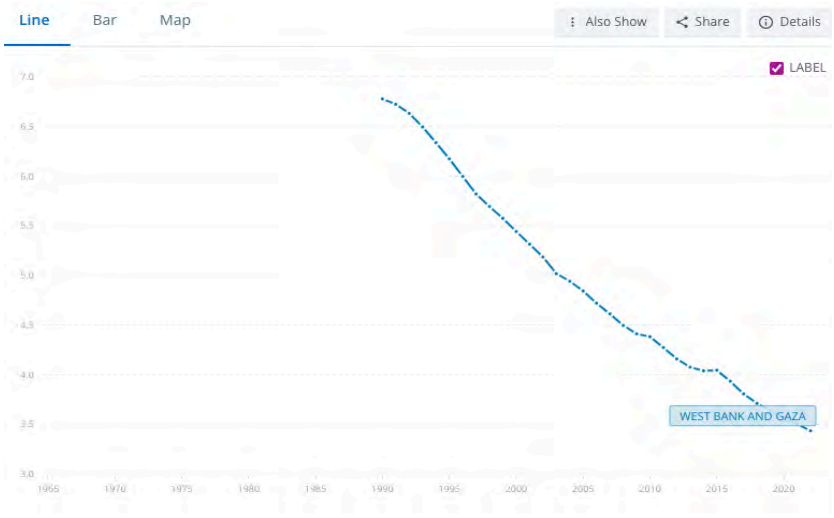

Fig 4. Fertility Rate in West Bank and Gaza (1990-2022). Data aggregated from (1) United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2022 Revision; (2) Statistical databases and publications from national statistical offices; (3) Eurostat: Demographic Statistics.

The trend in Palestine is similar with respect to birth rate; however, as shown below, it is slightly less pronounced. As expert research participant Dr Islah Jad explains, “Boys are needed still specially with the spread of the daily killing of Palestinian youth and the violence inflicted on Palestinians that urge the people to have more children to survive this violence, however, we have the same trend as in Jordan but a lower pace (Personal Communication, 2022).” This demographic ‘battle’ is an on-going battle, as noted by Dr. Jad, for liberation from illegal occupation, and the Palestinian population is acutely aware of Israel's past and present plans to tip the demography in their favor. They attempt, through different measures, to cap the Palestinian population (for example see PCBS 5.7 to 5.5 million from 2022 to 2024). This is primarily done through wanton execution and incarceration of the male population (Abdallah, 2022); furthermore, the Israeli law of ‘Aliyah’ allows for anyone with Jewish heritage to claim Israeli citizenship. More recently with the Russia-Ukraine war, Israel was keen and insistent on only ‘taking in’ Jewish refugees (Sayegh 2022). However, this is met with numerous counter-measures such as the phenomenon of ‘sperm-smuggling’ for example, from incarcerated Palestinian men to their wives (who are later impregnated through artificial insemination the most notable case of Milad, daughter of the late Walid Daqqa).

Kaddoura explains a contradictory phenomenon in a Palestinian population outside of the Occupied Territories and the Gaza Strip. She says, “In Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon for example, the birth rate has shrunk dramatically, and it is hard to see this as anything but a result of a disappointment and distrust in the conditions of the camps, where most children, especially sons, end up seeking refuge or migration in other countries eventually. Investing in one son who would end up working in the gulf makes more sense than spreading your means sporadically over four children (Personal Communication, 2022).”

The women interviewed for this thesis provided further, more nuanced, explanations for their personal choice in reducing the family size. While largely it relates to deteriorating economic conditions, some women raised contributing factors largely revolving around the personal investment in raising children, in some respects, the unpaid labor of child rearing. Others noted the general ‘state of the world today’ as being too unkind to bring new life into it. This emphasizes a changing awareness in tandem with changing external circumstances. But the key point here, for many women, is that the reduction in family size is indeed a **conscious choice facilitated by external factors**.

Bint Siham (28), mother of two, raised in Ramallah, Palestine, and working in the United Arab Emirates, explains that she would like to have as many children as she grew up around, however she isn’t sure if that is a realistic possibility. “Having kids is a lot of responsibility, it’s become very expensive to raise a child, and today’s parenting style is more about quality than quantity,” she says. “I have more aspirations, I imagine, than my mother [there is more to life than being a mother]. I have more stuff going on, sports, travel, and other ambitions. I would like four kids, but it's just not realistic (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Her younger counterpart from Amman, Jordan, Bint Mimi (24), adds that she would have only two children, but more recently she has been avoiding the idea completely. Due to her younger age, her upbringing in the capital city, a stable socio-economic status, and a lessened amount of family pressure she has taken a deep and introspective approach on the topic. She explains, at length, her experience and conclusions. She says:

> Money is a big factor, people don't make as much as they used to; more accurately, the cost of living has gone way up and salaries don't necessarily reflect that. This is the biggest factor determining the size of a family today. For example, my mom's side of the family is her and then seven other siblings. From the seven siblings the average family size has dropped down between two and four kids; no one has more. The family that does have four children are only able to do so because their father works in (something like) the banking sector and has a decent income and as such can afford a family of four children.
>
> Another big change is that both parents are now required to work in order to sustain the needs of the household. A big factor moving women to the workplace is the need for dual income. It makes sense to have a smaller family because there's less time to dedicate to bringing up the children. Very often domestic help is hired especially in the region but still that is just another expense for the children. This also implies people cannot start families as early as they previously did (Personal Communication, 2022).

This puts into perspective the personal thought process, while certainly not identical to all women in Jordan and Palestine, does indicate a shifting social schema in regards to family size; the change in schema, in this case economic pressures, leads to a change in habitus, in the form of women's decision making. Essentially, this economic pressure has allowed, and interpellated, women into the space to contemplate both the financial and personal investments needed to maintain a family. Furthermore, this increased awareness is centering the need of raising physically and psychologically secure children and an effort to relieve future generations of both personal and political traumas they were subject to.

To emphasize this, Bint Aya (25), a half Palestinian and half Belarusian participant, who has lived in Yarmouk Refugee Camp in Syria, in Amman and in Turkey, elaborates on her perspective. She says that she is not keen to have children, citing multiple reasons for this, explaining that she is unsure if she has a 'motherly instinct.' Amongst deeper reasons such as, she is uncertain if she is able to completely give up her 'freedom' *once again* to become a

mother after only recently feeling like she is fully capable of making her own life choices. “I feel but this is true for myself and many other girls that she spends a lot of time in her life trying to grab at her freedom, we become accustomed to living for others rather than ourselves and not often do these girls have a chance to live for themselves. I have had this chance and now I'm not sure how willing I am to let it go by having kids (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Her elder counterpart from southern Jordan living and working in the United Arab Emirates, says:

> Personally, I would like to have a big family for sure, but it depends on who I end up with, it isn’t my choice alone. Today, life is more expensive and in the region particularly, we have just been witnessing trauma generated and re-generated through a repetition of history - it makes women more hesitant than before in making a decision on children. Thankfully, I feel there is no longer a tight timeline on something like meeting your partner or having children. There is no timeline for anything actually, I am trying to live at my own pace (Bint Maya (30), Personal Communication, 2022).

These responses indicate that economic conditions worsen for people all across the globe acting as a vector of interpellation on the subject, which not only considers her conditions and ‘subjective identity’ but also provides a point of structuration through which conscious decisions lead to a reduction in family size. This in turn reduces the amount of unpaid labor women are obligated to perform in their households through a significantly lesser amount of children to dedicate themselves to. This newly obtained ‘free-time’ as well as economic stressors allow women to pursue different goals, namely, education and employment – adding to their cumulative bargaining power.

Two key topics were raised here; first, more liberties extended to women and a subtle but visible change in gender roles in their primary households. Second, while it seems male children are still a ‘priority’ it is less pronounced today than with previous generations. These two indicators point to an increased awareness of the oppression of women and efforts towards gender parity in agency and autonomy within the family unit.

A key finding from the preliminary survey found that resoundingly women cited a different upbringing to that of their mothers. This referred to a greater amount of personal liberty afforded towards the younger generations. While the biggest prompt for this is external factors, it nonetheless, once again, affords mothers more space for their daughters and a shift, however slight, of gender roles.

A great summary of this was provided by Bint Siham, she says:

> My mother's parents wanted to get *her* married and I *chose* to get married, it wasn't forced on me. The fact that my parents raised me to believe that I can conquer the world, I can travel, I can do my combat sports, something my mother couldn't have even dreamt of (Personal Communication, 2022).

This sentiment was echoed by numerous participants highlighting some kind of increased leniency; in many cases, it indicates that the guardians are making conscious choices to allow this. There is a silent and unspoken understanding between women of their unique oppression; in some cases, as will be discussed in the following chapter, the oppression is also simultaneously compounded *by* the women in their lives. Despite this, they are, for the most part, willing, oftentimes forced, to remove these pressures from their children; but only to an extent where they can also 'protect' them as well. Ultimately, as the oppression is a joint experience, women at different stages in their lifetimes will be interpellated by patriarchal ideology, in their own lifetimes they may respond according to their ability. But it appears in many cases, their point of structuration with the patriarchy, where they are capable of encouraging (sub)structural transformation, is presented through the elimination of certain oppressive structures for their kin and children.

She continues to contextualize a possible motivation for mothers, or guardians, to make these changes. She says, on her mother's upbringing:

> Her grandfather lived above them in the same building and was quite psychologically abusive. I was allowed my individuality and she certainly wasn't. Her household was very concerned with the opinions of the extended family and were very traditional. She was quick to marry my father because he doesn't have those values, he is quite open-minded and that was a big advantage to her (ibid.).

This implies that at least one propellant towards this change is the very experience of gender based oppression; one that older generations are slowly refusing to subject the young to. Simultaneously, younger women assert greater entitlement to autonomy, shaped in part by exposure to global discourses through technology and education.

Bint Aya (25), explains:

> I think that not everyone will have those moments of awakening. Let's say it takes a lot of strength and, I think, again, a few privileges and the right tools which I'm sure not everyone has to break the cycle and so it ends up being reinforced over and over (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Maya notes the effort her mother invests into her well-being, despite a disjuncture in belief systems and upbringing. She says:

> The more I spend time with my mother, she is getting to understand what kind of person I am. How I measure success by the fact that I want to be happy, I have plans for my future, I want to travel, move to another new country for work. I am trying to explain all these things to her and she supports it but she doesn't understand it. She never experienced the same thing; it is all new to her. She was married early, and had a family early, and this was her focus in life (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Aysha shares a similar experience, saying:

> I am the complete opposite of my mother in general, she has an affinity for rules and I do not. We were raised differently but largely due to the internet and general expansion of knowledge in my lifetime, the world opened up to each other in my generation. In terms of education, she did study in a local college but I did university and received a Master's abroad as well. She was raised conservatively and so were we, but observably less so (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Khadra echoes the same experiences and sentiments as she expresses the tension between perceived agency and the structural constraints that shape women's lives. While she acknowledges that her grandmother had little choice, her dependence on financial support making autonomy nearly impossible, her family's silence around this reality suggests an effort to uphold the illusion of agency. This generational pattern continues with her mother, whose narrative shifts over time. Initially, she frames motherhood as a choice, aligning with the broader cultural expectation that "good" women naturally desire and accept childbearing. However, her divorce and her husband's behavior force a re-evaluation of this assumption. Her questioning of whether "good things happen to good people" signals a deeper reckoning with the ways in which societal norms mask coercion as choice. Upon confronting personal hardship her mother began to reassess the extent to which their 'choices' were ever truly their own (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Yasmin says, "I had the freedom to marry who I wanted to as did my mother, however despite marrying a Palestinian man to suit my grandfather's wishes it was still difficult for her as she chose her partner rather than he chose for her. My grandfather was tough on my mother in the sense that for example she really wanted to be an interior designer, however my grandfather was completely against and even blocked entirely that he was uncomfortable with her visiting strangers' homes (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Bint Nadia (24), explains, quite accurately, "I think my mothers generation does have a deeper internal conflict, because on the one hand she empowers me greatly and on another she doesn't, in an attempt to protect me. I think they want to be ready for the world as it is today, but they aren't quite there yet (Personal Communication, 2022)."

This effort, created by internal and external factors, signals an internal conflict women in these contexts face; on the one hand, they do not want to subject the young to past pains, on the other they fear that society has not yet caught up to the changes they seek thus risking their security, in some form or another.

In turn, for successful negotiation attempts, in this case allowing space for intergenerational change, is a halt in the *reproduction* of patriarchal ideology.

These contradictions point to a broader struggle, between the desire to break harmful cycles and the fear that society hasn't evolved enough to support those changes. As a result, many mothers attempt partial renegotiations of gender norms without completely severing ties to past logics.

Such negotiation requires a suspension, or at least a disruption, of patriarchal reproduction. Respondents frequently noted double standards favoring men, rooted not only in local tradition but also in global patterns of male protectionism and institutional patriarchy. Physicality, lineage, religion, and legal frameworks all converge to reinforce these norms.

As Kandiyoti explains in her essay:

> In classic patriarchy, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. However, women have access to the only type of labor power they can control, and to old-age security, through their married sons. Since sons are a woman's most critical resource, ensuring their life-long loyalty is an enduring preoccupation. Older women have a vested interest in the suppression of romantic love between youngsters to keep the conjugal bond secondary and to claim sons' primary allegiance. Young women have an interest in circumventing and possibly evading their mother-in- law's control (1988, 279).

Although this specific model has weakened, its traces linger. Many respondents highlighted how boys were still viewed as family bearers and thus received privileges in practice, even if not always in principle. In the domestic realm, this manifests in preferential treatment regarding curfews, education, inheritance, and marriage expectations.

Bint Sophia articulates the layered contradictions:

> They treated me and my brothers the same, but in dala' (the pampering) I got more. But my grandmother obviously preferred boys. My mom didn't fully agree, but without access to education, she replicated it anyway. I once asked my grandmother, 'Why do you favor boys?' She said, 'Because the boy carries the family name.' I was like, WTF. My dad wasn't into that logic - he actually thought girls needed more financial protection because men could take care of themselves. He also understood that once my brothers were married, no one would look after me. And he was right (Personal Communication, 2022).

Here, patriarchal preference is not only intergenerational but also internally contested. The struggle is not between obedience and resistance, but between competing forms of care and protection.

This chapter has examined the intimate and often contradictory ways in which women in Jordan and Palestine navigate their social realities through individualized bargains situated within the constraints of broader structural forces. Drawing on theoretical contributions from Giddens, Sewell Jr., Krylova, and Joseph, the analysis has resisted static conceptions of agency and instead foregrounded women's negotiations as dynamic, iterative, and embedded within historically and socially contingent fields of power. These negotiations, whether through decisions around marriage, religious performance, educational pursuits, or family planning, do not dismantle patriarchal or neoliberal structures outright. Yet, they constitute meaningful engagements with these forces, marking out zones of flexibility and contestation within the dominant order.

By centering the 'neopatriarchal bargain' as both a conceptual tool and lived reality, the chapter reveals how women both sustain and subvert gendered power relations in their everyday lives. The forms of agency identified here are not overtly collective or revolutionary, but they are far from insignificant. Instead, they represent a cumulative and generational form of change that operates through the mundane and personal: in shared household responsibilities, expanded mobility for daughters, more equitable attitudes toward reproductive decision-making, and subtle reconfigurations of authority within families and friendships. These acts of bargaining do not

evade structure but operate through it, often reinforcing its contours while also slowly shifting its boundaries.

Importantly, while these strategies are deeply individualized and do not produce immediate systemic transformation, they suggest a different register of social change, one that emerges through personal navigation of interpersonal oppression, which itself is rooted in the institutionalized gender regimes mapped in Chapter 1. The inability to trace direct causal relationships between such negotiations and larger-scale social transformation should not diminish the significance of these processes. It allows for a reframing of agency and transformation: away from the spectacular and toward the incremental.

This interpersonal terrain of bargaining and adaptation sets the stage for Chapter 3, which turns inward to the internalization of oppression: how schemas become embodied, contested, or appropriated within women's own subjectivities. If Chapter 2 mapped the external maneuvers that pause patriarchal reproduction, Chapter 3 will trace the internal terrains where these negotiated freedoms are absorbed, or resisted, within the self. Only by understanding how power is both lived in relationships and inscribed in dispositions can we grasp the modus operandi of oppressive systems.

Chapter 3. Psychological Compounding: Internalizing Geopolitical, Gendered, and Cultural Pressures

Abstract

This chapter investigates the internalization of three distinct yet overlapping oppressions experienced by Palestinian and Jordanian women: as Arabs, as women, and as Arab women. These layers reflect geopolitical instability and Western domination, systemic sexism, and culturally specific pressures such as *'eib*,' respectively. Drawing on primary interviews, postcolonial feminist theories, and psychosocial approaches, the chapter explores how these oppressions create a triple consciousness, forcing women into fragmented identities and double lives. As Arabs, women internalize the geopolitical instability and imperialist narratives imposed upon the region. As women, they navigate international and local systems of sexism. As Arab women, they contend with culturally specific mechanisms of control like 'eib,' which functions as both a regulatory and gendered-policing tool. Horizontal violence, intergenerational trauma, and co-dependence emerge as recurring themes, highlighting how internalization serves as both a survival mechanism and a perpetuation of oppressive societal norms. By centering the voices of Palestinian and Jordanian women, it highlights the psycho-social effects of living under multiple, intersecting oppressions, while contributing to broader discussions on gender, power, and resistance in postcolonial contexts. Women here reflect on their internalizing and reproduction of restrictions and norms, producing a kind of ongoing internal battle for most that they contend with and attempt to resolve.

Following previous discussions on Palestinian and Jordanian women's relationship with the 'state' and 'society,' this chapter examines the relationship between women and the 'self' within oppressive socio-political contexts. It investigates the intersecting psychosocial effects of institutionalized and social oppressions, offering an in-depth understanding of 'internalized oppression' in neopatriarchal societies. Using primary narratives, socio-political analysis, and feminist theory, it highlights how systems of patriarchy, colonialism, and societal expectations converge to shape women's experiences, influencing both individual identities and collective consciousness.

The chapter begins by situating internalization as a global phenomenon while grounding it in localized realities. While internalized oppression transcends geographic boundaries, it takes differing forms in different socio-cultural settings. For Palestinian and Jordanian women, it operates at the intersection of gender, colonialism, and cultural constraints. Within (neo)patriarchal structures, exacerbated by colonial legacies, internalization prompts responses such as shame, distorted self-perception, and reinforced social control, affecting women's sense of agency and belonging.

Three key findings emerge. First, the internalization of sexism, manifesting as sex shame, unrealistic beauty standards, body shame, and forms of horizontal violence, where women police each other. Horizontal hostility, a key component, directs action against peers rather than against structures of oppression, thus reproducing systemic inequities.

Second, internalized material and political insecurity produces dual and triple consciousness, cultural codependence, and identity ambivalence. Drawing from Du Bois (1903), this "dual consciousness" captures the conflict between self-perception and external realities. In Palestine, (neo)patriarchy compounded by settler-colonialism intensifies this dissonance, highlighting how fragmented identities emerge as both coping strategies and potential acts of defiance.

Third, the chapter addresses the internalization of '*eib* (shame), a gendered cultural mechanism regulating women's behaviors and fragmenting the self. Though '*eib* governs both men and women, women disproportionately bear its burdens across different class and religious backgrounds. Internalizing '*eib* leads to "double lives" and layered consciousness, as women

balance societal expectations with their desires for autonomy. As Williams (2012, 135–144) notes, internalized oppression often serves survival, protection, and reproduction.

Centering their voices, the chapter broadens understandings of internalization within specific socio-political and cultural frameworks, offering avenues for resistance, redefinition, and collective change.

Internalized Oppression as a Process: Relational Dynamics, Psycho-Social Symptoms and Realities

Defining internalized oppression continues to be a work in progress due to its intricate workings on both the intra and interpersonal levels. It is a concept that is largely a psycho-social phenomenon, brought to prominence through the work of authors in the field of psychology and psychiatry through investigation of topics including dominance and subordination (Vygotsky 1978). It was brought into the realm of sociology and politics through authors including W.E. Dubois (1903) within a racial framework, Franz Fanon (1967) through his studies on the psychology within the colonial framework. Also important to the discussion is the work of educator Paulo Freire (1970), and Albert Memmi (1965) centering the concept within the additional frameworks of race, racism, and education. However, as will be discussed, this is both social and psychological and as such, internalization in this context is relational.

Originating with the concept of internalizing, where external information is analyzed both consciously and unconsciously, it is considered a general way of learning for all individuals (see for example Taalas et al. 2020). The act of the internalized external oppressive thoughts, behaviors, or actions, is what is understood as internalized oppression.

Lev Vygotsky's research in cultural psychology is widely cited as one of the key texts in conceptually understanding internalization (of oppression). In what is described as a Marxist approach to psychology (Cole, foreword, 1978), he explains the internalization of signals and language (from immediate and extended social groups and other mediated culture) into the psyche as a fundamental part of existence. He argues that messages received externally come to

affect the internal psychological functioning and places heavy importance in including an individual's socio-cultural context (ibid.).

Citing Vygotsky (1978), Zittoun and Gillespie (2015) explain the general premise:

> An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice; first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological) […] (c) The internalization of cultural forms of behavior involves the reconstruction of psychological activity on the basis of sign operations. […] The internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology, the basis of the qualitative leap from animal to human psychology. As yet, the barest outline of this process is known. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57-58).

This highlights in detail the process that occurs, essentially, to all people subjected to communal and cultural information. The subsequent internalization of negative or positive signals is not specified nor the extent of the internalization either. In his essay "Internalization: Process or Fantasy?' Roy Schaefer (1972) introduces his argument, he says: "When we use the term internalization we refer not to a fantasy but to a psychological process, and we are saying that a shift of event, action, or situation in an inward direction or to an inner locale has occurred (411)."

Similar to this conceptualization is the work of Mark Tappan, where his perspective of this process must include mediated action. He elaborates, writing:

> Both internalized oppression and internalized domination are better understood as forms of mediated action; in other words, they are better understood as sociocultural phenomena rather than simply as psychological phenomena. Such a reinterpretation, among other things, helps to hold both the individual and the structural/systemic levels together at the same time (2006, 2117).

This active participation, conscious or unconscious, seems to be a defining feature of internalized oppression amongst its researchers. It often presents as a psychological response to external, sometimes cultural, stimuli. Furthermore, most specify that this leads to an internal belief of inferiority. While this is certainly true in many cases, I personally did not find that a belief in inferiority is always necessarily internalized, but rather an understanding of (legal, political, social, personal, biological) 'difference', how these differences are treated by social contexts, and de-facto understanding of behaviors required by the oppressive system or dominant group to ensure safety and survival .

Miller's 1986 work, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, highlights the effects of misogyny and sexism on the psychology of women; here, she elaborates on internalized oppression without naming the phenomenon as such. "Her description of the attribution of superiority to the dominant group, care-taking and focusing on the needs of the dominant group, and deference to the dominant group, can be described as internalized oppression (Willams, 2012 citing Miller 1986, 30)."

This was further elaborated upon by scholars such as Fanon, and Friere, both holding similar perspectives on the effects of internalizing oppression. For example Friere expresses, "As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation (1970, 46)." His position revolves on the internalization of the dominant group's world view, arguing it is the only thing reproduced and thus subordinate group members will come to internalize this view. He also describes the subordinate group members psyche as 'playing host' to the consciousness, culture, perspectives of the oppressor (ibid., 30).

Alluding to double consciousness, he says, "The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and that at the same time themselves and their oppressor, whose consciousness they have internalized. (ibid.)"

These early theorisations on colonization, race, dominance, and subordination have remained relevant across social groups and temporal contexts. Fanon (1967) approached these questions

through both introspection and observation, analyzing how colonization produces internalized structures of domination and subordination in both colonizer and colonized. His exploration of the psychological toll of systemic oppression, particularly the internalization of powerlessness and inferiority, resonates with broader experiences of marginalization.

Nicholls (2012) extends Fanon's insights to gender, arguing that "his deconstruction of colonization is grounded in an analysis of power relations that is as applicable to gender as it is to the conquest of foreign territories." This framework is particularly instructive in contexts like Jordan and Palestine, where women experience overlapping forms of subjugation shaped by patriarchy, colonial legacies, class, and global aid systems.

Internalized oppression, in this sense, is not simply a matter of binary domination/subordination, but a reflection of layered systems that are internalized and reproduced within marginalized communities. While men in Jordan and Palestine may also face structural constraints, they do not constitute the dominant group in all spheres. Gendered oppression operates through complex and often contradictory forces, meaning that women may simultaneously resist and reproduce oppressive norms within their families, communities, and institutions.

Lipsky (1987) defines internalized oppression as "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the oppression of the (dominant) society (6)." This highlights the self-directed nature of internalized oppression, which can be seen as both a process (Williams, 2012; hooks, 2005) and a product of systemic oppression (Lipsky, 1987). Audre Lorde also provides insight into this phenomenon, saying:

> Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion (1984, 115).

Addressing internalized oppression necessitates a comprehensive examination of the socio-political and economic contexts in which it manifests. Genuine psychological recovery from internalized oppression requires confronting both institutional and interpersonal dimensions of oppression. It is from this starting point that we can truly consider the ways in which oppression intersects, within itself. Furthermore, it highlights how different expressions of our existence (identities) can face different oppressions simultaneously. i.e. gendered, racial, socio-economic, etc. intersect and thus grants us the ability to appreciate an individual's lived experience.

Internalized oppression operates through layered **processes** like socialization, acceptance, and intergenerational transmission, leaving enduring psycho-social effects. This section delves into these processes and their manifestations, particularly horizontal violence, ambivalent relationships, and dissimulation, as they emerge in the lives of Jordanian and Palestinian women. Rooted in participant accounts and informed by grounded theory, it explores how such patterns disrupt individual identities and collective dynamics.

The analysis emphasizes the interplay of neopatriarchal and settler-colonial systems, revealing how shame, self-distortion, and mutual policing perpetuate oppression. These frameworks highlight cycles of resistance and complicity, offering insight into the structural and personal dimensions of survival that will be addressed experientially in subsequent sections. By addressing the intersectional areas of gendered oppression, it attempts to understand internalized narratives that disrupt self-perception and relationships, while also exploring the psycho-social tools individuals employ to navigate and, at times, resist these oppressive structures. This exploration is vital for understanding the interplay between systemic forces and personal agency in the perpetuation and potential subversion of these dynamics.

General learning occurs in a similar manner to internalizing (oppression or otherwise): first, the individual is socialized into a set of identities that are either considered dominant or subordinate. They can also overlap and intersect, leaving a single individual with multiple social identities. Second, the process of intergenerational transmission occurs through socialization from older

generations. While this generally refers to family in the household it can also include wider social networks as well (extended family, friends, colleagues, etc.). Finally, an internal process of acceptance, to a certain extent, of belonging to a subordinate group. It is worth clarifying that this internalization of oppression and associated effects is often attributed as a response to severely oppressive environments. That is to say that there is no blame cast on the victims of oppression in their responses to said oppression despite the resulting actions often causing detriment to the larger cause for the immediate need (Williams 2012, 55-56).

In oppressive contexts, internalized subordination unfolds through a structured process especially relevant to Arab women, who navigate intersecting identities as women, Arabs, and Arab women within oppressed/oppressive societies. First, individuals are socialized through learning behaviors and expectations associated with their perceived social roles. Williams (2012) explains, "Socialization is the process whereby humans learn what it means to be a member of a given culture or society (56)." For Arab women, this process often involves internalizing multiple layers of identity, requiring them to adapt quite quickly to meet personal needs safely (Lipsky, 1987; Al-Mahadin, 2004).

The second process is intergenerational transmission, where family and extended networks pass down values and what can be considered survival mechanisms. Williams clarifies that, beyond parents, "transmission may occur from individuals other than the parents, such as teachers, neighbors, or religious leaders (2012, 56-57)." In the Arab world, close-knit kinship systems function as vital and essential support networks, reinforcing resilience strategies within familial or wider personal networks in lieu of a welfare state (for example Joseph, 1999b., 2005). Consequently, individuals often internalize survival patterns from previous generations without directly experiencing the same oppressive conditions (Abu-Lughod, 1998).

The concept of intergenerational transmission is something that I initially wanted to dedicate the thesis towards, however, as previously explained, the method of a joint-interview between mothers and daughters was heavily self-censored by both parties. This further gives weight to the subsequent section on the phenomenon of (almost a necessity to) leading a 'double-life' as mentioned by research participants; this also sheds light on the relevance of dissimulation, discussed shortly.

For this thesis, the integration of overlapping identities each consisting of different power dynamics is important; specifically, for women in the Arab-speaking world, having weaker social positionality, globally, at least three-fold. As ‘Arabs’, as ‘women’, and as ‘Arab Women’; as members of marginalized groups belonging to politically side-lined oppressive/oppressed ‘states’. Furthermore many aspects of the culture exist in significantly more psycho-socially detrimental forms towards women, they thus internalize multiple forms of oppression and not just misogyny/sex-based double standards, for example. This means that Palestinian and Jordanian women, and women facing intersecting violence, must in some form develop a more acute internal awareness of identity salience and must be able to switch through them both quickly and safely. These tactics and this knowledge is frequently transmitted intergenerationally through both direct familial/social instructions or internalized through observation.

The final stage in internalized subordination is a complex, often partial, acceptance of one’s position within a subordinate group. Acceptance here is not absolute but negotiated; individuals selectively internalize messages that may foster cognitive dissonance, which can lead to questioning and rejecting certain oppressive norms. Williams (2012) states, “The process of acceptance is not uniform for all members of a subordinant group (76).” A woman, for instance, might accept societal beauty standards while simultaneously believing in women’s strength, creating an inner conflict that challenges oppressive standards (Mernissi, 1987, similarly Mahmood, 2005).

Memmi outlines a thought process of ‘acceptance’, saying, “The constant presence and application of the mythical portrait leads to a situation in which the colonized begin to question themselves: “Is he not partially right?” he mutters. “Are we not all a little guilty after all?” Lazy because we have so many idlers? Timid because we let ourselves be oppressed? (1965, 87).”

On acceptance, my research did not find that women or oppressed groups inherently believe in their inferiority. Instead, any internalization or projection of negative stereotypes seems primarily a tactic for survival rather than a true acceptance of ‘lesser worth’. Compliance, whether passive or active, appears as a means of negotiating safety and stability within oppressive contexts, rather than a genuine belief in one's own inferiority.

Malcolm X's (1965) metaphor of the "house negro" captures an uncomfortable truth about internalized oppression. He describes oppressed individuals identifying with, even defending, their oppressors. He said:

> Whenever the master said 'we,' he said 'we.' That's how you can tell a house Negro. If the master's house caught on fire, the house Negro would fight harder to put the blaze out than the master would (1965, 10).

Fanon (1967) also iterates this illustrating how under colonization, the subjugated start to see themselves through the lens of inferiority, aligning with the colonizer's worldview. For many Arab women, who navigate layered systems of subjugation, the need to break free from this conditioning is crucial yet impossible with no structural changes. However, it is possible this can be accomplished through wider liberation projects and radical reform.

It is here where parallels can be drawn with Fanon's (1952) work in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in essence throughout the book he deconstructs the psychology of the colonized and the colonizer, with a key focus on race, implicated in the title. He draws similar a to Malcolm X in the passage of both arguing that through the dehumanizing practices of colonization, the colonized body begins to view itself as inferior, or subordinate, even joint to, that of their colonizer. In order for this mirage to be broken the colonized must undergo a liberatory experience that can, and, according to Fanon, should also include revolutionary violence (ibid., Fanon, 1967).

This internalization of oppression is not merely a mental process but is reinforced by structural conditions. The practical and emotional dependency on men, entrenched by patriarchal laws, particularly in Jordan and Palestine, deeply impacts women's agency. Scholars like Hasso (2009, 2011) Abu-Lughod (2013), amongst others, have shown that this dependency is not just cultural but institutionalized, instilling in women a form of obligation to the very structures that limit them. It's a collusion often born not of belief but necessity, adopting a stance of compliance to navigate a rigid societal framework where dissent can mean loss of protection, support, or even safety.

Moreover, the role of violence, both explicit and implicit, is central. As Fanon and others observe, fear of retaliation can push oppressed communities to embody behaviors that mirror oppressive norms, not out of belief but as a safety barrier. Within regional contexts, the gendered experience of violence, whether social, legal, or economic, creates a pressing need to act in accordance with neopatriarchal practice, if only to avoid punishment or alienation (Ghannam, 2013). This tension between public conformity and private resistance exemplifies a survival mechanism rather than an acceptance of inferiority.

These effects ultimately have repercussions far beyond the individual. In Jordan and Palestine, where women experience compounded oppression, this internalized conditioning limits not just individual autonomy but the potential for collective action. It isn't merely an adaptation but a perpetuation of subjugation – one that must be critically addressed to understand and ultimately transform the socio-political status quo.

Psychosocial phenomena that occur under this bracket include a distortion of self and identity, an oppressive construction of the self, and distortion in the naming of one's reality. It also includes emotional repression, and shame (Moane, 1999).

The **effects** of internalized oppression on self-knowledge, self-identity, and emotional well-being are deep-rooted and, again, often relational in nature. Within contexts where external pressures and imposed narratives shape individual perception, women from the 'Global South' can often experience what Memmi (1965) calls the "mythical portrait," a false and appropriated image that reflects society's (local or geopolitical/colonial) distorted expectations rather than fulfilling personal desires, at the very least through traditional means. This mythical portrait, reinforced through patriarchal structures and legal dependencies, disrupts self-understanding and results in a fragmented sense of self.

The responses associated with these internalized false images often take the form of shame, fear, and anger, responses that not only mask over genuine emotions but reinforce cycles of self-doubt and often, submission. These distortions in self-identity negatively affect not only personal

growth but the ability to form genuine connections with others due to a learned mistrust of self and surroundings. In the process, women constantly struggle to reconcile the fragmented image society has imposed on them with their own, often obscured, authentic selves. The raging current of 'mix-messages' on a woman's being and responsibilities, within internal structures and the importing of Western feminism and its values can cause a sort of fragmentation that has multiple outcomes. This fragmentation can lead to reactionary movements with a total rejection of the Western identity, it can remain a fragmentation in perpetuity, or if/where possible women will leave and relocate, for example. In many senses, the context enforces an internal upheaval in some form or another. This distortion of the self is also crucial to understanding the reasons in which a woman may consciously or unconsciously reproduce oppressive ideas or practices.

Shame plays a crucial role in the dynamics of oppression, functioning both as a **tool** used to oppress and as an **outcome** of the oppressive process. Across various definitions, three central aspects of shame emerge. It is characterized by feelings of being unworthy, lesser, and vulnerable. This sensation can manifest both externally and internally; with time this internalized shame can morph into a near permanent state of insecurity.

Nietzsche explores shame within the broader framework of morality and social control. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), he argues that shame arises from an imposed set of values that classify certain behaviors or traits as unacceptable, creating a sense of inadequacy and internal conflict. He emphasizes that shame reflects societal expectations rather than inherent moral truths. This perspective is particularly relevant when considering how oppressive systems manipulate shame to enforce conformity and maintain control over marginalized individuals.

Fossum and Mason (1986) generally describe shame as an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It arises from self-judgment, which can lead to feelings of humiliation or indignity so profound that one feels stripped of dignity or exposed as fundamentally flawed or unworthy. Adding that pervasive shame results in a consistent feeling of being inherently bad, inadequate, or unworthy as a human being (ibid. 5).

Kaufman and Raphael (1996) further interpret shame as the feeling of being seen in a painfully diminished state. In moments of shame, individuals turn inward and experience a magnified, self-judging gaze. Even when alone, people often experience this "exposure," mistaking it as a judgment solely from others when it is also a reflection of their **internal self-surveillance** (ibid., 17-8). As such shame that results from internalizing oppression and also exists as a tool to reproduce oppressive conditions. This can ultimately create a cycle where the oppressed internalize and perpetuate feelings of unworthiness, self-doubt and subconscious self-policing.

In the context of gendered oppression, particularly within Arab societies, it plays a somewhat specific role. It is quite intricately woven into cultural norms and used as a tool for social regulation that often results in controlling women's behavior. This cultural narrative enforces a rigid framework where individuals actions, particularly women's, are continually scrutinized and judged, fostering internalized feelings of inadequacy and fear. As will be discussed in the following section (Internalized *'Eib*), shame is used to govern society by society, particularly women, and their daily lives.

This internalized shame often manifests as self-surveillance, where women police their actions to align with societal expectations, thus perpetuating a cycle of gendered oppression. Additionally, within Kandiyoti's (1988) framework of the "patriarchal bargain," or in this instance the 'neopatriarchal bargain' where women internalize shame as a means of survival within a male-dominated structure. The pervasive sense of shame is deeply connected to gendered expectations, restricting women's agency by aligning their worth with family reputation. It no longer behaves or functions as a personal feeling of inadequacy but it is a social responsibility and in turn becomes a culturally sanctioned tool of gendered control. By embedding shame within the fabric of social norms, provides an efficient mechanism to reinforce policing of women and reproduce oppressive gendered norms with little thought or effort.

Dissimulation is defined as the act of hiding one's true feelings, thoughts, or intentions, often by adopting a false persona or engaging in deceptive behavior. This is understood as a survival mechanism that marginalized individuals use to navigate oppressive environments. Through this social masking of their authentic selves, they can protect themselves from potential backlash or

discrimination within hostile social structures - this applies to different oppressions such as racism or sexism, for example.

As hooks (2005) argues, dissimulation serves as a coping strategy for those facing systemic oppression, allowing them to negotiate their identities in spaces that may not accept them. Similarly, Angela Davis (1981) discusses how individuals in marginalized communities often feel compelled to mask their true selves to avoid scrutiny and maintain social acceptance. Du Bois (1903), who introduces the concept of "double consciousness," discussed at length in the analysis of the interviews, where marginalized individuals experience a split identity, constantly navigating between their authentic selves and the identities imposed upon them.

In neopatriarchal Arab societies, women often navigate dual identities, balancing public conformity with private autonomy in response to cultural and (geo)political pressures. As the neopatriarchy exists as hybrid system that is in essence a conflict between traditional patriarchal control within a neoliberal 'modernized' society that has exacerbated the restrictions on women's autonomy. Within this context, Arab women adopt behaviors of dissimulation; a strategy used to navigate the conflicting demands of this flawed modernity within a fortified patriarchy. This form of "double consciousness," characterized by outward compliance and an inner private self, becomes necessary for survival in an environment where both family and society impose strict expectations on women.

This creates a dual identity – a "false self" Memmi's 'mythical portrait' as an outward presentation developed to manage the high stakes of social conformity while attempting to retain a sense of autonomy and selfhood within 'safer' contexts (with friends, for example). In many ways this also provides a framework to understanding the 'neopatriarchal bargain.'

This constant negotiation of selfhood limits women's ability to understand, let alone assert, a clear sense of self within a gendered framework. The dissimulation of identity is quite clear within the context of Palestinian women particularly. As they are faced with extreme violence by a clear oppressor the primary way women identify themselves internally is as Palestinians first and women second. In doing so, social gendered oppression cannot even be considered as a pressing issue. Personal assertion is often a luxury that many, regardless of gender, cannot afford.

This psychological phenomenon undoubtedly has far-reaching effects, but a key issue within this is that it creates a fragmentation within close relationships. It creates a constant internal tension that can lead to identity fragmentation and somewhat of a distrust in others and so, relationships of any kind are cast under a different light and cannot be formed easily.

This dual consciousness is exacerbated by the social conditions bred by neopatriarchy as the polemic between ‘modern’ perceptions of life and gender roles. Within state conditions that infantilize women dissimulation into either ‘extreme’ can often lead to a deep distortion of internal conditions.

Dissimulation can also lead to a false sense of empowerment, rewriting a narrative, as women navigate neopatriarchal expectations with the illusion of control. In her doctoral dissertation, Kristine Sheets (2023) adds that:

> For those seeking to reconstruct their sense of self, their identity, and their narrative, forgetting assumes a practical purpose. Memories that do not align with the underlying themes that one wishes to emphasize when narrating their life inevitably find themselves excluded from the narrative. These themes are shaped by present desires and aspirations. When engaging in the ace of recollection, individuals recall details that are specific to the narrative they prioritize, one that affirms their place in the world (131).

Thus, dissimulation creates a self-perpetuating cycle, where deceit must continually be employed to maintain any sense of security or power.It serves as both a coping mechanism and a limitation in neopatriarchal contexts, where women’s agency is exercised within harsh boundaries. This duality underlines the tensions between survival and self-assertion in a society that upholds patriarchal norms in new, adaptive forms. These patterns emphasize, once again, the need for a structural reform and cultural shift, where women’s self-expression is not linked to nor a threat to the remainder of her family.

Co-dependence and ambivalent relationships generally tend to come hand-in-hand and can easily feed into one another. As a result of internalization as well as external, oppressive, contexts, levels of trust between individuals as well as institutions is ruptured due to different forms of perceived betrayals and punishments. In interpersonal contexts, in this case largely familial,

codependence often involves members focusing excessively on each other's emotional or practical needs, sometimes at the expense of personal identity or autonomy. This arises when one member feels responsible for the well-being of others, creating unbalanced roles within the family (Lancer, 2012; Bacon et. al, 2020). This is applicable in romantic relationships and friendships as well (ibid.).

Ambivalent relationships within families, on the other hand, are characterized by mixed feelings; affection combined with frustration or resentment. Family members may feel emotionally attached yet wary or conflicted, leading to both unpredictable closeness and distance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

These phenomena are often found in tandem as codependent roles can exacerbate ambivalence, where the pull of familial duty conflicts with individual needs. This cyclical dynamic can make family interactions tense, or insincere, reinforcing patterns of dependency and compounding contradicting emotions. This becomes more problematic through male guardianship laws, where women's autonomy remains regulated by male family members. Here, co-dependence and ambivalence create a challenging terrain that women navigate as they balance familial loyalty and conformity to individual wants and needs.

In *Descent of the Nation: Kinship and citizenship in Lebanon* (1999b.), Joseph explains that this dependency, codified in law and normalized within social structures positions women as legally subordinate, reinforcing a system that makes their survival and stability reliant on male figures, fathers, husbands, brothers, thus shaping their personal and professional choices (214). Though this may not always be the case socially, it has been absorbed into law.

Legal dependence amplifies this 'reliance' within relationships, particularly in Jordan and in some Palestinian communities, where laws regarding male guardianship and citizenship place women in a clearly dependent position. When women rely on male guardians for permissions, such as travel, marriage, and work authorization, this dependency embeds itself deeply into daily life, with male guardians functioning as both protectors and, paradoxically, obstacles. Joseph observes that this dynamic creates an ambivalence that shapes relationships with male family

members, oscillating between admiration and resentment, trust and mistrust (Joseph, 1999b., 222). This ambivalence stems from the reality that women's autonomy is contingent upon the choices and whims of their guardians, fostering both emotional and psychological tension.

This serves as a useful framework to not only understand the context of Jordanian and Palestinian women vis-a-vis the 'dominant' group, men, but also their relationships generally as well as mechanisms of hegemonic narratives. This affects views towards other women, employment and education, as well as some general behavior. An innate fear of loss, oppression, or disadvantage is frequently triggered by external circumstances and creates a form of obedience and passivity in order to remain safe and protect themselves and those close to them.

Horizontal hostility, a phenomenon rooted in internalized oppression, has been widely examined by scholars, including Frantz Fanon. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explores this concept in the chapters "The Woman of Color and the White Man" and "The Man of Color and the White Woman" (1952), illustrating how individuals attempt to distance themselves from their oppressed in-group by presenting themselves, both internally and externally, as distinct and exceptional. Tajfel and Turner (1979) similarly describe this as an effort to disassociate from the perceived 'inferiority' of one's group, asserting a different identity to avoid the stigma attached to collective subordination. This disassociation can manifest as harmful behavior directed at members of the same oppressed group, which Fanon suggests may serve as a reactionary or retaliatory act stemming from deeply internalized feelings of inferiority.

Horizontal hostility thus operates as a form of in-group violence that emerges under conditions of systemic oppression. Pharr (1996) characterizes this dynamic as "contempt," where subordinated groups are conditioned to view themselves—and one another—as inherently lesser. This learned contempt redirects anger and frustration inward, toward peers rather than toward the dominant systems or actors responsible for the oppression. The resulting violence is often more intimate and painful, as it does not come from external institutions or state mechanisms, but from within one's community, family, friends, and broader social networks.

Because of this proximity, horizontal hostility can be especially traumatic: the shared knowledge and vulnerabilities within an oppressed group are weaponized, often through verbal abuse,

relational aggression, and other destructive behaviors (Artz, 1996; hooks, 1984; Miller, 1976; Pyke & Dang, 2003). As later sections will show, this may emerge in culture-specific expressions of social violence. Though not always physical, such hostility represents a form of *banal violence*, subtle, routine, and frequently unconscious—embedded in everyday practices and social expectations. This habitual expression of internalized oppression functions as *habitus*, appearing innocuous but reinforcing structural domination. In doing so, it sustains cycles of harm and diverts attention from the systemic roots of subjugation (Pharr, 1996).

Within the Jordanian and Palestinian contexts, and the wider Arab context, the root of this effect of internalized oppression is as a result of intersecting oppressions. Furthermore, the expressions of horizontal violence (including social regulation methods such as *'eib*) that are culturally specific serves as a clear landscape to understand the reasons this occurs.

The following analysis explores three primary forms of oppression internalized by Palestinian and Jordanian women, informed by both their cultural settings and broader socio-political forces. These categories: race, gendered race, and culture-specific shame, offer a picture of the overlapping pressures these women face and internalize in unique ways. The chapter begins by presenting these three dimensions as either separate or as converging aspects of a single, multifaceted oppression, showing how internalized cultural, racial, and gendered stereotypes create distinct consciousness and behaviors, much like Du Bois's "double consciousness" concept (1903), which is especially relevant here in understanding how women navigate their layered identities under patriarchal and colonial conditions.

Internalized oppression emerges not as a static psychological state but as a relational process shaped by relational systems of power, patriarchy, colonialism, culture, and class, and reinforced through socialization, intergenerational transmission, and negotiated acceptance. Foundational theories from Vygotsky, Fanon, and Freire illuminate how oppressive ideologies are internalized, yet this study challenges simplistic narratives of "inferiority," arguing instead that compliance often reflects survival tactics within rigid structures. For Jordanian and Palestinian women, this process is compounded by threefold marginalization (as Arabs, women, and Arab women), legal dependency, and culturally specific tools of control like 'eib (shame). Psychosocial

manifestations—dissimulation, horizontal hostility, and ambivalent codependence—reveal the tension between fractured selfhood and tactical agency, where conformity masks quiet resistance.

Having established this framework, the following section turns to the lived experiences of women navigating these dynamics. Through participant narratives, we explore how structural violence and cultural norms are internalized, resisted, and subverted in daily life. Their stories not only validate the theoretical complexities outlined here but also expose the gaps between academic abstraction and the messy realities of survival under intersecting oppressions.

Internalization of Sexism: "I Always say that Woman's Greatest Enemy is the Other Woman"

In the Arabic language, there is still no fixed, nor accurate, phrasing for the term internalized sexism/misogyny. One of the suggested translations, *koroh' el nisa'a el-dakhili*, 'inner-hatred for women' does not reflect the fact of the meaning of the term as gender-specific to women. This is strange to me considering the prevalence in society, one that takes many forms and is reproduced (consciously and unconsciously) by both men and women.

Journalist Tatiania Rouhanna writes on the phenomenon generally and regionally, and says:

> These behaviors by women serve to uphold the patriarchy and the view that women are inferior or subordinate to men. It drives girls and women to believe that their options are constrained to those appropriate to the "female role", and to fail to recognise their own power and as a result restrains women's pronounced achievements in a range of important domains (2022).

Internalized sexism refers to the unconscious assimilation of sexist beliefs by women, leading them to adopt behaviors and attitudes that devalue their own gender and reinforce patriarchal norms (for example Bearman et al., 2009; Rahmani 2020). It often results in self-surveillance, competition, and the prioritization of male perspectives, which can limit women's autonomy and perpetuate social inequities (Evteeva, 2024). In Arab contexts, internalized sexism is intensified

by cultural norms that prioritize male authority and influence, shaping gender roles and expectations within familial and societal structures (Husseini, 2021). While there are different forms of internalized sexism highlighted by research participants, a common thread throughout is the effect of horizontal violence on the situation and how it seeps into participants' everyday lives.

Dr Islah Jad adds on internalized sexism ,“It certainly could be a coping mechanism especially in conservative families, there is some gain in avoiding blame, punishment and in having some social and familial peace, however resistance is also obvious in many instances and more gender aware culture is spreading fast (Personal Communication, 2022).”

As noted in the interview questions (Annex A.) I asked the participants directly if they were familiar with and have had experiences of internalized misogyny/sexism and if so where it manifested from. They all, in one form or another, perceived themselves as having faced internalized sexism, largely in the form of horizontal violence, from women in their lives. This was noted in familial, social and professional or academic settings. There is a frequent overlap between manifestations of internalized misogyny and internalized *‘eib* as both perpetuate malignant gender stereotypes. The culture of ‘shame’ or *‘eib* found in Jordan and Palestine, while being oppressive to both sexes and all sexuality, still disproportionately affects women.

Here, I try to isolate the discussion to frequently cited instances of internalized sexism in order to articulate, in the participants' words, both the effects and the reproduction of these oppressive ideals, the ways in which women are harmed and harming one another through horizontal violence. The focus is largely on instances where women are perpetuating systems of violence within their ‘in-group,’ i.e. instances of women inflicting violence towards themselves or other women. Three thematic results were prominent with regards to participants being subject to sex-based double standards. This includes: unattainable beauty standards that present as both physical and non-physical, the double-edged sword of sex-shaming participants have experienced, and horizontal violence manifesting in a form of envy and the internalization of gendered paranoia.

The, albeit brief, commentary shared by participants in respect to beauty still reveals the multifaceted and intersecting pressures that Arab women, particularly Palestinian and Jordanian women (post/neocolonial frameworks), face regarding beauty standards and self-perception, notably the intersections of race, gender, and cultural expectations. Secondary sources explain some of the prevalent aspects of such beauty standards, as Chen et al. (2020) discuss, these standards are frequently linked to socio-economic opportunities and privileges, as lighter-skinned individuals may find greater access to jobs, promotions, and social acceptance in contexts where Western beauty ideals prevail. However, interestingly, primary accounts cite purity and femininity as beauty standards as well – possibly standards that prompt more internal pressure as well.

The responses from participants identify **two** prominent themes within internalized sexist themes: 'beauty' standards: unrealistic beauty and body-type ideals, and, femininity and purity as both physical and behavioral traits as markers of respectability creating 'aesthetic' value. In this discussion, the two factors bleed into one another.

A younger half-Palestinian participant who has done independent research on topics of gender in the Arab-speaking world said, "I asked a community of women that I have gathered online recently if their culture or community has ever contributed negatively to their body image and 90% of the respondents (through a social media platform with over 10 thousand followers – though unclear how many responded) said yes. One person who responded was my closest friend's younger sister who was around 14 years old and I've known her since she was born. Oh, I found it really unsettling that young girls still have to face issues such as this (Bint Nadia, Personal Communication, 2022)."

Body and appearance issues are prevalent globally particularly with regards to women – it is a process of internalizing beauty standards, in whatever form they may take, and comparing oneself or body in contrast with unrealistic standards.

Studies relating to skin tone, body shape, facial beauty standards in the region, conducted by numerous teams such as Kashmar et al. (2019) or Mady et al. (2023), for example.

This research discusses how Arab women face pressures from cultural norms that prioritize skin tone, facial structure, slender body shapes, and conservative expressions of femininity. Such standards, especially when internalized, can distort self-perception and promote compliance with social hierarchies. In tandem with international trends, body image issues among women are exacerbated by local beauty ideals, which are often shaped by both colonial legacies coupled with and associated to mediatized contemporary beauty standards (these studies often focused on women who have undergone/will undergo cosmetic procedures (Di Gesto et al., 2021, Fardouly et al., 2021, Le Renard, 2020).

Skin tone is also a deeply ingrained beauty ideal, with whiteness frequently associated with higher status and acceptability (Chen et al., 2020). This is a colonial remnant that exists in much of the Global South and the Arab world. This racialized beauty standard, as research suggests, is further compounded by Western influences, contributing to a hierarchy that privileges certain features over others (for example, Le Renard, 2020, Naber, 2006).

For instance, Bint Layla, a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship in Haifa, recalls high school as a place where beauty standards caused her to self-isolate from women: “I just remember not being liked at all by girls...it felt like they were in this ‘Mean Girls’ movie. Besides, I was the new girl from a village, I was a little bit darker than they wanted me to be,” she reflects, explaining how this neo-colonial colorism, and settler-colonialism cultural difference, drove her to bond with boys instead, whom she found less judgmental. She adds, “I spent my time getting high with the boys…they fit the misfits group easily (Personal Communication, 2022).” Her experience reveals how internalized and external oppressions intersect, isolating women who don’t fit narrow cultural molds and leading them to seek acceptance elsewhere. oftentimes leading to different forms of self-medication, as noted here.

In a similar vein, in a study of residents of the ‘Ghor region in Jordan, one group of women in Jordan discussed how skin color continues to impact their lives. A participant voiced the opinion that discrimination based on skin tone was still prevalent, with several agreeing that darker-skinned women often suffer low self-esteem due to societal prejudice as men find “fault” and “make fun” of them. This increases pressure to use whitening creams, a common practice in

the region, fueled by consumer culture that promises a "fair and lovely" appearance through skin products (this is also the actual name of the whitening cream). Women in the group also highlighted the gendered nature of this, explaining that while dark-skinned men might still find acceptance, dark-skinned women are often stigmatized. One woman shared that her husband sought a second wife with lighter skin, an example of how colorism is deeply embedded in Jordanian society; he was then rejected by the family because he himself was dark-skinned. The impact of these attitudes is profound, as one father of a light-skinned woman once stated, "I would never let my daughter marry a black man (Curtis, 2012, 10-11)."

This association is rooted in a Western gaze: "Having white skin is considered to be a blessing and held as a much higher status than those with darker skin. Frequently, having been from or holding a passport from the Northern Hemisphere can easily secure and guarantee a job, and in addition, determine pay, benefits, and treatment in the workplace. Not many believe in equal treatment due to the divinity of whiteness in this region. Those with darker skin are treated as if they were below society and instantly seen as "ugly" and other harmful and degrading terms (Chen et al. 2020, 8)." Within the context of Jordanian and Palestinian families particularly, this is often an issue.

As it is not uncommon to find a very wide range of skin tones within a family, Bint Dima shares that her darker skin had been a cause for familial commentary for the majority of her life. While not overtly racist, she understands that this is due to the internalization of Western ideals of beauty. She also adds that colored eyes are viewed as more appealing in her family as well. She concludes that while this has affected her psychologically, particularly in her childhood, she has no issue contending with this and in fact, educating her family on this problematic internalized 'mythical portrait' (Personal Communication, 2022). Essentially, her attempts to problematize the status quo is an effective means that encourages self-reflection in an oppressed population. David and Derthick (in E.J David ed., 2014) explain, "Hence, the problem will be viewed as more than just a desire to have lighter skin but a desire and preference for Western culture and worldview. By framing the problem as internalized oppression, it will become clear that the problem also involves a devaluation or inferiorization of one's self and one's group. It will also become clear that the health implications go far beyond just physical health, to also include

mental health (Introduction).” However, Bint Nour contends that this is changing and amongst her peer groups, though namely through the male gaze, she believes this is changing. In a sort of reactionary rejection of Western standards, she says, “It is not that uncommon for men to find Arab beauty as, well, beautiful. Especially in the region (the Levant) since we have so much diversity, what I noticed is that the light skin colored eyes, men or women, tend to be attracted to the darker skin and darker eyes and vice versa. But it’s also not at all uncommon to see people with similar looks together as well, so I am not sure (Personal Communication, 2024).”

Bint Yasmin describes a feeling of exclusion at her all-girls school, where she was bullied for not fitting into conventional beauty standards or social norms, which she describes as a struggle to conform to “their standards of beauty” (Personal Communication, 2022). This exclusion underlines the prevalence of narrow beauty ideals and the social repercussions women face for not meeting them.

Bint Aisha articulates the pressure she feels from her family, specifically her mother, to meet context-specific conventional beauty ideals. She explains:

> As the only daughter I was subject to many comments on my appearance, it really affected me negatively. I remember being very comfortable as a child even without being the ‘pretty girl’, a tomboy with big glasses and I was really confident. But with years of comments on my appearance, weight, hair, even my choice of color.. it just added to my anxieties and changed me somehow. I was underweight because of anxiety and frequently got comments on it (Personal Communication, 2022).

For her, the aesthetic of femininity is not only a family expectation but tied to broader social validation. This expectation of conforming to a certain appearance, often lighter skin tones, delicate features, and a specific body type, illustrates the depth of cultural pressures on Arab women and parallels. It is believed to be a determining factor for the future of women in terms of marriage prospects, work and opportunity – it is also connected to familial social status as well.

Bint Aisha adds, “My mother is strong and tough and controlling in some aspects. Her biggest issue was the way I look and dress. I wasn’t as feminine as others my age. My mother got mad

because I didn’t want cheek fillers, or other cosmetic procedures. I was under a lot of pressure (as the only daughter), especially at a party or event. I always felt like I wasn’t good enough no matter what I did (Personal Communication, 2022).”

In this subsection of internalized oppression, the “distorted self” that participants describe is reminiscent of Albert Memmi's “mythical portrait,” where the oppressed internalize an imposed image shaped by stereotypes and ideals of the dominant (global) culture (that here influences the local culture). For many women, this means adapting to standards of purity, femininity, and social conformity, transforming personal identity into a kind of performance. The conflict between imposed ideals and true self fuels anxieties and feelings of unworthiness, as women struggle to balance these pressures (Mahmood, 2005) with their authentic identities. This distortion perpetuates inner conflict and reinforces the same hierarchies that uphold oppression. This mirrors studies on internalized beauty norms, which show that societal ideals around physical appearance can influence self-perception, especially among Arab women and women from the ‘Global South’ (Chen et al, 2022, Mady et al. 2022, Naber, 2006).

Here we see clearly the intersection of beauty and femininity/purity as a beauty ideal – this pressure to align with a feminized, ‘pure’ appearance is not merely cosmetic but is tied to larger social expectations around marriage and respectability, where looking a certain way equates to being “good enough” or even worthy of companionship. Bint Aisha concludes her response saying, “In her defense she wants me to be happy and not end up alone. And this all circles back to the patriarchy (Personal Communication, 2022).”

As such, purity and appearance converge, symbolizing moral and social standing. The pressure to embody purity or respectability is particularly significant in Arab communities, as we have discussed and will continue to discuss in the following sections, where social norms often valorize traits associated with moral “purity” in women. Bint Aysha describes feeling judged and advised by her peers to “conform to the status quo” out of concern that she would “fall as a respectable woman (Personal Communication, 2022).” This reveals an internalized cultural policing mechanism that enforces purity as a standard for respectability among women, especially when it comes to appearance and behavior.

Such pressure creates a constant need for self-monitoring, leading many women to adopt practices that ensure they remain within the bounds of what is culturally deemed 'appropriate.' It is considered 'ugly' to do otherwise. This internalized surveillance aligns with what has been described as the cultural maintenance of gender roles and purity as core components of identity (for example Barreto and Ellemers, 2005 or Rashed, 2013). The impact of these internalized beauty norms, as Bint Aysha and Bint Yasmin indicate, fosters a self-critical environment where body image and self-esteem are significantly shaped by cultural expectations and a collective sense of what is deemed as beautiful and acceptable.

The accounts from participants show the impact of beauty standards on self-worth and identity. For example, Bint Nadia observed that 90% of women in her online group felt cultural norms harmed their body image, highlighting how widespread these pressures are. Bint Aisha's experience emphasizes how family expectations, particularly from her mother, push women to meet beauty ideals tied to femininity and marriage. Her mother's insistence on cosmetic procedures, despite Bint Aisha's refusal, reveals a pattern where the pursuit of "ideal" femininity often suppresses personal choice, framing appearance as a path to societal acceptance. Ultimately, as her account highlights, this leads to marriage and eligibility as well. In some sense, mothers may behave this way to ensure their daughters' marriage before a certain age to avoid a tarnishing of their daughters' and family reputation.

The concept of "purity" as part of beauty is further apparent in accounts from Bint Yasmin and Bint Khadra. Bint Yasmin recalls being bullied for not fitting traditional beauty norms in her all-girls school, leading to social exclusion based on her appearance and interests. Meanwhile, Bint Khadra comments on her family's encouragement to follow "natural" ideals of a somewhat docile and passive femininity – an expectation that her mother reevaluated after her own divorce (Personal Communication, 2022). These accounts highlight how purity norms are often part and parcel with social acceptance in Arab societies, with respectability often linked to appearance, behavior, and marriage status. The result presents a nuanced cycle of conformity and internal critiquing that shows the intersections of gender, race, and cultural identity in shaping beauty ideals within Arab society.

Sex-shame is an issue that many women face globally; this can be in the form of shaming, forcing a repression of sexuality (for both cis and non-cis women), objectification, fixation, and fetishization of race, or virginity, amongst others. These acts internalized tend to lead to problematic internal responses and discourse that work slowly to obliterate the self-worth or sexual agency for many women. In the region these pressures are both present and pronounced. It is also closely related and overlaps frequency with the concept of *'eib,* or shame, discussed shortly and works in tandem to police both women's bodies, behavior, and thought.

One of the most prevalent manifestations and control mechanisms in the Jordanian, Palestinian, and wider Arab culture, is the fixation on virginity, and thus sexual activity. This is not necessarily a sexual fetish but more an imposed symbol or reflection of the 'dignity' of the women, as well as that of her family's. As such, women tend to police one another, heavily, more or less so depending on the specific context, with regards to general behavior but particularly with their behavior and engagement with the opposite sex (Joseph, 1993, 1999a.). The woman must always present herself as modest and chaste, and oftentimes, naive too. When an individual lacks experience in any aspect of life, they are often uninformed of the same aspects until experience and education is sought and received. This, in my perspective, is a control mechanism that vacuums power through this (largely sexual) inexperience. In some ways, their husbands, particularly if they themselves are not virgins, do, in many senses, gain this form of power over their wives. There is still an apparent culture of 'purity' as it were, largely rooted in the Abrahamic scriptures but have permeated into cultural thinking, even in non-religious households. This means that the woman is expected, once again, to give this part of herself to only one man, her husband, this exacerbates the psychological power dynamic. It also positions the women, and her hymen, as objects, and not as entire individuals or partners. This fixation has been internalized by many women, particularly from lower-income households and preceding generations. Discussing her mother Bint Nadia says, "She is just conditioned to think it's wrong but I don't think she genuinely underneath all the conditioning thinks it's wrong. It comes down to sex. I think this is at the core of what it is (Personal Communication, 2022)." An additional layer of fear from older women with respect to their daughters particularly is that virginity is often monitored by the state and women can face repercussions for sexual activity before marriage.

As a result, women have come to practice this policing in the same way that Malcom X (1965) and Fanon (1967) referred to the behavior of oppressed black bodies doing the same. The perpetuation of this gendered sex-policing is practiced by women's families, both immediate and extended, as well as their peers, society and even the law. The participants, as mentioned, were familiar with the phenomenon of internalized sexism generally and made references to different experiences. The conversations also eventually lead to the culture specific phenomenon of *'eib*, discussed in the final section of this chapter, signaling another overlap. Sex-shaming was brought up in different forms, however, what seems to be a particularly interesting aspect is that this is made visible in two ways; shaming **sexuality** and shaming **inexperience** (amongst peer groups specifically).

Sex-shaming in the contexts of these women's experiences is that it is often two-fold; in a sense, damned if you do, and damned if you don't. While generally, there remains a prevalent and poisonous obsession on female virginity regionally and in Jordanian and Palestinian households, wherever they may be geographically, in their **double-lives**, some say they also face peer pressure to be sexually active in some way. This holds true particularly for women who attended some form of private rather than public schooling where it is generally more conservative. However it is important to note that many 'high-income households' or the bourgeoisie also heavily police the women in their families that can be linked to the earlier discussion of the origins of veiling. The experience of private or international schooling is closely tied to social class. Sexual or romantic relationships among teenagers and young women are somewhat expected, though they often remain private and are part of their 'double lives.' For example, something as simple as speaking to a young man on the phone can be seen as an innocent form of entanglement. These aspects are typically revealed only to a few close friends, if at all. Bint Mimi, from Amman, explains, from a relatively privileged perspective/background:

> For context, my school environment was not necessarily typical in the sense that there was a lot of drinking and partying that had to be hidden for so many reasons. In my teen years there was a lot of sexual activity, mostly heteronormative. The internalized misogyny that I faced in my own personal context was more so related to my worth in

> reference to men. The internalized misogyny I faced was the fact that you would be judged for being sexually active and you would also be judged for not being sexually active (Personal Communication, 2022).

She describes a phenomenon that lingers like a low-grade fever across many Arab and other traditional societies: the normalization of men's sexual activity alongside the moral condemnation of the women involved. These men, often supported by their families, expect access to women's bodies while simultaneously demanding virginity in a future wife. At the same time, they fiercely police the behavior of their own female relatives, enforcing standards they themselves violate without consequence.

These pressures of purity are still present in a plethora of cultures in the word today and are certainly not exclusive to this context, however, it remains present in both Palestinian and Jordanian society to a jarring and noteworthy extent. This shaming of women begins from a young age and tends to peak in young adulthood, women are spared, to some extent, from this after marriage. Bint Aya (25) says, "Since I was young I was exposed to shaming, before I even hit puberty there was a fixation from my father, it revolved around covering up I think growing up and I barely had any freedom to be honest (Personal Communication, 2022)."

The novelty of this is in its emerging duality of this 'judgment,' particularly amongst the women interviewed; women are both expected to engage in romantic or sexual conduct and simultaneously refrain from doing so. This is particularly oppressive because women are forced, in this context, to judge themselves from different lenses and have no space internally or externally to explore their own desires. They are then more likely to perpetuate this judgment and thus these oppressive contexts onto other women.

In the case where this was perpetrated by women in relation to experience with men, 31-year-old Bint Bee, for example, explains her experience in Gaza, saying, "In that aspect women are much harsher on each other and weirdly competitive! I was always low-key about my relationships so I was viewed as weird or less mature (than the rest of my peers) (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Bint Mimi adds, “Being in an American School we were flooded with contrasting ideas of sexual activity being cool but also culturally still unacceptable so we are all walking this tightrope and in a way judging one another for it (Personal Communication, 2022).” She continues with a side note, “I do not understand why children and particularly teenagers are exposed to such things; it's not necessarily safe for teens to be sexually active (ibid.).” Particularly as they are much less likely to have access to the already limited sexual health services in both societies.

As the pressures to conform to sexual activity seems to be present, her elder counterpart Bint Yasmin (30) adds the inverse in the sense of policing a perceived excess of sexual activity highlighting horizontal violence and says:

> I also experienced this internalized misogyny as well from female friends; one of them judged me a lot for dating for instance rather than being in a committed long term relationship. Till now, I sometimes hear from my female friends the judgment of other women for all types of reasons; for being a DJ, dressing more revealing etc. I never intentionally contributed to this necessarily, at least not consciously. I often tried to defend the women who were targets of this judgment. But I will admit it was often hard to go against the grain with many women especially when I was younger (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Shadda speaks to the way this causes her to self-police, even in a time and place of her life that it is no longer necessary (as she is now married and lives abroad). She says, “When it comes to things like how to conduct myself sexually, I still feel some of those ingrained pressures from my upbringing, even though I know there's no real reason for it now. It’s something that’s just stuck in my head. Sometimes, I see these attitudes reflected in my extended family, especially on my dad's side, who tend to be conservative. They talk about topics like my choice to live abroad on my own or my relationships. It’s a mindset I try to ignore, but it lingers (Personal Communication, 2022).”

The second fold of it, Bint Maya from Jordan, explains, “I still have to lie and hide the fact that I have a sexual life and enjoy it.” But she specifies, “Virginity is one thing we don’t talk about or discuss at home (referencing her mother as it is really unlikely for this discussion to happen with male relatives) (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Bint Khadra believes that this is inherited from previous generations, “I think my mother has a lot of sex shame, a lot of profession shame, a lot of like class shame, both my parents were very working class, and I feel no matter how much she said to just be me, out loud with her words, there is no way to not inherit this.” Adding, “I still struggle to wear what I want if it’s too sexy sometimes, just to not feel like a disappointment I guess (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Bint Sophia raises an important issue regarding this double standard, and specifically a highly prevalent form of horizontal violence, she says, “Another example is that women want their sons to marry a virgin; they also want their widowed or divorced daughters to remarry almost always to anyone in these circumstances. There's just a lot of double standards here that are still imposed on women that we can all see very clearly (Personal Communication, 2022).”

The lack of accessible sexual and reproductive health services (SHRS) for women in Jordan and Palestine, particularly for unmarried individuals, has significant social and health implications. Due to strong cultural and legal restrictions, where premarital and extramarital sex is illegal in Jordan and traditionally forbidden in Palestine, women face barriers in openly accessing these services if they are unwed. In Jordan, legal structures, combined with hospital policies and societal expectations, often require women to disclose their marital status, exposing unmarried women to significant stigma or even detention when seeking sexual and reproductive health services (Article 282 punishes sex outside marriage) (Edwards, 2019, Consortium for Street Children, 2020). In Palestine, cultural emphasis on virginity and strict gender norms significantly discourage women from accessing sexual and reproductive health services. A study highlights that norms sanctifying virginity and shaming non-marital sex are so entrenched in Palestinian society that they can supersede a doctor's duty of care, leading to denial of services to unmarried women. Community-based organizations like the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) and SAWA provide support through legal aid, counseling, and helplines, yet the

pervasive cultural stigma continues to hinder many women from seeking help (Hanieh, 2023). This leads to a lack of critical emotional and familial support during sexual health crises, as exemplified in personal accounts like that of Bint Maya, who had to face her abortion experience without family support. She explains, “Abortion was not something I could’ve discussed with my mother when I went through it. Yes, I had to sacrifice in terms of not having my family around when I really needed them (Personal Communication, 2022).” This environment, where SHRS services remain inaccessible or socially risky, hinders the well-being of women across various spheres in both peoples. Thurayya Zreik tells me, from her work in Palestinian communities in Lebanon, what she believes is also relevant to Jordan and Palestine, says, “In particular, women I spoke with emphasized the social and cultural norms that mark these women as ‘deviant’ from expected behaviors. This leads to gossip, bullying, and isolation, all mechanisms for enforcing community-approved norms.” She added, “This stigma has an anthropological function; essentially reinforcing and preserving patriarchal values in our communities. These values remain embedded and produce a limiting force on women’s freedom and perceived value within society (Personal Communication, 2022).”

In many communities within Palestinian and Jordanian culture, norms around sexuality often create conflicting pressures for women, leading to feelings of shame and repression. Participants describe how societal expectations force them to maintain purity and chastity while also sometimes experiencing pressure to engage in romantic or sexual relationships. This duality fosters internalized shame and self-monitoring, often making it difficult for women to authentically express their own ideas and sexual agency. Familial and cultural standards of modesty, especially around relationships and behavior with men, place a burden on women to conform to both conservative and peer-driven expectations, limiting personal freedom and position desire as shameful.

The research discussions and participant insights reveal a layered manifestation of internalized sex-based double standards, often expressed through patterns of envy and competition, which sometimes escalate into horizontal violence among women. This internalized competitiveness is a recurring theme, and as Bint Sophia from Gaza, now working in France, explains, “Woman is her own greatest enemy; you see how much we should support one another, but in reality, this

isn't the case. A most prominent characteristic of a woman is her ability to feel emotion and often letting her emotions rule her – jealousy is an obvious trait." This statement sheds light on how deeply ingrained such perceptions are; women may feel compelled to prioritize securing attention, validation, or success over solidarity with other women.

Bint Sophia further notes, "The woman always wants to be the center of attention and doesn't like it when another woman takes that space from her. I rarely see two women joining up to initiate projects together, for example." This sense of scarcity and guardedness can lead to personal and professional challenges, especially in more competitive types of work, where, as she recounts, "women...affect me negatively in the workplace, even as far as lying to make me look bad or moving me from my position." Here her experience is intensified due to her diasporic context, where Arab and North African women navigate shared marginalization, heightening both competition and survival behaviors that manifest as horizontal violence. She explains, "They go even as far as lying to make me look bad, or rather move me from my position - to hold me back. In Paris, a lot of Arab women, especially North African women, seem to be opportunists at any cost. I have lost work because of this kind of 'hustler' mentality that they have (Personal Communication, 2022)." In this case, in some sense, she too is commiting (reactionary) horizontal violence as well in her understanding of the situation. Being in her particular position as an Arab woman, in perceived competition with another marginalized group of North African women in the Global North highlights intersecting oppressions. Thus the manifest horizontal violence is largely expected in a context where these two groups are normally lumped into one another (foreign, brown, Arab, Muslims women) by the society they live in and this perception is furthered.

The intersecting forms of oppression faced by Arab women in the Global North position them in a double bind: perceived as a homogenous group by the broader society yet differentiated and pitted against one another internally. Bint Aysha, who remains in the Arab world, describes how local women face similar pressures, explaining, "There is the pressure to raise your daughters to conform...friends who 'talk shit,' and judge you as bad for deviating from the norm." This pressure stems not only from societal expectations but also from protective instincts rooted in

preserving family reputation, reinforcing a cycle of conformity that complicates efforts toward mutual support.

Embedded cultural beliefs, such as the concept of the evil-eye and *hasad*, add another layer to this dynamic. Rashed (2013) explains:

> The evil-eye is an innate capacity to do harm unintentionally through a direct look when encountering abundance or beauty...closely related to envy (*hasad)*," where envy, intentionally or not, invokes harm upon others. This cultural context can intensify suspicion and mistrust among women, as accomplishments are met with wary admiration or latent fear of ill will (page 3 out of 12).

This exacerbates competition and horizontal violence and acts as a manifestation of Pharr's (1996) 'contempt.' This prevalent and widely believed cultural occurrence compounds with the lack of opportunities for women to create an even more ripe atmosphere for 'self-preservational' horizontal violence.

Sarah Kaddoura, contextualizes these dynamics, explaining, "It's hard not to feel in constant competition with other women; when you live in an environment that encourages it." She suggests that relocation or changing environments can help, but acknowledges that such opportunities are rare, saying, "It is a privilege not many women get to have. It's a work in progress but it cannot depend completely on individuals seeking to change it within themselves (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Bint Yasmin says, "I also made the decision to cut a lot of toxic female friendships that I had that was based on competition and judgment - which was often suffocating and a very clear product of the patriarchy (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Sometimes it is only a feeling of 'contempt', other times, it is transformed into action. As Bint Sophia's experience highlights, this action can materialize as horizontal violence. Being in her particular position as an Arab woman, in perceived competition with another marginalized group

of North African women in the Global North highlights this. Thus the manifest horizontal violence is largely expected in a context where these two groups are normally pitted against each other by the society they live in where this perception is furthered.

The themes of judgment and envy within women's social dynamics emerge as patterns, thoughts and behaviors that both reinforce and resist (neo)patriarchal structures. This tension between internalized societal expectations and individual attempts to reject them is central to these dynamics. The narratives shared reveal how women often unconsciously perpetuate the very norms they seek to dismantle, sometimes judging or distancing themselves from others to fit accepted roles, while also struggling to assert their authentic selves in spaces that feel constraining. Bint Aya concludes, "Sometimes we also find ourselves having certain opinions or actions that are not really true to our beliefs but we find ourselves repeating them just because we saw other women doing so. And it takes a huge effort to get rid of that and to better yourself and to get rid of all of this garbage and I don't think that a lot of people are privileged enough to work on themselves (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Horizontal violence has been positioned as both a response and social mechanism involving the process of repeating, mimicking, conforming to the reigning hegemonic narrative to stay hidden and safe with their weakened social positionality. It in itself, as other internalized oppressions, may be considered as part of the (neo)patriarchal bargain. A lack of opportunity for women also tends to breed this unhealthy competitive and envious state that is then translated into action that perpetuates the perceived 'competition's' oppression as well as their own. Within the context, horizontal violence is a result of intersecting oppressions and as a result tends to manifest in multiple ways for different reasons. Here, it behaves both as a clear protective mechanism that is transferred intergenerationally and as a (often subconscious) repressive tactic which essentially reproduces the same oppression. Horizontal violence is prevalent within the context of internalized sexism but more so, regionally, due to the legal context which they are subject to.

On experiences of horizontal violence between women here, Bint Yasmin says, "What was very repressing really is the way teachers, specifically female teachers and other female students policed each other's dress-code and behavior. For instance, at school I often felt pressured by my

peers to cover my hair outside, or subscribe to a religious way of living, etc. are instances that serve to perpetuate oppressive systems (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Survival, but more prominently 'protection', is a widely visible rationale by both women who commit this violence and are subject to it as well. This in turn fuels the reproduction of gendered oppression. To highlight the ways in which this so-called protection is transferred horizontally, Bint Nadia explains regarding experiencing this from her mother. She says, "Essentially, I think she is just trying to protect me from many things including my reputation. But I think she also thinks certain things are just wrong; sometimes, I don't know if she's conditioned to think that it's wrong or genuinely feels that way (Personal Communication, 2022)."

A woman with a publically 'ruined' reputation is often ostracized, if not aggressed against physically by her family. The reputation is generally tied to chastity and demeanor and often reflects back on the woman's family as well. In Jordan, domestic violence and familial violence often arise from entrenched honor codes, with severe consequences for women whose reputations are tarnished. These women face ostracism, and sometimes even physical violence from their families. As previously discussed, 'honor-based' violence in Jordan includes inter-partner violence, sibling rivalry, and violence within extended families. A similar dynamic exists in Palestinian communities, where societal and familial pressures contribute to cycles of violence. This violence, often linked to breaches of social norms, particularly affects women, especially in more conservative households.

However it is important to provide global context as this is not a unique phenomenon to the region. In terms of domestic violence rates, while Jordan faces significant challenges, other countries, especially in the West, report notable figures as well. Canada and the US both have higher rates of reported femicides per capita compared to Jordan (Canada 1 per 100,000, Jordan 0.6 per 100,000). The US reports a femicide rate of 2.9 per 100,000, while countries like France 0.7 per 100,000. These numbers highlight that while Jordan faces a cultural and legal struggle around domestic violence, certain Western countries, despite having stronger legal frameworks, still experience high levels of gender-based violence (World Population Review, 2024). As such this may offer insights into creating a new framework, considerate of cultural factors (in all

countries) that provides deterrence measures in addition to fortified mechanisms for recourse and justice that are centered in a localized feminist framework.

In saying this, older generations of women, based on both custom and experience, attempt to guide women within the social constraints we collectively face. Bint Nadia showing a heightened awareness of this herself says, “I think my mothers generation does have a deeper internal conflict, because on the one hand she empowers me greatly and on another she doesn’t in an attempt to protect me. I think they want to be ready for the world as it is today, but they aren’t quite there yet (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Horizontal violence among women, rooted in internalized sexism, often reflects conformity to oppressive societal norms for personal or collective safety. Bint Aya describes this dynamic: “Some women even do that because they have a personal gain from it [..] it’s safer [..] people don’t have the guts to stand up, so it’s best to go for what other people have already decided for us (Personal Communication, 2022).” This illustrates how fear and societal pressures drive the replication of systemic oppression and that it is problematically centered around the idea of safety and protection.

Sarah Kaddoura discusses tackling the difficulty of challenging these norms, explaining that “questioning or challenging internalized misogyny ends up making us feel alienated, unsafe and on our own.” She stresses the importance of collective and personal efforts alongside systemic reforms, saying, “It should be accompanied with changes in cultural representation, literature, news, education, laws (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Bint Haya points to judgment among women as a key struggle: “Our biggest struggle is women judging women.” She sees progress in younger generations uniting to fight double standards but acknowledges the enduring prevalence of horizontal violence in daily life (Personal Communication, 2022). These reflections, as well as those in following sections, express the complexities of internalized sexism (and other oppressions) and the extensive challenges in breaking cycles of horizontal violence.

The participants' experiences reveal how internalized sexism manifests through beauty standards, purity expectations, and racialized hierarchies, perpetuating self-surveillance and horizontal violence among women. These pressures, shaped by colonial legacies and cultural norms, produce conflicting demands: to be desirable yet respectable, visible yet restrained. The resulting internal conflicts inhibit autonomy and sustain cycles of judgment across generations. Through personal accounts, it becomes clear that internalized sexism is not merely private but collective, embedded within everyday interactions and societal structures, reinforcing gendered inequities across Palestinian and Jordanian contexts.

Internalization of (Sociopolitical and Material) Insecurity: "It is Paradoxical to be a Palestinian Woman"

The phenomenon of internalized colonialism in Jordan and Palestine highlights how colonial ideologies and power structures shape self-perception, gendered relationships, and state governance, particularly for women. As Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) explains, colonialism often portrayed Arab and Muslim women as needing "saving," undermining their cultural identities and agency. This internalized colonial mindset drives women to evaluate their worth based on Western ideals, inhibiting authentic self-expression and cultural autonomy (Spivak, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Said, 1978). This process of self-orientalization is further explored through adjacent contexts such as marriage by scholars like Hanan Kholoussy (2010), who examines the relationship between colonialism and gender in Egypt, revealing how colonial ideologies permeate societal structures, affecting state-building and the conceptualization of gender for both men and women.

In Arab *Women's Autobiographies: Politics of the Self, Resistance, and Community* (Elsadda, 2010), Hoda Elsadda unpacks how Arab women memoirists navigate the expectation to exoticize their experiences for Western publishers, often framing their narratives within Orientalist tropes to gain visibility. Similarly, Miriam Cooke, in Deploying the Muslimwoman (2007), examines how the image of the 'Muslimwoman' is co-opted by both Western and Arab actors, leading to self-Orientalizing performances that reinforce stereotypes of Muslim women as either oppressed or mysterious. Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, in *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the*

Occupation of Iraq (2009), explore how Iraqi women's organizations adopted Western feminist language during the U.S. occupation, aligning with Orientalist assumptions to secure funding and legitimacy in international spaces. Together, these works highlight the tensions of self-Orientalization: how Arab women and cultural producers strategically, and sometimes unintentionally, reproduce Orientalist narratives to maneuver within global power structures, often at the expense of reinforcing reductive stereotypes.

As highlighted in the previous section, **if** internalized, this phenomenon affects physical perceptions of the self, manifesting as either self-fetishization of the 'seductive Arab woman' or the internalization of Western beauty ideals, such as light skin and colored eyes.

This dual consciousness, where indigenous identity and imposed colonial identity coexist, leads to a fragmented self-image, particularly evident in Jordan and Palestine. Suad Joseph (1993, 1996, 1999a., also Sharabi, 1988, Massad, 2001, and Hasso, 2009, 2011) discusses how Jordan's state embodies a "neopatriarchal" character, with policies replicating colonial male-dominated structures, especially in matters like travel, marriage, and employment, where male guardianship is legally required. This system reflects the continuation of colonial patriarchal control, limiting women's freedom and autonomy. This approach is a form of internalized orientalism, where patriarchal values are framed as progressive, further eroding indigenous gender equity and perpetuating colonial stereotypes. As discussed in Chapter 1, this section will focus more on the lived effects of instability and the internalization of these effects.

In Jordan, the British colonial legacy continues to shape the state's legal and cultural frameworks, particularly in gendered laws. These colonial legacies persist in contemporary Jordan, where women's autonomy in equal citizenship, marriage, inheritance, and mobility remains restricted. As discussed in depth, state modernizing projects often borrow from colonial legal codes, presenting patriarchal structures as progressive, further embedding gender inequality under the guise of modernity. O'Sullivan (2021) highlights how the imposition of a nuclear family model disrupts traditional kinship systems, reflecting broader colonial efforts to restructure indigenous social systems and embedding a dual consciousness in women's daily lives.

In Palestine, internalized colonialism and Orientalism intersect with settler-colonial violence, intensifying the oppression of women. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010) emphasizes that Palestinian women internalize narratives of invisibility and inferiority, as reflected in interviews where women express feelings like, “No one sees us or hears us; we are not considered human beings (177).” This erasure is both individual and collective, shaping how women see their roles in society and limiting their ability to resist. Despite these challenges, Palestinian women resist through “non-conventional strategies of survival and resilience (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010, 221)”, preserving cultural practices and embodying *sumud* (steadfastness), which subtly defy colonial narratives. Similarly, in Jordan, women navigate the tension between traditional expectations and modern aspirations, finding ways to assert some autonomy even within restrictive frameworks.

Internalized colonialism in Jordan and Palestine leads to a fractured identity for women, torn between attending to multiple oppressions simultaneously. This dual consciousness that arises as a result not only influences personal autonomy but also shapes family dynamics, fostering ambivalence and co-dependence.

Within discussion with primary sources, two key themes emerge: the negotiation and rejection of dual consciousness in the Palestinian context, and the interpersonal effects of occupation, guardianship systems and family separations. In Palestine, where the oppressor is clearly identifiable, there is a more pronounced rejection of dual consciousness through active resistance and the reclamation of cultural identity. In Jordan, the subtler effects of internalized colonialism manifest in ambivalent relationships and codependency, particularly within family structures shaped by patriarchal guardianship systems, illustrating the complex interplay of colonial legacies, gendered oppression, and subversion tactics.

There are numerous intersecting oppressions in the Arab-speaking world, with occupation being the most dominant in Palestine, while both Jordan and Palestine grapple with poor, sexist social, political, and legal governance. This is compounded by weak economies and limited opportunities. The near non-existence of the welfare state and significant barriers to migration create a perpetual state of insecurity and stress. Even if one form of oppression doesn't affect

someone directly, other forms inevitably leak into their lives. The internalization of material instability, whether economic, related to citizenship and protection, freedom of movement, violence, or regional instability, becomes a constant experience of complex procedures, endless waiting, and bypassing numerous hurdles just to meet basic needs. This is now a way of life, visible and internalized, passed down through generations.

From a gendered perspective, I will explore the internal and external mechanisms that may arise in women, and individuals in general, as a result of this internalized insecurity. Women, in particular, face both political instability and the added burden of legal and personal co-dependence, further contributing to anxiety and instability. Their social positioning and internalized insecurity often result in a form of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903); a race-based double consciousness that, when combined with gender and cultural norms, evolves into triple consciousness. This generates psycho-social effects such as ambivalence in relationships and a fractured sense of self, along with a culture of dependence.

This becomes even more pronounced when considering a multi-generational perspective. In Palestine, the 1948 and 1967 displacements, along with the ongoing violence of the Zionist project, have created a history of near-perpetual trauma. Similarly, Jordan has faced political instability, including conflict with Israel and tensions with Palestinians within its borders. Neighboring countries such as Syria and Lebanon have experienced their own histories of oppression. This interwoven violence and upheaval, marked by frequent and precarious displacement, have deeply affected all four countries. As we see today, the Zionist expansionist project continues its brutal assault, wreaking havoc not only on Palestine but also Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, along with other regional actors.

Countless families in the Levant have endured, across generations, illegal occupation, foreign intervention, civil wars, popular uprisings brutally suppressed, total economic collapse, catastrophic natural disasters, authoritarianism, and arbitrary violence beyond comprehension. On top of this, they face the imposed inferiority resulting from Western powers' financial control over the region, along with the racism and bigotry suffered by the majority of Arab-speaking people in the Global North.

In such contexts, can any individual's psychological well-being truly be considered normal by any standard?

Displacement in Gaza has reached unprecedented levels due to ongoing Israeli military operations. In 2025, 1.9 million people, 90% of Gaza's population, were displaced, some up to ten times. Overcrowded shelters and severe food shortages exacerbate the crisis, this number will surely only increase (UNRWA, 2025).

In the West Bank, illegal expulsions, particularly in 'Area C' and East Jerusalem, continues due to demolitions, settler violence, and ethnic cleansing. Since the 'ceasefire' in early 2025, more than 40,000 Palestinians were displaced, with Masafer Yatta one of the key sites of forced expulsions, evictions and this systemic violence (B'Tselem, 2025). There has also been a concerted effort to ethnically cleanse the West Bank (for example, Tulkarem, Jenin continuing with severity into 2025), and southern Lebanon, in the process of the genocide of Gaza.

In 2024, Lebanon faced 1.2 million internally displaced people as a result of Israeli bombardment of the southern towns and cities as well as Beirut, the capital. Coupled with economic crisis, and regional instability causing migration into Lebanon by both Syrian and Palestinian refugees, this has severely strained basically non-existent national resources, leaving everyone in precarious conditions with limited access to basic necessities (Fawaz, 2024).

Displacement in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon highlights how material insecurity is a direct result of continuous geopolitical instability.

Conversely, Jordan, spared from significant political violence, hosts refugees, with most migration driven by employment and education. This contrast highlights the ongoing impact of colonial-era agreements, like Sykes-Picot (1916), perpetuating fragmented and unstable regional dynamics despite a collective history and intertwined future.

We then must consider the effect of this physical violence on household/familial structure, we must consider the legal oppression faced by women, their frequently and rapidly changing social roles, and the recurring cognitive dissonance that takes hold as a result. This is something that

affects the vast majority of people in the two contexts but the extent to which they suffer both oppression of this insecurity or precarity, and its subsequent internalization, is largely dependent on their resources (both material and non-material).

In the context of the occupation of Palestine, for example, in relation to women particularly, is the experience of an outlier of the sample. Bint Najla, accurately explains the widespread effect of this experiential instability across generations. As Palestinians, she says, the three generations of women in discussion (roughly 20, 60, 80 years-old) have faced political violence in their lifetimes. Her mother, she explains, was living in her hometown of Halhoul in al-Khalil during the Nakba in 1948, and while she was not displaced until later in her life, she was, in a very literal sense, an arms length from the violence and destruction of the 'catastrophe, ' adding that one of the oldest Israeli settlements is located nearby (till today it is a site of settler violence). During that time her mother and father were fighting with and for the Palestinian people, with her mother supporting as an unlicensed nurse and her father fighting in the Arab army. Later on in 1967, she and her mother both were subject to another upheaval and fled to Jordan during the war. Gathering her six children in a taxi her mother made a 16-hour journey to Jordan (actual duration from Halhoul to Amman is 45 minutes). Bint Najla's daughter, she explains, while living under much better socio-political conditions (due to a foreign passport and upbringing elsewhere) she has still technically been a foreigner in every country she has lived in in her 20-odd years (Personal Communication 2022).

Bint Najla's mother, displaced by both the Nakba and the 1967 war, faced not only the physical toll of fleeing but also the psychological impact of living in constant instability. As an unlicensed nurse, she contributed to her community's resistance while navigating the trauma of multiple displacements and a loss of home. Despite benefiting from nationalization and relatively better socio-political conditions, carried the scars of her mother's traumatic experiences, never fully feeling at home in any country due to her own displacement in 1967. Her son and daughter, though growing up in a more stable environment, still grapples with the inherited sense of being a foreigner, reflecting how intergenerational trauma persists. This ongoing cycle of displacement and alienation highlights how trauma is passed down, impacting both the material conditions and psychological well-being of each generation (Javanbakht, 2024, Palosaari, et al., 2013).

Her experience made me consider my family's: My paternal grandmother tells me the story of my father's birth. In Gaza, in 1956 as a result of the events leading up to the 'Suez Crisis,' events led to en masse executions of the men of Khan Younis and Rafah (and other areas in Gaza) and terrorized by Israeli forces. During the day, she tells me, the men in Gaza city were forced down into the streets in the early morning and made to stand facing a wall with their arms up until sundown under threat of Israeli violence, or death – my grandfather amongst them. After sundown, the lights were not allowed on inside homes. In preparation the midwives had installed a reflective material on windows so that lights could remain on if a woman went into labor at night. These were the conditions of my father's birth. She also often recalls Israeli armed soldiers forcefully taking him from her arms to psychologically terrorize her before he was a year old.

The conditions she describes, the terror of living under the threat of death, the forced separations from family members, and the violence that permeated everyday life reveal the direct psychological toll of the protracted Nakba and today's occupation. These experiences, passed down through generations, foster an internalized sense of vulnerability, fear, and powerlessness, which, when compounded over time, leads to a normalization of oppression until resistance springs forth again.

In both these narratives, the psychological and material effects of occupation are not isolated incidents but part of a continuous cycle of trauma that women, in particular, internalize. The constant exposure to violence, displacement, and legal marginalization deepens their sense of insecurity, leading to a fragmented sense of self and perpetuating a cycle of dependence, fear, and internalized oppression that affects not just individuals but entire communities across generations. This trauma has actual biological effects as well through epigenetics, whereby a change in gene expression as a result of violence and displacement (El Sarraj et. al, 2008, Damesyn, 2025). In Palestinian communities, prolonged exposure to trauma can influence stress-related genes, affecting individuals' psychological and physiological responses (Samara et al., 2020, Marie et al., 2020, Aldabbour et al., 2024). These changes can be passed down across generations, leading to heightened vulnerability to conditions like PTSD and anxiety (Thabet, 2020). As seen in the experiences of Bint Najla and her family, such trauma is internalized and perpetuated, shaping both individual lives and collective identity. In the case of my family, I

often wonder if their experiences of violence and displacement are causes for my medical conditions and anxieties today. Pushing this further we can also see these effects in action today with the ongoing violence against Gaza and the West Bank; we can even see this in Palestinians in the diaspora who are faced with detention and deportation (see Mahmoud Khalil from the US, for example).

Bint Siham, from Ramallah, adds on the intergenerational violence her and her mother have faced says, “Our experiences are similar because we are both living under an occupation, but in her youth, there was much more visible violence. There was an armed resistance in the West Bank and as such there were much more breakouts of fighting against the occupation. In my lifetime, it has been one of ‘peace’ agreements and the disarmament of the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority. They face more daily violence and we live under a veil of peace with different acts of violence and I suppose different types of aggressors (Personal Communication, 2022).” This has certainly changed and worsened since October 7, 2023.

And this type of conflict, upheaval, and disruption to daily life, is only one, relatively small aspect, of the different kinds of insecurity that is prompted by the occupation. The trauma and instability endured by most Palestinian women (and men certainly) generated a profound sense of insecurity, reinforcing feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, anger and frustration, that echo through subsequent generations. It is often internalized and dispersed in both emotional and material realms of being. Emotionally, when internalized, can lead to a variety of intersecting issues such as co-dependence, anxieties and phobias, ambivalent relationships, and cognitive dissonance and disillusionment. Furthermore there is an overwhelming sense of (survivor's) guilt for many Palestinians, as for example, Israeli violence is often disproportionate and disproportionately distributed amongst different Palestinian communities.

The forced adaptations strategized by each woman serve as both a response to and a reinforcement of the external forces of oppression (as there is little choice in the matter), resulting in a cycle of internalized trauma and self-doubt that is inherited and sustained through different generations within families. Though of course, ideas of resisting oppression are taught and learned as well sometimes causing further internal contradictions.

The lasting impact of intergenerational trauma in Palestine shows how intersecting forms of oppression, here settler-colonialism or neocolonialism, (neo)patriarchy, and cultural oppression, shape women's lived experiences. The psychological and emotional toll of this cycle is evident in narratives that link personal struggles to oppressive socio-political forces. Bint Aisha discusses the overarching omnipresence of occupation as a root cause of her trauma: “I would say that the only issue in my life is the occupation; that’s the source of my trauma (Personal Communication, 2022).” She elaborates on the compounding with neopatriarchy, stating, “Since the moment I was born, I have felt the pressure and oppression of patriarchy. The world today is so desensitized and cruel... it all comes down to the patriarchy. My inner demons are the ones that hinder me the most (aside from occupation) (ibid.).”

Sarah Kaddoura adds depth to this discussion, “When you are facing a certain in-your-face oppression that is vital and present in so many aspects of your life, you sort of get into survival mode. It’s harder for you to see it as part of a bigger intersecting system of oppressions (Personal Communication, 2022).” These insights illustrate how the intersecting forces of neocolonialism and neopatriarchy not only perpetuate structural violence but also shape personal struggles of women across generations.

Despite the pervasive oppression faced by Palestinian women, there have been incremental changes that signify progress. As Dr. Islah Jad notes, some legal reforms have been achieved: “It was reflected in legal terms partially, for example, in raising the age of marriage to 18, to inform the first wife of the second marriage of her husband, [and] to know the exact share of female inheritance before accepting ‘التخارج (withdrawing from inheritance rights) (Personal Communication, 2022).” These changes, though limited, highlight how generational shifts influence the modes and focus of women’s activism. Jad’s writings explore in-depth these evolving approaches within Palestinian women’s movements. From a broader lens, Kaddoura adds that activism, particularly through movements like Talaat, integrated women’s rights into broader resistance efforts: “Talaat (a Palestinian feminist organization), even if they sort of died out, birthed a phenomenon that echoed throughout the Arab world brilliantly. More and more

people started speaking up against the deprioritization of women's rights and lives (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Jordanian women too have dealt with the regional instability, authoritarianism and crippling economic declines. They face further insecurity through a different form; essentially women are legally infantilized, particularly with respect to personal status laws (similarly the case in Palestine as well). As will be discussed more extensively, women remain in precarity through a perpetual legal co-dependence on male guardians. In both cases, the external, unstable, circumstances in which these women have existed become the basic terrain in which women have to navigate through. This means in many cases, much of their behavior, and decision-making, have to conform to this silently hostile context. It then creates both internal and external responses, internally, it creates different layers of consciousness affecting behavior. This political ambivalence is translated into personal relationships, it becomes a way of being exacerbated by the legal infantilization of their civic status and deprivation of equal citizenship.

Developing Dual Consciousness in Dual Oppressions

Another expression of an internal experience of insecurity from a participant living in (self-described) ‘slums’ of Haifa highlights the effects of the occupation of Palestinian women (and men) with Israeli citizenships. She says, “Still healing; accepting life under occupation is not at all normal nor is it okay to be feeling normal. You always feel trapped and like you need to prove you are worthy of good honest support and a good education. The pain and anger never leaves you, you have to split your energy in half to keep chasing your dreams and getting closer to your higher self, and half chasing justice in a society so brainwashed it will never be on your side (Bint Layla, Personal Communication, 2022).” Here Bint Layla, as a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship faced with dual consciousness and the internal effects it causes. An inferiority complex is imposed by the hegemony of discriminatory Israeli society while trying to remain true to oneself as a Palestinian, despite the fact that both Palestinian, Arab, and Jewish Israelis have access to a plethora of public services by the state, Palestinians are generally not privilege to the same treatment, and when they are, they are made to present their worth in an overcompensatory manner. Of course, the standard of treatment of non-conforming Palestinian Israelis is outright discriminatory at best.

W.E.B Dubois' Double Consciousness, in *The Soul of Black Folk* (1903), proves a useful framework for understanding some aspects of the duality of consciousness that is presented in Bint Layla's discourse. Dubois, and later other scholars, developed this conceptualization namely through observation and introspection of the psychological conditions created through conflicting identities.

In essence, Dubois explains the state of one's existence, holding two opposing views in the same mind. While the two consciousnesses reside in tandem, they often contain contradictory views based on social identity. Dubois holds that this "double consciousness" exists as a result of attempting to reconcile identities in marginalized or oppressed groups vis-a-vis their own self-perception, ambitions, and beliefs. This turns into an internal tension and acute awareness of one's race, gender, and other identity related contexts in society.

To reflect on my own experience of dual consciousness, I recognize the cognitive dissonance that shapes my perspective, my reality, and my daily life, especially over the past two years. Despite the ongoing genocide in Palestine against my people, alongside the assault on Lebanon, a nation I hold citizenship to (due to the Nakba and Naksa), these flagrant attacks are fueled by the Global North. Yet, in order to complete my research and dissertation, I am still required to adhere to Western ideals and academic expectations. This includes self-censorship to maintain the façade of "impartiality" when presenting my findings, even though this ideal is rendered meaningless in the face of such wanton violence against my ethnicity and my gender, my people generally, and my land. This tension between personal experience and academic obligation reflects the painful contradictions that come with living in a state of dual consciousness; navigating their identities within systems that fundamentally disregard their lived realities and an effort in creating a 'third' space (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963).

Alluding to this, in Fanon's words, "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man than with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question. No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man (1967,

17).” This is equally applicable to other oppressed groups, but here particularly, amongst women in the Jordanian and Palestinian contexts of having to exist as multiple ‘characters’ simultaneously. There are specific codes of conduct with different social groups; this is done to integrate into both groups, to a certain extent. Moore finds, “Double consciousness is adaptive as a survival technique, but it can be considered maladaptive because it can generate mental conflict (2005, 752).”

This double consciousness is exacerbated in Palestine as Palestinians are subject to domestic discrimination by the same hegemonic power through different structures. This includes the racist policies of the settler-colony, the oppressive tactics implemented by the Palestinian Authorities and neoliberal foreign organizations (under a guise of ‘aid’ or ‘empowerment’), in addition to mediated international discrimination (as we have seen in the reporting on Gaza and the West Bank in 2023-to date).

Researcher Beesan Jaber explains:

> In Palestine, there’s a much deeper understanding that freedom isn’t free—just as giving up land isn’t free, women aren’t free either. People increasingly recognize that the liberation of women is inherently tied to broader societal and political struggles. Feminist issues aren’t isolated; they’re integrated into the larger political movement for freedom (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Saba asserts this as well, based on her extensive research (as well as her identity, upbringing, and residing in Palestine i.e lived-experience):

> Talking to women who were active in the first Intifada, I can clearly tell how well-directed their feminist movement was (and still is, although lost between NGOs and UN bodies). It was more intertwined, naturally, with the greater liberation of Palestine (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Aysha from the West Bank says, “It is paradoxical to be a Palestinian woman, when we protest and fight the occupation we have to stand side-by-side with those that are maintaining their privilege and thus participating in our oppression. But at the end of the day we are fighting a bigger oppressor (Personal Communication, 2022).” She highlights both the double consciousness based on second-class citizenship as well as double consciousness from gendered oppression too. This has been developed by scholars to mean triple consciousness, an awareness of the self in three separate categories and an understanding of the intersections and oppression therein; in this case, as Palestinians, as women, and as (discussed in the following section) Palestinian women. This is something that can be felt universally for these women, regardless of where they are physically located. “Women in the West Bank versus the women in 1948 Palestine are both under different intersectional violence than one another but this is just another method of separation and ultimately control,” adds Bint Aysha. However, neoliberalist feminism compounds with this facet of oppression acting as a big detriment as well. Additionally, recent events must be factored in, such as the flare in on-going violence that greatly worsens all aspects of this discussion.

Jaber continues, “However, despite this awareness, there’s often a denial or dismissal of the everyday struggles women face. Even when these issues are acknowledged, they’re often flagged superficially, without addressing the deeper systemic challenges (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Bint Saba tells me that, from an urban socio-economic perspective, the neoliberal agenda significantly reshaped the ‘freedoms’ experienced by the ‘Oslo generation’ in Palestine compared to their descendants. The Oslo generation, comprising individuals who reached adulthood during the first Intifada and grew up before the Oslo Accords, witnessed a dramatic shift in priorities as the Palestinian Authority transitioned from liberation to state-building. This transition, driven by the Paris Protocol, necessitated economic policies aligned with fostering a sense of stability and normalcy (if only to stir a fear of having it taken away). Particularly in Ramallah, as the de facto capital, substantial international and Western investments aimed to create an environment that would make the population wary of losing their newfound stability. She says:

> The native, Palestinian-led civil society (women's movements) transformed into foreign-backed NGOs, limited by Western conditional funding, with its main motto being "empowerment." Of course, this meant the development of women's movements is strictly tied to capitalist endeavors; the spread of loans, equating women's liberation to profit and individualism through the commodification of any and all that relates to Palestinian culture (embroidered bags, keychains, bookmarks, sweets, etc.) (ibid.).

The national and gender identity intersect forcefully at the site of citizenship, and this is relevant for the context of Jordan and Lebanon, but also other neighboring countries, particularly with respect to the Palestinians.

The denial of nationality to the children of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians, numbering between 355,000 and 500,000, highlights systemic issues rooted in fears of demographic changes and national stability (Al Jazeera, 2024). These children face significant barriers to basic rights, including access to education, healthcare, and employment. This policy is part of broader demographic control efforts that disproportionately affect Palestinians in the region, reflecting anxieties over granting full citizenship to Palestinian refugees who have historically faced displacement. As Bint Dima tells me, "At the end of the day, we can't pass on our nationality because they're scared of the Palestinian men we marry and the Palestinian boys we might have (Personal Communication, 2022)." This phenomenon is similarly visible in Lebanon, where laws prevent Lebanese women from passing on their nationality to their children, further marginalizing Palestinian and other displaced populations at the expense of women's equal citizenship (Sayegh, 2018). Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity helps to explain how these national boundaries and gendered inequalities persist: rather than fostering integration, these policies entrench divisions and sustain patriarchal systems. In both Jordan and Lebanon, laws perpetuate women's dependency on patriarchal structures while excluding Palestinians from full citizenship, further undermining gender equity and deepening ethnic oppression. These frameworks sustain the exclusion of Palestinians while undermining gender equity, illustrating how Jordan, Lebanon, and other nations contribute to both the oppression of Palestinians and women.

In Palestine, family separation is a deeply entrenched issue, exacerbated by political instability, displacement, and the ongoing conflict (Abdallah, 2022). These separations often occur due to imprisonment, death, or the need to seek employment abroad to support the family. A report from UN Women (2018) indicates that a substantial number of Palestinian families experience disruption due to the incarceration of male relatives, leading to emotional and psychological distress for the remaining family members, particularly women and children. As of 2022, approximately 5,000 Palestinians were imprisoned by Israel, many of whom were fathers or male relatives, leaving women to shoulder the responsibility of caregiving and household management under difficult circumstances (UN Women, 2018). This absence of fathers or husbands creates a void, contributing to emotional instability, particularly in children, and is a well-documented cause of attachment issues (Bowlby, 1982).

This separation is also driven by the need to seek employment abroad in order to provide for families. As Bint Aisha from Gaza explains, “Both my parents worked, but my father did so abroad, my mom was so tough on us, my father was busy and depressed living away from his family – making him somewhat complacent in our upbringing (Personal Communication, 2022).” This absence of one of the primary caregivers creates an emotional gap that leads to ambivalence in the child’s emotional development, as well as in the relationships between family members. Many Palestinian families are forced to endure this separation due to the economic necessity of seeking work abroad, a phenomenon that also extends to Jordanian families facing similar conditions of migration efforts (Akram, 2022). Bint Aisha adds, “All Palestinians no matter where they are from are familiar with this separation in their households but that isn’t normal. It caused depression for my father and this affected his relationship with us (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Furthermore, political violence, forced displacement, and economic hardship often lead to multiple forms of separation within families. Thousands of Palestinian families are affected by Israel’s unjust and illegal separation policies. These policies restrict movement between Gaza and the West Bank, impacting family reunification and forcing long-term separations. This is notwithstanding the arbitrary arrests of husbands and sons and indefinite administrative detentions the Palestinians are subject to. This state of flux creates a cycle of ambivalence in familial relationships, where the need for survival often leads to emotional alienation and

attachment issues. It, then, compels women to take on multiple ‘gender’ roles in the household as a result of these separations causing increased stress and depression. This is notwithstanding the concept of separating a people from their land.

One interpersonal and intrapersonal consequence, which has previously been described as horizontal violence, can also be understood as the ambivalence in women’s relationships in Palestine, as explored throughout this thesis. This ambivalence arises from intersecting forms of oppression. In many cases, particularly within conservative Palestinian communities, women are subjected to surveillance by other women who uphold these societal norms. Judith Butler (1993) suggests that this ambivalence is not just a personal or emotional experience but rather a strategic engagement with power. In societies where women, along with other gender minorities, are often the primary enforcers of cultural values, they may impose these restrictive norms upon each other, even when those norms limit their own freedom. This self-policing manifests in both direct and indirect forms—such as the criticism of a woman's behavior, the enforcement of dress codes, or the internalization of guilt for perceived violations. According to Butler, this ambivalence is intricately linked to power structures, as it positions individuals within regimes of power that both shape and constrain them. As she argues, ambivalence becomes part of the very mechanisms of power that one seeks to resist (123-4) (see also Foucault, 1980).

As Kaddoura explains, women of higher socioeconomic status often navigate their oppression by delegating labor and expectations to others, buying freedoms or even participating in the oppression of lower-class women in order to maintain their privileged positions (Personal Communication, 2022). The relational dynamics of power, where oppression is not merely top-down but now embedded in the social fabric, where wealth and status play a critical role in reshaping power dynamics.

These issues are further exacerbated through legislative dependence on men: while of course it has implications in the ‘macro’ it can contribute to learned complacency or passivity in many aspects of life. Co-dependence and ambivalent relationships often appear together, where emotional co-dependence exists alongside material co-dependence. The love-hate dynamic between men and women in patriarchal societies, especially in contexts of legal dependence, deepens these ambivalences. Murad-Garlick , formerly at USAID, explains, she says:

> As a culture we have accepted the inclusion of more women in the workforce and education, but this has not reduced the elevated value of men, especially as laws still consider men as the legal guardians of women in all their personal affairs.they have left the space open for this interpretation that men are more socio-economically valuable and remain in charge of decision-making at the family level and therefore at the community level (Personal Communication, 2022).

This notion of legal guardianship and financial provision reinforces male dominance in both public and private spheres. Women's reliance on men for social freedoms and often economic stability and conforming to their decision-making perpetuates a cycle of emotional and material dependence, leading to ambivalent relationships.

Bint Khadra also touches on the harmful effects of legal co-dependence in her family. She reflects on how (neo)patriarchal laws around divorce perpetuate financial instability for women: "It's left my family in a position where my mother, who has essentially made it possible for my father to have a family, and money post-divorce has been very real and felt stress for us (Personal Communication, 2022)."

This highlights how legal frameworks, such as divorce laws, often burden women financially, making them dependent on male relatives or partners. Despite the fact that *mahr* (the dowry) is meant to offer some financial protection post-divorce, it rarely meets women's financial needs. Factors like socio-economic status and education level influence how much mahr is paid. When women initiate divorce through *khul'*, they may even be required to return some or all of the *mahr*, compounding their economic insecurity (for example, Dupret et al., 2019; Cuno, 2015).

Furthermore, Nassar (2015) observes that divorce settlements and child support often fail to meet the basic needs of divorced women, particularly in contexts like Palestine and Jordan, where single-income households struggle to cover living expenses. In cases where custody is awarded to the mother, her financial responsibilities increase, while the support from her ex-husband is often insufficient. Raman (2024), for example, also notes that while men are legally required to

pay mahr in full at the time of divorce, various factors, such as the initiating party, can lead to reduced payments or no payments at all.

The inadequate financial protection that women receive post-divorce shows the ways in which legal frameworks intended to safeguard women fall short. The real-world effect is that divorced women often face fragile financial circumstances, making them dependent on others for survival, which perpetuates a cycle of legal and emotional ambivalence as likely she becomes the legal responsibility of another male relative.

Bint Khadra reflects on the complicated intersection of legal co-dependence and inheritance laws when she shares:

> Then there's the knowledge that my father is trying to conceive (he's in his late 60s), and knowing that I'll never see any inheritance from anyone ever as a certainty. My mother was very stressed, yes, but she's still in a good position. In a way, it just felt like she had invested in something that flopped miserably but that she had no choice but to invest in too (Personal Communication, 2022).

This statement reveals how women, in trying to navigate patriarchal and legal systems, invest emotionally and financially in relationships that ultimately leave them at a disadvantage. The control men often exert over inheritance further strengthens this co-dependence. In many parts of the Arab world, inheritance laws are deeply gendered, with women receiving a fraction of what male heirs receive. A report from the Arab Center for Policy Studies in Jordan explains, Article (288) of the Jordanian Personal Status Law states:

> There are two cases concerning the husband: "A- Half if his dead wife has no offspring (heir). B- A quarter if his dead wife has an offspring (heir)." In the same way, Article (289) of the same law states: "There are two cases for a wife or wives: A- A quarter if the husband does not have an offspring (heir). B- The eighth if he has an offspring who is an heir" (Al-Izza, 2017, 6).

Ababsa (2017) explains how such laws, which are rooted in both religious and colonial systems, continue to perpetuate this imbalance. Inheritance laws often result in women being coerced into relinquishing their property rights in favor of male relatives, further illustrating the material and emotional co-dependence. This is a direct manifestation of legal and cultural frameworks that diminish women's agency and secure their continued dependence on men (4-6).

Bint Najla, for instance, faced similar challenges when trying to protect her family's assets: "I had to protect many of my female family members' assets and inheritance through '*wekaleh*' because it was threatened in one way or another by our male relatives, who are generally much more reckless financially and do not oblige their religious and legal duties (Personal Communication, 2022)." This highlights a subversive circumvention of power as women assign each other with 'power-of-attorney', or specifically divide assets prior to a death and thus the intervention of the law in the case of death/inheritance to bypass this inequality.

The statistics on gendered property ownership in Jordan also highlight the ongoing economic vulnerabilities women face. According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics (Jordan DoS and ICF, 2013), only 6.8% of married women owned their homes, and a mere 7% owned land, compared to higher figures for men. Additionally, research from the revealed that majority of women had voluntarily renounced their inheritance rights, often due to social pressure, demonstrating the entrenched gendered dynamics of property ownership in the region (Ababsa, 2017).

Finally, this relationship between legal dependence and ambivalence is reflected in cultural practices. Bint Khadra notes:

> I feel like her own lack of willingness to bear teeth and fight; again this is internalised 'goodness' or womanly niceness, or being above it all, which is very gendered. In a way, it is derived from religious culture, but it's not her own faith (Personal Communication, 2022).

Here, she focuses on how cultural expectations of goodness and niceness contribute to women's legal and emotional co-dependence. Women internalize these values, often at the expense of their own agency, reinforcing a dynamic of emotional ambivalence where resistance to patriarchal norms is stifled by the pressure to conform and often still be able to provide as a single parent.

Legal dependence, particularly in the areas of divorce, inheritance, and custody, fosters both material and emotional co-dependence between men and women in Palestine and Jordan. While laws theoretically offer some protections, they often fall short of providing women with the independence they need, leaving them in ambivalent, strained relationships with men and some policing amongst one another. This dynamic is compounded by cultural expectations that further entrench women's dependence and limit their autonomy, creating a cycle of co-dependence that is difficult to break.

In both Palestine and Jordan, internalized colonialism, structural violence, and legal dependency have fractured women's identities, entrenching cycles of emotional and material co-dependence. This dynamic produces a dual consciousness (Du Bois 1903), wherein women simultaneously internalize oppressive state and societal norms while remaining aware of their own agency and aspirations. Caught between external constraints and inner yearnings, they experience ambivalent relationships, with men and among themselves, reinforced by patriarchal inheritance laws and economic precarity. Far from granting autonomy, these legal and social frameworks perpetuate vulnerability, embedding personal insecurities within broader colonial, neoliberal, and gendered power structures.

Internalization of *'Eib*: "Because Our Bodies Were Always *'Eib*"

It is difficult to explain a long-standing socio-cultural abstraction to its full extent, the nuance that phonomenon encompasses is hard to capture as it is so deeply ingrained into the culture – it is an intergenerational habitus. *'Eib* directly translates to 'defect' though it is used to describe a 'shameful' act. It is so prevalent that it is difficult to imagine that many Arabs, man or woman, have not been subject to this word (and its associated social code) in their lifetimes. This social code regulates public behavior of both men and women, though it is well understood that it disproportionately affects women.

Scholars explain that the term is rooted in pre-Islamic, or the *Jahiliyya* period, tribal 'customs,' *'eib* emerged as a means of modulating the social order, where violations against accepted codes of conduct could harm not just the individual's reputation but also the standing of their entire family, extended family, and tribe. This created a system in which personal and collective identities were intertwined, with each family member's behavior reflecting on the one another and the whole. Welchman (2000), for example, adds that, in a general context it can act as a moral code guiding honor and shame, deeply influencing both familial and social interactions (10-12). In some sense it acted as a self-regulating socio-legal mechanism to provide structure and order in society. Both its rules and gender order has been adopted throughout different eras and in many senses preserved to this day.

As time and societies progressed into Islamic tradition, the term grew to be intertwined with religious concepts such as *haram* which refers to something that is forbidden by God and religion, adding religious dimensions now to social conduct. While they are still socially understood as different concepts they frequently intersect.

The concept of ʿ*eib* (shame) as a regulator of social behavior has deep roots in pre-Islamic Arabian tribal norms, where honor and reputation functioned as pillars of communal cohesion (Smith, 1903; Al-Tabari, 1987). Historical accounts of Jahiliyya society emphasize how codes of shame, distinct from later religious notions of *haram* (forbidden), governed familial and gender roles to protect tribal standing (Ahmed, 1992). Even as Islamic legal frameworks emerged, these pre-Islamic values persisted, blending with religious ethics to shape social expectations (Joseph ed. 1999a.). For instance, Al-Ali (2000), amongst many others, argues that modern legal systems in the Middle East reflect a hybridity of colonial-era reforms, Islamic jurisprudence, and enduring tribal codes centered on honor. This is particularly evident in laws governing family conduct, where social regulation methods, such as *'eib* continues to regulate gendered behavior, such as marriage and public propriety, despite the existence of formal civil or Sharia-based statutes (Hasso, 2011). Thus, while contemporary governance structures appear modernized, they remain tethered to a very old and persisting social logic that privileges communal reputation over individual autonomy.

The effects of this socio-cultural phenomenon has much tighter restrictions on women's being and behavior as they have come to bear the weight of the family's honor. It heavily regulates multiple aspects of her life as well as her internal framework. This limits aspects such as dress code and attire, interactions with friends, interactions with men, their freedom of movement and expression, done so to preserve the respectability of their families. This social regulation manifests in a form of internalized monitoring system, as women are socialized to conform to these standards. Sakleh (2020) describes how this internalization operates as a form of "self-policing," where women guard against actions that might provoke communal judgment (or even notice).

'Eib does not only enforce the gendered status quo, but also actively works to preserve it – through the creation of this internalized self-surveillance it limits any deviations from it as well. The weight of *'eib* is a tightened form of psychological restraint, confining women within the parameters of the 'tradition' of a (neo)patriarchal society. Al-Hussami and Moqbel (2021) find that Jordanian women understand it as a "system of surveillance" that causes "constant self-monitoring," significantly influencing women's perception of herself (1166). Echoing this Sakhaleh provides an integral concept, one that explains the manifestation of double lives. She says: "Shame is also contingent upon members of the community becoming aware that an act was committed that veered from the social norms. The presence of shame results in a Foucauldian sense of self-monitoring, which places individuals under persistent vigilance (Rashidian et.al 2013, 868) (Sakleh, 2020, 31)."

Real world implications, such as the previous account from Bint Maya, weigh heavily with regards to safety and access to sexual and reproductive health services. In many Arab societies, women seeking such services may face intense scrutiny or judgment, as societal norms around female sexuality are tightly controlled (for example Al-Hussami & Moqbel, 2021). As both *'eib* and *haram* dictate standards of respectability, unmarried or sexually active women often hesitate to seek essential services, fearing both legal repercussions and social ostracism.

This culture has since been ingested into different legislative systems throughout the years and continues through into today's patriarchy. The codification of both organic and imposed gendered biases has been exacerbated by the concept of *'eib* and in turn has become a neopatriarchal instrument of control. In her book *Consuming Desires: Family Crisis and the State in the Middle East* (2011), Hasso explains that cultural concepts resembling *'eib* work in tandem with state policy and the law to reinforce patriarchal norms and practices. Through the incorporation of 'honor' and 'shame' based 'tradition' into state frameworks it works to legitimize and legalize an unequal gender order.

She argues that state policies and family expectations often converge to regulate and control women's behaviors as part of maintaining family honor, which is similar to the concept of *'eib*. Family and state systems are mutually constitutive and productive of gendered and sexualized regulatory mechanisms (ibid., 38-9). This places women in a position that they are policed legally, exacerbating an existing culture of policing through concepts such as *'eib* and 'honor.'

These norms no longer exist as solely by-products of tradition but are now perpetuated by state structures that prioritize the family unit (one governed under a patriarch) over individual freedoms. In many senses similar changes were made during the Ottoman Tanzimat period in accordance with the Napoleonic Code to centralize the family unit under a single patriarch in order to more easily control and regulate populations.

By codifying social expectations into state mandates, the state becomes a collaborator, if not the instigator, of gendered inequality. Amira Sonbol's works (2003a., 2003b., 2011) echos that this legal incorporation similar social constructs like *'eib* allow (neo)patriarchal values to permeate public life, particularly where family honor and gender roles are concerned, and shows how these laws serve to 'maintain stability within the family unit' largely through the control of women's autonomy. In *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (2003a.), previously explored in Chapter 1, Sonbol examines how legal frameworks evolved alongside Islamic, tribal, and Ottoman influences to create a system of personal status laws that limit women's agency, often under the guise of preserving family and social stability. These laws, according to Sonbol, systematically incorporate traditional concepts of honor that restrict women's behavior, including limitations on marriage, divorce, and labor participation despite her extensive research

highlighting that it betrays Islamic custom. She argues that these restrictions are justified through a selective interpretation of Islamic law, despite historical evidence that Islamic principles encouraged women's social and economic participation.

When laws mirror informal social codes, they contribute to a structure of constant self-regulation where individuals, especially women, must adhere to community-defined standards of honor. This self-regulation is often internalized, creating a societal environment where women feel pressured to conform to state-sanctioned norms and familial expectations.

The overlapping influences of *'eib* in both the public and private spheres strengthens a system of neo-patriarchy that requires women to uphold collective ideals even at the expense of personal freedoms. This dual mechanism of control, blending state policy with societal expectations, not only preserves dated traditional values but also enhances the reach of patriarchal norms across generations, norms exacerbated by the neo-patriarchal framework embedding codes such as *'eib* into the fabric of modern Arab societies.

It is now powerful force of social governance, regulated by both the state and community – it has evolved into an instrument that molds identity, behavior, and familial roles in accordance with state-endorsed ideals, centering how cultural concepts can be reinterpreted to serve contemporary power structures (for example Abu-Lughod 1986, Ahmed, 1992, Hasso, 2011). It is now a tool to preserve and reproduce neo-patriarchal values and the monitoring of women's conduct. This centuries-long social engineering project perpetuates gendered oppression under the guise of collective 'responsibilities,' perpetuating a patriarchal order that limits female agency under the guise of family integrity and collective honor.

There is little space for *'eib* to not be internalized as it is so prevalent in the culture. While the process of internalization is similar for all intellectual and emotional phenomena, within this framework, the role of socialization is integral. A perspective on how *'eib* is internally processed uses concepts from Chapter 2 of this thesis to explain, "Eib is a form of habitus in the lives of Palestinian women. Women follow 'eib ideology both consciously and unconsciously. As well, 'eib is rarely everevery explicitly discussed among women in society but all women

know that it is a system which they are required to follow to ensure the proper functioning of society, (Sakleh 2020, 37)."

In her thesis, also using Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus, Sakhleh argues, through enforcing *'eib*, women are able to use their agency through a practice of self-monitoring or self-censoring; though it remains it is a perpetuation of a habitus, or pattern, of oppression that more deeply affects women (ibid., 38).

The internalization of *'eib* often translates to women viewing their bodies, thoughts, and choices through an external gaze that is shaped by societal approval rather than desire, self-discovery and expression. A woman's inner being, through adherence to cultural norms and contradictory beliefs creates murky waters fuelled by fear of judgment and repercussions. Instead of fostering a genuine sense of self, this focus on *'eib* creates fragmented identities, where women must present themselves in certain ways, even though they do not necessarily agree with the status quo.

Bint Aya discusses her experience under this social construct. She says:

> Since I was young, I was exposed to shaming. Growing up, I barely had any freedom, and everything revolved around finding a guy to marry. My mother (from a Slavic state), who herself was brainwashed by (local neo)patriarchy, ended up complicit in taking my rights away from me (Personal Communication, 2022).

Her words reveal how the internalization of *'eib* is transmitted intergenerationally, even in the case where her mother was not exposed to 'Arab' neo-patriarchy and still internalized and reproduced these norms within her family. For Bint Aya, this upbringing resulted in a childhood and adolescence defined by restriction and judgment. Having recently achieved a sense of personal autonomy, she now hesitates to relinquish this newfound freedom by adhering to traditional expectations, such as becoming a mother. Despite difficulties she says she has broken free from these constraints. She states, "I feel like I've finally had a chance to live for myself. I'm not sure how willing I am to let it go by having kids (Personal Communication, 2022)." Her

hesitation speaks to a tension between societal roles and personal desires, reflecting the ongoing negotiation of identity in the face of internalized cultural oppressions.

Similar sentiments are echoed by others, such as Bint Shadda, who explains that even within less oppressive family dynamics, *'eib* sets limits on freedom: "Parents may not call the police on you, but there's still a line where pushing boundaries is impossible, especially if you know your family or the community will intervene (Personal Communication, 2022)." *'Eib* here functions not only as personal constraints but as a social control mechanism restricting women's expression. Women when raised with *'eib* as a 'moral compass' there is a difficulty in expressing emotions or ideas that contradict accepted norms causing both personal guilt as a result of social disapproval. Women are often compelled to mute aspects of themselves. Emotional openness, assertiveness, or any divergence from the "ideal woman" mythos can feel impossible under the eye of this cultural conditioning.

Fida Adley (2012), in her study on education amongst Jordanian women, for example, suggests that self-perception in societies with high social expectations is frequently molded by how one imagines being perceived by others. For Palestinian and Jordanian women, this external lens reinforces *'eib* as a foundational aspect of identity formation, often limiting personal needs and desires. In (neo)patriarchal societies, where female voices are historically subdued, these women may grow accustomed to seeing themselves as reflections of societal expectations over themselves as individuals. As such, often, the construction of one's identity mirrors society and not self. In many senses, *'eib*, as well as other social phenomena, function as an "organizing principle" of social control, compelling women to embody ideals of femininity that discourage engagement with their individuality.

In professional spheres, the internalized *'eib* often restricts a woman's full contribution. In societies where female roles are often bound to private, familial duties, stepping into public domains and labor markets is sometimes interpreted as 'dishonorable'. In Jordan, for example, women are largely socially or legally barred from working jobs that include night shifts (outside of essential services). These restrictions are justified by authorities as protective measures but are

often criticized for limiting women's participation in the workforce, especially in fields that require nighttime or industrial/manual labor (for example, Koburtay et al., 2020).

As Bint Nariman explains, “I was not allowed to work as a waitress, for example, because it wasn’t ‘acceptable’ or take time to think of what I wanted to do and learn how to support myself (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Bint Najla’s experience offers a parallel reflection on workplace sexism. She recounts her time as a finance officer for multinational logistics companies, revealing the pervasive discrimination she faced, particularly from male bosses. “There was a tangible ‘want’ amongst the men for the women to portray submissiveness,” she says, emphasizing the patriarchal expectations that often require women to downplay their agency and assertiveness in professional environments. In response, Bint Najla explains how she “left two well-paid positions for reasons relating to sexism or politics,” signaling the limitations imposed on women’s professional growth due to systemic discrimination (Personal Communication, 2022). Her decision to move towards self-employment reflects a “patriarchal bargain,” where women endure discrimination in exchange for career legitimacy, further highlighting the gendered constraints within professional settings.
Here, *‘eib* aligns with cultural constructs like the “ideal woman” – a symbol of femininity, modesty, and obedience embedded in cultural narratives. It is a standard so prevalent it has generated a perception of aesthetic appeal. Bint Reem from Jordan shares her experience in the workplace as an automotive designer and mechanic in a male dominated industry highlighting how she, along with her male and female colleagues, try to divert *‘eib*. She says within her company (as the owner), “They’ll (clients and authorities) address the male manager, even after I’ve introduced myself as the owner. Once, I had to ask him to solve an issue with the authorities because they outright refused to deal with me as the head of the company (Personal Communication, 2022).”

The necessity for her to defer to a male colleague demonstrates the role of *‘eib* as a tangible constraint. Authorities and clients internalize the belief that leadership and technical expertise are inherently masculine traits, while women are relegated to subordinate roles, regardless of their actual capabilities. This internalization not only impacts how others perceive her but also shapes

her professional interactions, creating a disempowering cycle that undermines her autonomy and authority.

Additionally, her story presents the concept of horizontal hostility within a neopatriarchal context (between men and women), as the male manager, despite his subordinate role, is empowered by systemic gender norms (state) to act as her 'representative'.

The internalization of *'eib* creates a fragmented self-identity for women, as they must navigate societal expectations that restrict their behavior, thoughts, and bodies. Women like Bint Aya and Bint Shadda highlights how *'eib* shapes personal and social identity, leading to emotional suppression and a constant negotiation between personal desires and external judgment. Disguised as a moral compass, it distorts women's sense of self by requiring them to conform to cultural ideals. This is particularly evident in professional settings, where women face systemic barriers, such as restrictions on night shifts, reinforcing the notion that certain roles are 'inappropriate' for them. Bint Reem's experience in a male-dominated industry further illustrates how *'eib* limits women's autonomy, as they are often denied recognition and authority, despite their capabilities. Ultimately, *'eib* serves as both a personal and societal constraint, preventing women from understanding and asserting their identities.

Ilahiane (2019) discusses the concept of 'shame' in Arab culture, emphasizing its dual role in regulating both social behavior and gender roles. He notes that it is not merely a moral constraint but also a cultural tool that enforces gendered expectations of modesty, femininity, and respect for social hierarchies. As Ilahiane (2019) explains, *'eib* signifies "a sense of shame, disgrace, or social defamation," but it can also reflect "respect, honorable modesty, and deference to one's elders and social superiors (57)." This dual function of 'eib encapsulates both the pressures on men and women to maintain family honor and the broader cultural codes governing behavior within the Arab world. Such norms, while often informal, create powerful social pressures that can limit personal freedoms, especially for women, who are seen as the primary bearers of family 'honor'. Experientially, it does not necessarily function as a gendered tool of oppression solely, it does create a social order, contrary to the social code of the West for example, where elders in this culture are revered and respected. The family bond does not break when an

individual is of ‘legal age’ and it is often incumbent on the children to care for and provide for the elders in their families. This, for example, also speaks to a family’s ‘social standing.’

In an informal interview in France in 2024, I spoke with a young Palestinian man who has been a political refugee for over a decade. He remembers his time in Palestine growing up in one of the camps in Beit Lahm (Bethlehem) and his experience of *‘eib* as a teenager. He recognizes that his female family members experience social pressures of *‘eib* significantly more and in a more stringent manner, men are also accountable for their behavior under this framework. He explains things such as smoking in front of elders, not respecting elders, wearing types of clothing outside of the contextual norms, speaking with female friends after they marry (sometimes even their cousins), tattoos, piercings, and other embellishments are all considered *‘eib*. In many senses, his testimony highlights that authentic self-expression is socially regulated and ‘deviance’ from this code of conduct prevents forms of social evolution regardless of gender. He concludes that in actuality within a household men can often adopt whatever behaviors they wish to as long as they remain ‘respectful’ in public. Many families are concerned with their public standing and therefore their concern is ‘*esh ha yehku el nas*’ (what will society think of this) over actual belief in the status quo (Personal Communication, 2024). This was echoed in my other, again informal, discussions with men in the Levant region particularly those with non-conforming attitudes (such as tattoos, piercing, untraditional employment or areligious) and thus subject to *‘eib* in a more apparent way (Jordan, Lebanon, 2024). Discussions with men from Jordan pointed to more stringent codes including stigma surrounding trivial things such as wearing shorts or gold jewelry (likely due to religious homogeneity).

Al Hussami and Moqbel’s primary interviews offer further insight from the context of ‘lived-experience.’ One research participant explains, "Actually there are many situations in which I use the word Eib daily. For example, when my sister speaks or laughs loudly, especially if there are guests at home, I blame her using the word Eib". I use it when my son eats impolitely, and when he asks other children on private matters, like 'does your mother sleep with your father in the same room? I say Eib for a girl to go to gym or public swimming pools. I say Eib for a girl to apply make-up on her face or nails, especially if visible to her father, elder brothers or outsiders (1166-7).”

The participant adds she was subject to this in her upbringing as well explaining how this is reproduced intergenerationally (ibid.).

Even within the preliminary survey, prior to these discussions, the respondents overwhelmingly (175/305 participants or 67 percent) responded to being raised with different rules and expectations than their male siblings and extended relatives. As women largely children's primary caretakers, again we find that this is as a form of internalized oppression but more often than not, specifically, presented as conscious or unconscious horizontal violence.

Highlighting the ways in which these 'feminine' characteristics and gender roles are ingrained into young girls, Bint Nariman (38), says, "I was being conditioned and trained to behave in certain ways in front of people, so the culture of ('eib) عيب was huge in my family. Things like *tadyeef ahweh* (serving coffee to guests) or helping with cleaning and cooking; while my brother did whatever he wanted whenever he wanted without any obligations (Personal Communication, 2022)."

She adds, "I was always shaped to become a wife and mother– never really allowed to choose what to study," expressing the limitations imposed on women's educational and professional aspirations (Personal Communication, 2022). Additionally, by relegating household responsibilities and expectations for domestic care and behavior exclusively to women, families reinforce rigid gender roles that define women's worth in terms of compliance. In Bint Nariman's case, her brother's freedom contrasts starkly with the demands placed on her, further highlighting the disparity between male and female experiences within the same family structure. This inequality reinforces the idea that *'eib* is not only a cultural expectation but also an instrument of gendered control, creating a duality where women's actions are scrutinized and regulated while men are often free from such restrictions.

This level of self-surveillance, framed through what Foucault might refer to as a panoptic model, positions women as both the subjects and agents of their own regulation, continually evaluating their behavior in alignment with collective expectations (Rashidian et al., 2013).

Bint Nadia's observation that, “The patriarchy imposes *‘eib* but us women practice it” highlights the internalized policing of women’s behavior, where women not only face gendered social pressures but actively enforce them as well. She explains:

> If a man ‘catches’ you doing (something ‘eib), it’s really awkward and embarrassing, and can be dangerous. But if a woman catches you, you can be sure they’re going to speak about it to you and others making a large moral judgment, they perpetuate it through society. Men judge, obviously, but they (women) are the ones who impose the ‘red-tape’ (Personal Communication, 2022).

This insight points to the cyclical nature of gendered control, where women, despite being the primary targets of these social codes, often uphold and perpetuate the moral constraints placed on them. This creates a self-regulating system that limits the autonomy of women, even in environments that might seem progressive.

The gendered control of women’s bodies is especially evident in the regulation of sexual behavior. Bint Nariman’s statement that she has “major body issues and sexual inhibitions because our bodies were always *‘eib*” echoes the internalized shame many women experience (Personal Communication, 2022). This cultural stigma surrounding women’s bodies is often tied to the concept of virginity, as previously discussed, a value that is enforced much more strictly for women than for men. As Bint Nadia points out, “There is somewhat of a double standard because my elder brother’s girlfriend stays over all the time and my mother has no issue. The other day my younger brother asked my mother how she felt about them living with their partners and she just replied, ‘Yes, but not your sister ‘*eib* (Personal Communication, 2022).’ Here, we see control over women’s bodies manifests in the form of shame and restriction, particularly when it comes to women’s sexuality.

Even seemingly trivial matters, like the use of tampons, become a point of moral regulation. Bint Nadia recalls how her mother, despite using tampons herself, didn’t approve of her daughter’s use, justifying it on the basis of her ‘marital’ status (which in this context is equivalent to sexual

activity), “While she uses them, she doesn’t like me doing the same, explaining she already has four children so it’s perfectly acceptable. It is a bit inconsistent but I think it is a generational thing (Personal Communication, 2022).” Similarly, Bint Haya shares how her mother told her to wait until marriage to use tampons, clearly linking how menstruation and sexuality are deeply intertwined with cultural notions of *‘eib* (Personal Communication, 2022). In this context, Ghabra’s (2015,12-3) analysis of the veil as a reactionary coping mechanism is useful. The veil can be seen not just as a tool of modesty but as a response to the intense policing of women’s bodies. Women use it to protect themselves from the male gaze, attempting to regain some sense of control over their bodies within an oppressive system. However, this self-regulation may also be a reflection of internalized patriarchy, reinforcing the very constraints it attempts to subvert.

Bint Haya’s experience adds another layer to this, illustrating how even in liberal and non-religious households, cultural expectations around modesty and women’s bodies persist. She shares, “My mom literally will make me wear a bra at home when they (her brothers) walk around in their boxers, and she thinks bralettes are not real bras. Yeah, also, whenever a plumber or handyman comes, I have to hide in my room (Personal Communication, 2022).” Despite coming from a family that positions itself as liberal, Bint Haya’s experience of being required to hide her body when men enter the house reflects the deep-rooted, culturally ingrained notions of modesty that transcend religious affiliations. This contradiction between her family’s progressive stance and the ongoing regulation of her body highlights how women, even in wealthy, modern or non-religious contexts, are still subject to societal expectations that regulate their bodies. These pressures, rooted in a deeply embedded sense of *‘eib,* reinforce the idea that women’s bodies must be hidden, protected, and controlled, regardless of personal beliefs or family dynamics.

Participants’ accounts, from rural households to cosmopolitan diasporas, reveal how even women themselves become agents of this moral policing, reproducing horizontal violence. This panoptic internalization fractures identity, compelling double lives that balance autonomy with communal expectation. Recognizing how *‘eib* is embedded in both cultural and state institutions uncovers its critical role in sustaining gender hierarchies across Arab societies.

Externalizing Triple Consciousness: “I Lie and Lead a Double Life”

As a result of cumulative internal and external oppressions, a ‘triple consciousness’ can arise in women. The concept of extends W.E.B. Du Bois’s double consciousness, providing a framework to understand the intersecting identity struggles of marginalized individuals, particularly women, who must navigate multiple oppressions. For women in the context of this discussion, this theory manifests as internal negotiations and policing of self, thus creating a tension between personal desires and societal expectations – values enforced by (neo)patriarchy, gendered cultural norms, and geopolitical pressures. As this subsection will show through primary sources, these women’s experiences of triple consciousness are often expressed through double lives; a balance of public conformity with private ‘freedoms’. This duality is a somewhat of a coping mechanism in a society that has restrictive cultural expectations while also pushing women to engage in broader global, economic, and political systems.

The ‘intersectionality’ of oppression, as outlined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is a critical lens through which Arab men and women’s double lives can be understood. The ‘matrix of domination’, as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) discusses, explains how systems of power overlap to create compounded forms of subjugation. In the case of Arab women, this includes not only state patriarchy but also suffocating cultural norms, legislative infantilization, and geopolitical oppressions, violence, and instabilities that shape their daily lives. These overlapping forces require a careful negotiation of identity, where women develop survival tactics to navigate both domestic expectations and broader societal roles. This negotiation often takes the form of a neo-patriarchal bargain (Chapter 2), where Arab women are compelled to strategically maneuver between compliance and resistance, crafting double lives as a means of asserting some level of autonomy while remaining within the bounds of cultural and societal expectations.

So, why live a double life? For the moment, we must.

In Arab societies, intergenerational learning, oral traditions, and the transmission of cultural, familial, and social knowledge from one generation to the next holds significant value (for example Garner et al., 2021). However, when this process is governed by the strict codes of *‘eib* women face increasing barriers to accessing this information and sharing in existence without

self and society surveillance. The enforcing of silence, particularly around issues such as women's sexuality, autonomy, career aspirations, and personal expression leads to an inter-group inhibition in the sharing of wisdom, experiences, and histories, which could otherwise empower younger women and challenge traditional roles. As Bint Aisha describes, "Essentially, the patriarchy shaped my mother and many of her views, she was tough because she was raised in a certain way, it is a cycle (Personal Communication, 2022)." Grandmothers, mothers, and daughters might find themselves constrained in discussing sexual agency, alternative career choices, or even political activism, for example. In essence, *'eib* is undermines the relationship between women and is often a clear site of horizontal violence.

This intergenerational cycle, fueled by the intersecting contexts, often results in a disturbance in the transmission of knowledge, especially when it concerns the autonomy and rights of women. Thus, the generational transfer of knowledge and values becomes constrained by the very norms meant to uphold them, creating a situation where women feel compelled to lead a double life. For example, Bint Maya explains a common phenomenon in 'middle class' (though not exclusively) explaining, "Virginity is one thing we don't talk about or discuss at home (Personal Communication, 2022)." Bint Shadda adds, "I think the ultimate point of contention in our society is sexuality, gender, and how people express them. It's the hardest thing to change minds about because it's so tightly bound to lies and taboos. Women, in particular, are made the face of culture through their sexuality. If women could freely express themselves, it might shift the pendulum in a different direction, creating space for more voices and opportunities to challenge these norms (Personal Communication, 2022)."

I have understood through both the research and experience that this double life is normally a result of a triple consciousness. It involves both an awareness of social requirements as well as personal wants and needs and is a means, sometimes a risky means, to realize both. The marker of living a double life is presenting one way around one peer group (here it is usually family) and behaving another way alone, or around another, more accepting peer-group. It also means trying to avoid social criticism on both fronts. In this context, the double-life is a result of the intersection of oppressions; between geo-political marginalization, sex-based double standards,

and cultural oppression; with the constant monitoring and policing of women's behavior and conduct it is a common recourse.

The late Zaha Hadid, Iraqi architect, explained this feeling accurately in both a professional and global context. She said, "In my case, I'm a woman and an Arab. Being an Arab woman and a modern architect certainly don't exclude each other – when I was growing up in Iraq, there were many women architects. You cannot believe the enormous resistance I've faced just for being an Arab, and a woman on top of that. It is like a double-edged sword. The moment my woman-ness is accepted, the Arab-ness seems to become a problem (Qureshi, 2012)."

In many cases, this feeling, this triple consciousness forces a double life, presenting one identity to meet societal and familial expectations while secretly pursuing personal desires or freedoms. Contending with the demands of the neopatriarchy, complying with 'modernization' and neoliberal values, as well as (mutated) cultural norms such as *'eib* create a need for this duality. Bint Nariman explains:

> The simplest thing I can say and can elaborate on is that I lie / lead a double life and continue to do so to a certain extent to fit both my mother and late father's patriarchal obligations. I lied about friends, boyfriends, where I was, what I do (Personal Communication 2022).

Double lives behave as an attempt to reconcile competing identities and demands—family, society, and self. The dissonance between how she presents herself at home and how she behaves outside is a direct result of the cultural policing of women's lives, forcing them to navigate between two worlds, one of familial duty and the other of personal exploration.

In the case of Palestinian women, socio-political occupation adds a layer of psychological stress, leading to a duality of consciousness and experience. Bint Layla, Palestinian interviewee with Israeli citizenship, reflects on how the political landscape forces a duality in her daily life: "As a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, you must retain your Palestinian identity, but at the same time, you must immerse yourself in Israeli society (which is extremely oppressive and

discriminatory). You behave one way with your Palestinian peers and another with Israeli society (Personal Communication, 2022).” She then must contrast her gendered identity in the lens of both contradictory societies within the context of settler-colonialism. This triad is not just a personal struggle but also a socio-political manifestation of how oppressive forces work relationally in the lives of marginalized individuals.

Dr Islah Jad says on the local Palestinian and wider Arab culture, “Double lives could be a marker for many men and women in our society, if they are away from social gaze they have a life and in their community they have a different life, we have many female students at the university they remove their veil on campus and put it back when they go to their communities, same could apply on smoking *argila*, cigarettes, alcohol (for males and females) (Personal Communication, 2022).” This observation speaks to the universal experience of living a double life, particularly within conservative societies where public and private behavior are often tightly regulated and thus must be carefully separated. Women, in particular, are constantly expected to conform and require them to live in ways that are somewhat disingenuous to both the cultural norms as well as their true desires or identities in order to retain social acceptance of self and family. This is further complicated by the cultural codes surrounding *‘eib* and gendered expectations, which not only demand conformity but also punish those who transgress.

The experience of leading a double life is not merely an individual tactic but also a reflection of the complex layering of oppressions faced by Arab women. These women must navigate not only the family policing, but also the geopolitical pressures of living in conflict-ridden regions, all while negotiating their roles within a deeply (neo)patriarchal cultural and governance systems. This process, however, is not passive; it requires active negotiation. Bint Khadra, for instance, speaks to how women in her generation have internalized patriarchal norms: “Most of it is already internalized, *bala gafyeh* (subconsciously) conforming to things we don’t believe in because of ‘*esh ha yihku el nas*’ (what will the people/society say).’ What people?! (Personal Communication, 2022).” Women, especially younger generations, must negotiate these internalized pressures to manage their roles in society. Despite the oppressive structures that push women into living double lives, there is a clear element of resistance embedded within this experience.

Bint Sophia reflects on the differing perspectives she and her mother have on community values, particularly in relation to '*eib*. She shares, "My mom kind of cared about the community a lot when I didn't care! I went to a foreign school, so I learned to talk about anything, and my mom found it '*shu qilit hal adab*' (an expression meaning what a lack of morals) (Personal Communication, 2022)." She acknowledges that while her mother didn't outright forbid her actions, she still expressed disapproval, "She understood my lifestyle and never told me you can't do this, but she loves to complain, I guess (ibid.)."

Bint Yasmin adds on the frustration of confronting these societal pressures: "When I spoke out against what I saw as '*takhalof*' (outdated customs), they told me, 'But what do you expect, our society is conservative.' And it angers me and frustrates me when that excuse is used to silence me. Yes, society by and large is conservative, but I am part of this society too and I have a right to be (Personal Communication, 2022)." Her assertion suggests that women, even within restrictive social environments, are increasingly aware of their rights and the injustices they face as well as the horizontal violence and policing they are subject to. As such, living a double life can also be seen as an act of rebellion against the conservative social codes that seek to suppress women's autonomy and voices.

Here we can consider the framework of the neopatriarchal bargain – the double life as a bargain. We trade openness and honesty with family for freedom with self, and friends. Bint Shadda speaks to this 'double-edged experience', often a contradiction between personal desires and familial expectations. She says, "Starting when you're a teenager, you kind of start to live a double life. You have trips between two worlds, you know this personality or being whatever character that you have at school or amongst friends and then what you have at home (Personal Communication, 2022)."

As a result of internalization of *'eib*, women either comply with the code, as they also agree with its rules, or a manifestation of a double life. The ongoing process attempts to bypass strict social codes, such as *'eib* is a balancing act that sometimes is a life-long commitment. Double lives are both mechanisms of survival and resistance, as it involves navigating between self and society.

This duality reflects the resilience of women who, despite oppressive constraints, continue to (secretly) assert their agency and seek spaces for self-expression within society.

Despite the multiple oppressions these women faced, many pointed to the importance of their friends in navigating their self-awareness, independence, and act as protection in many cases. Friendships become crucial spaces for subversion, solidarity, and offers an alternative to the silence and censorship often imposed by family and society-at-large.

Bint Dima explains, “Even though my family is very accepting and open-minded, very much so for the country and region, there is still a difference in my character outside the home. Just an example, even though my parents know I am a smoker, I can never smoke in front of them; I am a married woman and in my thirties and still bound by these rules. The only place I am entirely myself is with my friends (and not even all of them) (Personal Communication, 2022).” Here she explains how friends act as a kind of internal and external refuge from the performative constraints of social and familial settings, allowing women to act out all aspects of their character and behaviors with little or no judgment.

For others, friendships provide a form of reciprocal support, despite religious or familial differences, For example, Bint Aisha, reflects on the role she plays in comforting friends whose religious values conflict with their families’ expectations: “But also I’m pretty religious, so we don’t have that huge gap (in mentality), but still it’s there (between her and her mother). I can imagine if I was not a practicing Muslim, like many of my friends, then it would be impossible to still live at home (Personal Communication, 2022).” As she and her household have the same belief system she is able to navigate her home life with comparative ease, despite this she respects and empathizes with her friends' circumstances. As she recognizes the struggles of her friends and despite differences does not judge and explains she offers practical and emotionally supportive support to her peers when needed.

For some, friendships are essential for survival in difficult situations. Bint Layla recounts how she relied on her social connections during a period of tension and estrangement with her family She explains “I had to run away from home and not have contact with my parents for a year and

a half till I figured *shit* out. The house was a mess and violent, and it wasn't healthy. I was between the street and my friends' homes, eventually I was able to start, so I was busy enough (Personal Communication)." Her experience illustrates how friendships can fill the void left by fractured familial relationships, providing some sense of stability in order to plan and design her own future before mending her family relationships.

Beesan Jaber explains that this is increasingly pervasive in our societies, saying:

> Friends have taken on somewhat of a new role with one another, particularly with regards to helping one another with familial restrictions, for example. Personal freedoms are definitely more exercised in this generation and less in the generation before. But I think that it is related to the openness in the society we live in today. Young Jordanians today have much more access to a lot of information than their mothers had. The greater access to knowledge allows women to challenge traditional norms, often with the support and encouragement of their peers (Personal Communication, 2022).

This generational change in culture prompted by modernization and neoliberalism has provided young women with a new standard of friendship that is contrary to the concept of horizontal violence, and allows spaces for free discussion. Friendships also provide a space for re-evaluating cultural standards. For example Bint Nadia reflects on this:

> I wonder with what we're seeing in our generation… like things that we're okay with and have been normalized for us—like normalizing dating, living with your partner or even premarital sex or whatever. Having these ideas when we're older, if we choose to have families, will these things be okay with us? What I'm trying to say is, will we see a generational change, or has there always been communities in our culture that find these things normal? (Personal Communication, 2022)."

This introspection demonstrates how friendships enable generational critiques by allowing spaces for discussions amongst one another with no judgment, and no '*eib*. By imagining a future where these normalized ideas might shape younger generations, women like Bint Nadia

are actively contributing to a gradual liberation from the more stifling aspects of traditional codes.

Friendships allow for spaces to reconcile conflicting ideas in a way that is independent of societal expectations. This is not to say that women all want to conform to Western standards of feminist ideals, in fact, they may decide on more conventional and traditional roles – whatever the case may be, it will result in their choice made for themselves. Friends not only reflect back a sense of self but also create a support system that counters the isolating effects of internalized oppression, encouraging generational change and new possibilities for the future.

In navigating triple consciousness, internalization of patriarchal, cultural, and geopolitical oppressions, Palestinian and Jordanian women perform double lives: conforming publicly while pursuing private freedoms. This dissonance, as Bint Nariman admits, emerges from neo-patriarchal bargains and settler-colonial contradictions, requiring simultaneous self-surveillance and strategic silence. Through dual consciousness (Du Bois 1903) extended to triple consciousness, women reconcile social imperatives with personal agency, using friendships and secret spaces as temporary refuges. Though born of constraint, these double lives reflect both adaptation and defiance, revealing a dialectical practice where personal survival tactics illuminate pathways for collective understanding and, potentially, communal solidarity beyond imposed roles and boundaries.

This chapter traced how Palestinian and Jordanian women internalize overlapping systems of oppression, geopolitical instability, systemic sexism, and culturally entrenched gender norms, producing layered forms of self-regulation, fragmentation, and survival. Through the lens of triple consciousness, we see how women navigate their identities not as unified wholes, but as contested spaces shaped by external pressures and internalized expectations. Internalized sexism surfaces in interpersonal policing and horizontal violence; internalized political and material insecurity generates ambivalence, hypervigilance, and fractured belonging; internalized *eib* enforces bodily shame and moral surveillance, contributing to women's double lives.

Yet within these struggles, women's narratives reveal not only the burdens of internalization, but also the creativity and agency involved in managing, resisting, and sometimes reconfiguring

imposed identities. The development of dual and triple consciousness reflects a deeply relational, often painful process through which women both survive and contest the structures surrounding them.

By situating internalization within its specific geopolitical, cultural, and gendered dimensions, this chapter emphasizes that internalized oppression is not a purely psychological phenomenon, but a socially and historically rooted process. As participants' voices demonstrate, internalization is often a strategy of endurance as much as a reproduction of dominance, offering glimpses of potential reimaginings even within constraint.

The following chapter extends this exploration by moving outward from internalized struggles to consider how women conceptualize change, healing, and resistance, both for themselves and for future generations, within the limits and possibilities available to them.

Chapter 4. From Embodied to Communal: Everyday Strategies of Informal Feminist Praxis

Abstract

This chapter culminates the thesis's three-fold analysis of institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression by centering the everyday acts through which Palestinian and Jordanian women transmute embodied subjugation into (potential) collective liberatory actions. Building on Chapter 1's critique of legal infantilization, Chapter 2's exploration of patriarchal bargaining, and Chapter 3's dissection of internalized pressures (such as '*eib*), this final synthesis reveals how informal feminist praxis: re-education, exposure, and organic solidarity, confronts intersecting systems of control while planting seeds for transformative futures.

Re-education begins as a solitary investigation of colonial-patriarchal norms, reclaiming culture and autonomy through ancestral histories and critical reflection. Exposure fractures hegemonic narratives by bridging digital spaces and intergenerational dialogue, and working to freedoms beyond neoliberal commodification. Organic feminisms transform personal insights into communal strength. These practices enact a lived dialectic: re-education dismantles internalized shame while challenging legal hierarchies; exposure critiques neoliberal co-optation while demanding equitable access; organic solidarity rejects depoliticized NGO frameworks while recentering anticolonial struggle. By translating individual resistance into communal frameworks we can imagine alternative organizing. Participants' visions for younger generations, security, autonomy, and collective care, emerge as a living blueprint for gender justice grounded in dignity, resistance, and anticolonial futures. This chapter bridges the gap between lived realities and theoretical feminist approaches, offering a nuanced perspective on how women actively shape pathways toward emancipation in the absence of systemic support. It highlights the need for both structural and individual reform, emphasizing that while personal transformation is vital, it must be complemented by structural change to achieve lasting liberation.

This chapter stands as the culmination of the thesis's threefold inquiry into institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression by viewing these dynamics through the direct lens of the women interviewed. Here we explore the personal and communal strategies that Palestinian and Jordanian women cited, often informally and outside formal structures, as they confront multiple layers of subjugation and to imagine a more equitable status quo. Their narratives reveal how everyday practices can serve as sites of both resistance and renewal, and how individual acts of defiance may evolve into collective movements that challenge hegemonic power relations.

At the heart of this inquiry are three interrelated forms of informal feminist praxis. The first is reeducation, a process that begins in solitude as women unlearn colonial and patriarchal narratives that have shaped their sense of self and possibility. By engaging with ancestral histories, local stories, and critical reflection, participants reclaim cultural knowledge and rediscover traditions of female agency that had been obscured. This inner work not only dismantles internalized pressures such as the code of eib but also lays the groundwork for mutual understanding and solidarity.

The second practice is exposure, which encompasses both digital engagement and intergenerational dialogue. Women described how social media platforms, community gatherings, and conversations with older and younger kin create spaces to share counter narratives and to question hegemonic assumptions about gender. In these encounters, boundaries of class and geography are overcome and women learn of experiences and ideas beyond their immediate surroundings. Exposure therefore becomes a catalyst for imagining alternative ways of living and for forging connections that transcend local constraints.

Organic feminism, the third mode of informal praxis, emerges when personal insights are translated into communal strength. With their experiences with reeducation, exposure, this gives way to autonomous spaces that prioritize care, dialogue, and shared decision making. It presents as a potential for solidarity built from below that can contest legal and social regimes that seek to isolate women and enforce dependency.

By centering participant testimonies, this chapter bridges gaps between lived realities and theoretical feminist frameworks. It critiques the limitations of top down reforms that lack cultural resonance and argues for an approach that intertwines personal transformation with structural

change. The women's hopes for future generations: social and physical security, autonomy in decision making, and intergenerational care, suggest that sustainable liberation requires both individual empowerment and collective reconfiguration of social institutions. In highlighting these everyday strategies, the chapter offers a nuanced perspective on how informal feminist praxis can seed transformative futures grounded in dignity, resistance, and justice.

The Need for Structural Change

Structural inequalities within different governmental levels create cascading and compounding effects on all areas of society. To address these in their entirety, reforms must operate both from the top down, to dismantle institutional barriers, and from the bottom up, to challenge cultural and societal norms that sustain these inequities. Only through this dual approach can meaningful and sustainable change be achieved.

This unbalanced gender order is further exacerbated in a neocolonial and, in Palestine's case, settler-colonial context, where systemic oppression ties women's liberation inextricably to broader struggles for decolonization and self-determination. Historically, Palestinian women have consistently framed their gendered liberation as intertwined with national liberation, reinforcing the importance of addressing both simultaneously. We have discussed this in previous sections where many Palestinian research participants noted this sentiment, emphasizing its current relevance. Dr Islah Jad's work demonstrates the tension between the push for gender equality and the overarching priority of nationalistic struggle, wherein women's voices, though present, are frequently marginalized in the broader political narrative (Jad, 2008, 2010, 2018.).

It can be argued the socio-legal standing of women in Palestine directly affects women in Jordan. The liberation of Palestinian women is not only vital for Palestinians but also for the broader region, including Jordan, as both countries share legal frameworks (in the West Bank, for example) and intertwining national concerns. In Jordan, the inability of women to pass on their nationality to their children is linked to political issues surrounding Palestinian refugees. Granting Jordanian women this right could have broader implications, potentially granting Palestinian refugees automatic citizenship, which complicates Jordan's (and other neighboring countries) 'contentious' position in the region, particularly in relation to the Palestinian cause

(Sayegh, 2018). A shift in Palestinian legal and social systems could provide Jordanian women with more power and influence, benefiting both groups in their shared interests of justice and gender equity. This interconnectedness shows that a holistic approach, one that considers the liberation of both Palestinian and Jordanian women, men, and children could pave the way for lasting change in the region.

As previously discussed, central to these socio-structural inequities is the fact that women are neither recognized as equal citizens by the state nor granted full rights. This legal and societal infantilization perpetuates a condition where no gender programming, no matter how innovative, can ensure women's safety in their resistance against systemic and gendered oppression. As Jad explains, "Since legal reform of the law is so slow and not comprehensive, the imbalance of gender power relations still in favour of men and social norms still, to some extent, support men's power over women (Personal Communication, 2022)."

While there have been some advances in addressing gender-based violence (be it physical or socio-political) and allowing women access to previously restricted professions, these changes are limited and do not have extensively wider social changes. As Beesan Jaber points out, "There have been a lot of social changes with regard to women that aren't necessarily reflected in the legal context, but young women born in the late 80s, 90s, and 2000s have more exposure and experience, particularly with one another (Personal Communication, 2022)." Nonetheless these changes remain fragile without mutual reinforcement acting as safeguards. As Zreik notes, "Material liberation and ideological emancipation must go hand in hand; one cannot succeed without the other (Personal Communication, 2022)." These changes must be mutually reinforcing for sustainable gender equity to be maintained. Without these reforms, coupled with some shifts in socio-cultural perceptions, gender equity, and in many senses, the status quo will continue to be precarious.

The interaction of gender and structural inequality in the Arab world has been extensively examined by Arab, feminist, and Arab feminist scholars. For example, as discussed extensively in this thesis, state policies reinforce patriarchal systems, particularly through personal status laws that regulate family and marital relations, perpetuating male authority over women. This aligns with findings in Palestine and Jordan, where legal codes, influenced by both colonial

legacies and local traditions, sustain systemic gender inequalities (for example, Hasso 2011, Abu-Lughod 1986, Leila Ahmed, 1992). Islah Jad highlights the role of national struggles in shaping gender dynamics, particularly in Palestine, where women's liberation is inextricably linked to national liberation movements. She argues that while these movements have offered spaces for women's activism, they have often sidelined feminist agendas in favor of broader political goals, reflecting the constraints seen in grassroots efforts today (for example, Jad, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2018).

While legislative advancements may introduce legal recognition of women's rights, these reforms are often undermined by entrenched social norms that prioritize family honor over individual rights. The disconnect between top-down reforms and ground-up demands emphasizes the need for an integrated approach that combines legal, cultural, and economic changes to ensure meaningful progress for women. These perspectives align with the primary sources' echoing of the dual need for structural reform and cultural transformation to dismantle patriarchal systems effectively.

Recent examples from the region, such as the repeal of Saudi Arabia's driving ban (2017), show that structural reforms can lead to cultural shifts, although these changes are often limited. The driving ban's repeal allowed women greater autonomy, and the ability to drive, but did not challenge traditional gender roles within the home or with society at large outside its immediate context and thus highlighting the limitations of isolated policy changes (Alasagh & Alshammari, 2022).

Zreik elaborates, "Working on the ideological front alone is just not sufficient if we want to push women's liberation in the region. So, both material and ideological justice need to be contextualized. I think those are the key areas that will progress gender equality (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Another example of structural reforms bringing significant changes yet unsustainable without cultural support is in Tunisia. In September 2022, Tunisian President Kais Saied introduced a new electoral law that eliminated the principle of gender parity in elected assemblies. This change could result in Tunisia's parliament being led almost exclusively by men, illustrating the fragility of legal progress lacking socio-cultural backing (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Morocco's 2004 amendments to the *Moudawana* (family code) granted women more rights in marriage and divorce, yet these reforms have struggled to reach rural and conservative areas, where patriarchal practices dominate (for example, Hanafi, 2012). This discussion was renewed in September 2023, when Morocco's king decreed the parliament to reform family law. The *Moudawana* reform had a six-month timeline for draft submission to Parliament. Aiming to address issues like adultery, underage marriage, and inheritance rights, lead to nationwide discussions with often contradictory views. Reformists push for progressive changes, such as decriminalizing adultery and ensuring gender-equal inheritance, while conservatives oppose this citing religious and cultural values. On underage marriage, stricter regulations seem likely, a welcome change, reflecting concerns over minors' rights. However, the amendments are expected to balance the contradicting views incorporating tangible reform through Islamic principles to avoid societal polarization. The changes are likely to be subtle but significant to maintain social balance (Al Ashraf, 2024).

In Egypt, the 2014 criminalization of sexual harassment marked a step forward, but societal attitudes have limited its enforcement and impact (Kirollos, 2016). Similarly, Iraq's gender quota laws have increased the number of women in parliament but failed to challenge their marginalization within male-dominated political spaces (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009, Alkhudary, 2024). Such examples reveal how isolated policy reforms risk being superficial without deeper efforts towards cultural shifts.

According to Toukan's study, despite significant political advancements in several Arab countries, gender attitudes still lag behind. In 9 out of 12 countries surveyed by Arab Barometer, a plurality of citizens either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "In general, men are better at political leadership than women." This sentiment is particularly prevalent in Palestine (65%), Jordan (66%), and other parts of the Arab world (Toukan, 2023). This emphasizes that 'traditional' Western efforts for gender equity may not be the correct approach for the region (such as quotas or affirmative action hires).

Furthermore, economic forces play a significant role in shaping gender norms in complex and often contradictory ways. In Jordan, the rise of creative industries has made behaviors previously deemed inappropriate for women more acceptable. Social media, often forbidden for many

women in conservative households, is now a space where women post professional photos to expand their businesses (Bint Aysha, Bint Aya, Personal Communication, 2022). This shift illustrates how economic opportunities can expand the spaces in which women can operate, while also highlighting the extent to which societal norms remain tied to capital demands rather than any significant ideological change.

Husseini adds, in Jordan, “Society has developed, and women are now receiving more education and becoming more involved in the workforce. This has transformed the status of women. Families who once controlled women’s movements, their wages, and even their clothing, are now seeing a shift. In my work, I see women who are free to go out, earn money, pursue higher education, and enjoy their lives. It’s no longer the case that this kind of dominance is widespread, even if there are still areas where it exists (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Thurraya Zreik's work in Lebanon (with Palestinian communities) on socio-economic challenges provides further insight into this, particularly regarding how economic hardship can exacerbate gender inequality. She says, “You can really see this when we consider the coping mechanisms and strategies related to economic hardship, such as early marriage (Personal Communication, 2022).” Women are often caught in a contradiction where they are simultaneously independent and dependent, which makes accessing essential services and gaining economic autonomy more difficult. Zreik emphasizes that women with unmanageable economic burdens lose social capital, which in turn affects their material capital. This becomes particularly evident in the context of sexual and reproductive health, where young girls are often denied basic services, exacerbating gendered suffering (ibid.).

According to Beesan Jaber (Personal Communication, 2022), the understanding of socio-economic issues in relation to patriarchy tends to be limited to a small group, those with academic or anti-imperialist resistance backgrounds. This narrow focus means that economic struggles are frequently isolated from the larger social norms that shape gender oppression. In contrast, Palestine presents a more integrated view. There, the relationship between land, liberation, and gender is more fully recognized. The understanding that land is not ‘free’ expresses the notion that women's liberation cannot be decoupled from national liberation and political activism (for example, Jad, Jaber, Personal Communication, 2022). Murad-Galrick says,

“The culture however has changed in some sense. We may be seeing more openness in terms of access to education and labor participation through multiple socio-economic layers of society but we visually look more conservative (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Socio-economic factors are critical in understanding shifts in gender roles, especially among the ‘upper-middle’ class. As noted by Jaber (Personal Communication, 2022), some women in their early thirties no longer wish to have children, a stance they are privy to as a result of their economic and educational backgrounds. This decision is not universal but rather tied to social status and access to resources, illustrating that changes in family dynamics and gender roles are deeply influenced by socio-economic status (for example Kaddoura, Bint Mimi, Bint Aya, Personal Communication, 2022). Economic forces, while offering opportunities for gender progress, also maintain and reinforce the structural inequalities that define (neo)patriarchal systems. Understanding this dual role is crucial to addressing gender inequities in the Arab world and beyond.

As such, meaningful change requires a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the need for women’s economic and political participation but also the systemic barriers they face. Structural reforms must be deep and wide-ranging, encompassing legal protections, education, and cultural shifts. Only through these efforts can gender equity in Palestine and Jordan be realized, not just a theoretical ideal but a lived reality. Zreik explains a need for a wholesome approach, she says:

> I do think that it has to be a multi-pronged, to use that term, approach including social media and discussion sessions at school, as well as general policy. There is certainly a need to raise awareness but also working community by community within a national context. Otherwise, we run the risk of using imported concepts with little relevance and that have already, largely, been rejected. Even political intervention or radical intervention definitely needs to take input for any risks of study done to change his attitudes and behaviors (Personal Communication, 2022).

Finally, Rana Husseini concludes, “What I can say is that, over the years, Jordanian laws have evolved, but in terms of gender equality, there has been a shift in people's attitudes, especially as daily life requirements changed. The role of women in society evolved, and women were

increasingly encouraged, or even required, to enter the labor market. This transformation helped improve their social status (Personal Communication, 2022)."

Reeducation: "I Had to Unlearn *It* and I'm Still Unlearning It"

Reeducation refers to the ongoing, context-specific process through which individuals critically reassess internalized norms and reframe their understanding of self, society, and power. It is not exclusively about replacing one set of ideas with another but involves a deeper, often generational, effort to dismantle structural oppression, question inherited roles, and rebuild knowledge within lived realities, cultural histories, and collective struggles. As Bint Dima frankly states, "I had to unlearn it, and I'm still unlearning it (Personal Communication, 2022)." Her sentiment captures the ongoing struggle against both institutional, interpersonal and internalized gendered oppression and the forces that perpetuate it. Misogyny is so ingrained, she explains, that even in traditionally 'progressive' environments, like parts of Europe, it remains the same challenge with a different face, "I'm still trying to wrap my head around misogyny in Europe (ibid.)."

For many, the process begins with recognizing the extent to which contradicting values have shaped their understanding of themselves and their roles in society. Sarah Kaddoura elaborates, "It's really hard to deconstruct and let go of so much of what we internalized through patriarchy (which I personally still struggle through as many women/feminists)." She emphasizes that understanding the effects of harmful ideas requires more than individual effort; it depends on having the necessary "sources, support, and space (Personal Communication, 2022)." Adding that without systemic change in education, laws, and media (etc.), the process is stunted, leaving individuals to attempt the reeducation process in "the wrong conditions (ibid.)."
Colonialism and modernization entrenched these contradictions by imposing neopatriarchal systems, oppressive hybrids of foreign and local gender hierarchies, onto Arab societies. Framed as "liberatory" policy, these structures erased pre-colonial forms of female agency and codified new hierarchies that continue to marginalize women today. Reeducation, as both a personal and collective process, confronts this. It demands more than unlearning internalized norms like those Bint Dima and Kaddoura describe; it requires rebuilding frameworks of knowledge grounded in cultural histories and resistance. It rejects colonial and patriarchal logics not by replacing them

with imported theories but by generating alternatives rooted in lived realities. NGO-driven efforts, however, often reduce systemic oppression to individual "unlearning," avoiding structural critique. Kaddoura observes this dynamic firsthand: "Most international NGOs cannot do work that is not approved by the state or challenging its power, meaning it remains centered on cultural and small-level cycles, reproducing the idea that patriarchy is only within the social sphere… feminist ideas end up aligning with class status (Personal Communication, 2022)." This approach, she argues, strips feminism of its political teeth, reducing it to depoliticized self-help rather than liberation.

Yet even as imported models falter, Kaddoura does not outright reject transnational feminist ideas. She adds, "We cannot refuse ideas that grew in other places (like reproductive justice & intersectionality in black America, sex work organizing and gender discourse in India, etc) as 'Western' and therefore not useful. We just need to learn from those experiences and thoughts, and how we can apply them correctly or make use of them in our context, instead of importing them directly (Personal Communication, 2022)." This tension—between resisting colonial frameworks and adapting global solidarities—plays out starkly in the Levant. In Gaza, Palestinian women endure gendered violence and systemic erasure, yet their suffering is rendered invisible by international feminist movements that prioritize abstract ideals over lived realities. Between 2023 and 2025 (ongoing), neo-imperial violence in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria has dehumanized entire populations, exposing the absurdity of "fixing" gendered oppression without confronting the systems that devalue all life in the region.

Here, unlearning patriarchal norms is inseparable from rebuilding knowledge through collective struggle, a project as embodied as it is intellectual. Bint Maya's efforts to break generational cycles of control, for instance, reflect this duality. "It took time to get [my mother] to understand… her support was conditional, rooted in tradition," she explains (2022). Like the Palestinian movements, her journey shows us that reeducation is not a solitary act of defiance but a communal reimagining of power, one that weaves the personal, political, and ancestral into one another.

Adel Abadeer (2015) advocates for culturally resonant interventions that address both structural inequalities and ingrained social norms in his book *Norms and Gender Discrimination in the Arab World*. Drawing on the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000), Abadeer stresses that meaningful change lies not merely in access to resources but in the freedom to utilize them in alignment with one's values without fear of repercussion or reprimand. He writes, "What ultimately matters to people is their freedom. It is the freedom people have to choose from the set of valuable choices that comprises their ability to live according to what they value (Abadeer, 2015, 93)." This perspective should apply in different contexts, be it in political participation, religious expression, or personal choices.

Bint Aysha suggests, "Introduce it slowly through culturally conscious examples that deconstruct these roles (Personal Communication, 2022)." By pointing to historical practices, such as how grandmothers once spent time with butchers and vegetable merchants without shame, she highlights how certain gender norms are recent and should be questioned. She further notes that "the contemporary cultural version of Islam (mutashaded) was imposed by the British Mandate (ibid.)" emphasizing how cultural shifts can often be traced to colonial influences, which continue to shape the region's gender dynamics.

Hasso (2018), for example, emphasizes that fostering inclusive environments where women and men can actively and comprehensively participate in reshaping these systems is integral to unlearning oppressive norms. She argues that, "to be masculine is to have ownership or ownership-like relations over others, and to be emasculated is to be in relations of subordination (ibid.)." This framework connects gender identity to systems of dominance, where masculinity often relies on avoiding subordination or compensating for it symbolically or materially.

Her analysis also highlights the role of the body as a form of capital, building on Pierre Bourdieu's concept that cultural capital is ultimately embodied. This perspective reveals how societal pressures and institutions such as authoritarian states, religious systems, or the military, reinforce anxieties around masculinity (and by extension defining 'femininity' as its inverse) by positioning individuals in hierarchies of dominance and subordination. Reeducation initiatives could use this lens to address harmful gender norms by reimagining power relations and

promoting equality. Such efforts would need to dismantle the symbolic links between masculinity, ownership, and control while fostering agency that isn't rooted in domination. By challenging these sites of gendered power, reeducation can cultivate spaces for transformation grounded in equity and critical engagement. Furthermore, it must detach the concept of masculinity with control and dominance and femininity with subservience, for the sake of healthy social relations. And as such we can ask; is reeducation not only intellectual or emotional, but also embodied?

Bint Nadia speaks to the difficulty undoing this embodiment, sharing, “All the unlearning that I did and the reconditioning that I underwent took a lot of time and effort, and I hope that doesn't need to be the case for younger women (Personal Communication, 2022).” Her reflection centers that reeducation is not just intellectual or emotional, but it is also physical, lived, and often isolating without collective or institutional backing. Encouraging girls to break from tradition, without altering the systems that enforce those traditions, risks placing the burden of change solely on individuals. Like Hasso, in some way she points to how power operates through the body, how reconditioning must be both personal and structural to be meaningful. Reeducation, then, isn’t just about shifting minds, but about disrupting the very ways in which oppression is performed, maintained, and felt in everyday life.

Zreik also emphasizes that any attempt to implement change must be informed by the realities of each community, or else it risks being rejected as foreign or irrelevant. This points to the importance of supporting the effects of reeducation with the social reaction of local populations (Personal Communication, 2022).

Reeducation must be rooted in the lived experiences of individuals and communities, integrating the historical, economic, and social factors that shape gender roles. As seen in the discussions around exposure and generational shifts, reeducation should not only provide access to new ideas but also foster a critical engagement with those ideas, allowing for adaptation and transformation at both the personal and societal levels. The process must be gradual, reflective, and supported by both grassroots initiatives and formal educational reforms, recognizing that change will not happen overnight. Thus it is not merely the rejection of oppression, but the cultivation of new ways of being, embodied, collective, and grounded in liberation rather than control.

Exposure: “The Chance to Read Other Women’s Experiences”

Many research participants, in some form or another, pointed to the importance of exposure as a factor in shaping the gendered status quo. This process, whether by innovating or adapting thoughts and self-perception, can lead to meaningful changes in action, at least on a personal level. Exposure offers a means to challenge inherited norms in a way that is organic, allowing women to reconcile new possibilities with existing socialization and beliefs. However, as the women’s reflections make clear, exposure is not inherently liberatory; it is shaped, even constrained, by context, access, and structural inequalities.

Besan Jaber discusses how access to information plays a central role in exposure to new ideas, she says: “I believe this is tied to the increasing openness of the society we live in today (Personal Communication, 2022).” But ‘breaking free’ is not only contingent on exposure. Bint Aya adds, “From personal experience, I don’t think I would have changed if I didn’t have access to the internet and the chance to read other women’s experiences. Without that, I would have remained stuck in the same routine, reinforcing the beliefs we were conditioned to live by. Breaking that cycle takes incredible strength, the right tools, and privileges that not everyone has access to. Without these, the cycle of reinforcement continues (Personal Communication, 2022).” As such exposure must also be coupled with the means, the courage, and often, the luck and privilege to use it to change individual and collective circumstances. Her statement highlights both the power and the limits of tools like the internet. Yes, it’s transformative, but only for those who can access it – for others, the same mentalities and gendered status quo exists. In her perception, this access acted as a powerful tool in dismantling the mental and material conditioning that confined her.

This isn’t just about internet accessibility or conforming to ‘modern’ gender order, it is about context: a ‘modernized’ world where younger women can question what their mothers could not. Exposure through technology, media, education, and other women’s experiences offers them the resources to carve out new spaces, but it also throws into sharp juxtaposition of just how limited these freedoms were, and in many cases and places still are.

Bint Shadda reflects on the contrasting realities between her mother's and her own experiences due to different geographical and socio-cultural contexts highlighting this point. She says:

> My mother's options were far more restricted, largely because of the era she grew up in and the cultural and class contexts of her upbringing. For instance, she was raised in Rsafyeh (north of Amman), Jordan, which offered a vastly different environment from my upbringing in Bahrain. The opportunities and exposure available to us were worlds apart due to these differences (Personal Communication, 2022).

This generational and geographical comparison emphasizes how access to opportunities, be it in terms of education, career, or personal freedom, can vary greatly depending on the time and place in which one is raised. Not all exposure is created equal, it is dependent on where you're born, your family's means, and the cultural moment you exist in. These forces often meet and dictate whether women get an opportunity at something beyond traditional roles or are forced to remain locked in them.

Bint Shadda continues, "The exposure to ideas around gender equality today is significant, and I hope this continues to shape future generations. I hope parents raise their daughters with values rooted in equality, opening up more opportunities for them, particularly in education and the workforce. Although these shifts might seem small, they hold immense potential for broader social change (ibid.)."

Considering the different social and geographical contexts, Bint Aysha also offers an interesting take on how economic shifts can influence cultural acceptance, particularly in relation to women's roles; "Exposure to new ideas and foreign concepts brings gradual change to society, but these changes are not inherently good or bad, they're tied to societal transformations. Capitalist interests have unintentionally advanced feminism in this way, normalizing previously banned behaviors through economic necessity (Personal Communication, 2022)."

This contradicts the idea that exposure alone drives progress – it is about how economic needs reframe cultural norms, sometimes in ways that superficially align with feminist goals. She

argues this process lacks true revolutionary spirit, explaining, “This exposure works slowly, providing growth and reducing reactionary rejection over time. However, slow normalization is not enough for a revolution, it lacks the necessary shock factor (Personal Communication, 2022).”

Her statement connects economic shifts with changes in cultural norms, understanding that while exposure through these shifts can normalize previously ‘frowned upon’ behaviors, it may not lead to the kind of radical change that is truly needed. Instead, the process is gradual and driven by market forces rather than ideological evolution.

Bint Maya reflects on the sometimes seen generational divide in understanding new ideas and values, saying:

> The more time I spend with my mother, the more she begins to understand what kind of person I am. I measure success by my happiness, by the plans I have for my future.. like traveling or moving to another country for work. I try to explain these things to her, and while she supports me, she doesn’t fully understand it. It’s all new to her because she never experienced these kinds of opportunities or ways of thinking (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Maya’s efforts to explain her ambitions to her mother center on some of the difficulty of bridging the gap between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ values, even when there is support. However, we can consider this as a form of exposure for her mother. Similar examples can be found across households as we have discussed in Chapter 2, on the changes in generational upbringing. Testimonies such as Bint Aisha, Bint Shadda, Bint Khadra, Bint Sophia, and Bint Siham speak to this. The younger generations’ mentality towards different topics may provide a new point of view for older generations. Our discussions reflect a slow but meaningful shift, where younger generations not only benefit from exposure but act as vehicles of it for their parents.

Just as many women credited exposure as a catalyst for change, they also revealed its limitations, reminding us that access alone does not dismantle power. Together these narratives express that exposure can empower individuals to question societal norms, seek personal freedom, and challenge gender expectations. Yet its impact is neither immediate nor universally transformative. It depends on a mix of personal access, cultural context, and economic conditions. While exposure can be a powerful force, it remains a privilege; unevenly distributed and often inaccessible to many. What is evident, however, is that generational change, geographic movement, and digital connectivity all play a role in expanding access to new ideas. The more pressing question is how to make this access equitable, not just for those who have broken through contextual barriers, but for all women.

An Organic Feminism: “Women Should Know Their Sisters”

The issue, or rather the perception, of ‘conceptual’ feminism in the region is contentious, not necessarily because of anti-liberation or inferior sentiment, but rather due to the genuine lack of a local, logical feminism that proves relevant to the population. In the Jordanian context, this problem is manifested in three central forms of feminism, which are also apparent in Palestine. First, there is state-sponsored feminism, which remains very thin and almost invisible, with the state offering little more than symbolic gestures. This form of feminism, despite its proclamations, does not bring substantial changes for gender equality and tends to revere the role of motherhood (for example Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2016). The second form is the imported, decontextualized feminism, often referred to as NGO feminism or Western feminism. This version is widely rejected by both religious and non-religious individuals due to its perceived condescension and non-applicability to the realities of the region. This has sparked a reactionary stance among the population, who generally believe that the rights being pushed by Western agendas are not the most pertinent concerns of women in the region. Finally, there is the presence of Islamic feminism, which, while affirming the belief in equality, lacks the structural means to create home-grown change. This approach essentially functions as a ‘proof-of-concept,’ asserting that equality exists in theory but falling short in terms of lived-experience.

In Jordan, state-sponsored feminism is often criticized for being superficial and aligned with political interests rather than genuine gender empowerment. While the government has made

efforts to advance gender equality through institutions like the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), these initiatives are often seen as insufficient. According to feminist scholars, the state's control over these movements tends to emphasize political stability over structural change, limiting the scope of real transformation for women (Hasso, 2009, Moghadam, 2004; Al-Husseini, 2021). These reforms, while publicly supportive of gender equality, have often failed to challenge the deep-rooted (neo)patriarchal structures that continue to dominate Jordanian society.

Western feminist ideologies, often promoted by international NGOs, further complicate the feminist landscape in Jordan. These imported frameworks are frequently criticized for being disconnected from local cultural, political, and social realities. Many Jordanians, both religious and secular, view this influence as an imposition, with Western feminism perceived as too alien to address the specific needs of women in the region. This is particularly evident in the resistance to issues like gender-based violence, where local feminist activists find themselves at odds with both international and domestic pressures (for example, Sayegh and Shafei, 2018, Najjar, 2020, Kallah, 2023). As a result, there is a fragmentation within the feminist movement, making it difficult to form a cohesive and locally relevant response to gender inequality.

The challenges faced by Jordanian feminists reflect the broader struggle for gender equality in the Arab world, where movements are often constrained by both state control and the imposition of foreign ideologies. Despite these obstacles, feminist movements in Jordan continue to evolve, with some activists advocating for a more nuanced, locally grounded approach to gender justice. In the end, true empowerment for women in Jordan may require a shift towards more indigenous and intersectional feminist frameworks, ones that are responsive to both local struggles and global solidarities.

A significant issue with these imported or fragmented feminisms is the lack of (critical) intersectionality within existing frameworks. For instance, Islamic feminists hold beliefs that do not always align with those of Western feminism. One prominent example is the differing perspectives on Palestine and its liberation, where Western feminists, in general, do not consider the liberation of Palestine a feminist issue (Shalhoub-Kevorkian et. al, 2022 or Pratt, et. al,

2025). This divergence shows the ways in which feminist frameworks, whether Islamic or Western, often fail to address the region's unique political and cultural dynamics, overlooking the intersection of gender and national liberation struggles.

This gap between theory and practice demands reimagining, one that Hanna Al Taher articulates through anticolonial feminism. She argues that anticolonial feminism must expand, saying, "Imaginatively across and against borders in a way that creates space for what could be, instead of being coopted into a neoliberal and docile compliance with what is (Al Taher, 2023)." She critiques the depoliticization of feminist struggles since the 1980s, noting that state-sponsored neoliberal feminism has transformed what was once a radical and anticolonial movement into a charity-driven, non-threatening agenda. She adds:

> Anticolonial feminism cannot be detached from wider political liberation struggles. And searching for vestiges of an anticolonial feminism in Amman requires a recognition that, in order to be understood as anticolonial, feminists must include in their political imagination: liberation for non-Jordanians, especially non-Jordanians exploited in gendered and bonded labor (ibid.).

This understanding reveals the limitations of a neoliberal, state-sponsored feminism that relies on exploitation, making it insufficient in truly addressing the liberation of women, especially those marginalized by national borders and labor practices.

Bint Aysha from Ramallah adds to this discussion by emphasizing the importance of solidarity and unity among women. She believes that awareness of shared oppression is crucial, saying:

> Women should know their sisters, in the sense that they must understand they are an oppressed class of people in this context. They should be constantly defending each other's right to do what they want. Each woman who puts down another is actually setting off a ripple effect that will affect more than her. It sets the precedent of 'she cannot' as well as the concept of taking away from one another like that is normal. We

> need unity, especially that there is a forced effort to separate us (Personal Communication, 2022).

Despite widespread skepticism and fragmentation, feminism in Jordan and Palestine is far from redundant. What emerges from these critiques, of state co-optation, NGO agendas, and incomplete religious frameworks, is a call for a more rooted, relational feminism. One that resists depoliticization, engages with anticolonial liberation, and insists on the centrality of solidarity across communities and borders. As women like Bint Aysha remind us, feminist transformation begins with recognition: of shared struggle, of classed and racialized hierarchies, and of the necessity to defend one another's freedoms as collective, not individual, rights. Organic feminism, then, is not about rejecting all that is foreign, but about re-centering what has been buried: the political imagination of women whose liberation is inseparable from justice, dignity, and unity.

"To Young Women, We Hope –"

The perspectives of these women express their deep understanding of the societal pressures they face, as well as their collective desire to create a better future for younger generations. Through their words, they advocate for a world where women can be free from judgment, self-doubt, and the internalized misogyny that has shaped their lives. They offer powerful hopes for younger women to live lives full of possibility, love, and self-expression.

Bint Mimi hopes for a future wherein younger women can create a healthier environment for themselves and others. Reflecting on her own teenage experiences, she contrasts them with the possibilities of today, particularly the digital spaces that have opened up new avenues for dialogue and connection.

> I hope younger women are able to foster a healthier environment for themselves and for others around them. When we were teenagers, there was so much we put up with. But today, we are exposed to new ideas. There's so much more room for dialogue on social media, where people can express themselves, share ideas, and

> learn more about breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma and internalized misogyny (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Yasmin hopes that younger women will enjoy more freedom to choose their own paths and break free from the societal constraints that defined past generations. She stresses the importance of detaching self-worth from reputation and instead cultivating self-confidence, even if that still feels idealistic.

> I hope younger girls will have more freedom to choose the paths they want, the freedom to express themselves, and the ability to push back against societal constraints without fear. I also hope they don't tie their value to their 'reputation' but instead develop self-confidence – although that may be an idealistic wish (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Layla offers a more intimate and emotional hope, one grounded in resilience and self-love. She wants younger girls to find it easier to grow and evolve despite the chaos of the world, and to live intentionally even in difficult circumstances.

> I wish that evolving for younger girls becomes easier with time. I hope they will learn to love themselves despite the chaos. Living a mindful life is also important because we all chose to stick around in this 'bullshit' place for very meaningful reasons (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Maya calls for clear national-level action to push feminist agendas forward. For her, identity politics alone are not enough and structured, organized, and sustained efforts are required to achieve meaningful change. She says:

> Clearly thought-out and written agendas need to be set at the national level and pushed through. Simply claiming to be a feminist doesn't accomplish much. We need more organization (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Nour desires for a world in which young women can live their lives without being constantly judged or shamed. Her hope is for girls to have the space to make mistakes, grow, and live fully.

> In a perfect world, I wish and hope for every girl to live her life to the fullest, to make mistakes without the fear of being judged or shamed. To believe in themselves and pursue things that 'typically' aren't for women (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Bee highlights a critical issue often overlooked in mainstream discourse: the judgment women direct at one another. She calls for solidarity among women, especially younger ones, and the need to build each other up rather than tearing each other down. Speaking on horizontal violence, she says:

> Our biggest struggle, in my opinion, and what I hope will change, is women judging women. Especially young women should come together around certain topics instead of tearing each other down (Personal Communication, 2022).

Bint Nadia envisions a future where young women can live freely, confidently, and authentically, without being tied into social stereotypes. She stresses the need for open-mindedness in parenting, particularly around gender and sexuality, and calls for stronger legal frameworks that protect people's right to live as they are.

> I hope younger girls can live more freely, with confidence and courage. I wish for them to have the strength to overcome challenges, break stereotypes, and embrace their individuality. I also hope that future mothers will raise their children with more open minds, avoiding rigid values that cannot evolve with time.

Finally, she emphasizes legal protections: "I hope the pendulum swings in a different direction, one that creates more space for individual choices and opportunities. I wish for better laws that protect people's rights to live authentically, without fear or limitations" (Personal Communication, 2022).

The shared hopes among these women for a better future are deeply rooted in their lived experiences and their acute awareness of the oppressive structures that have shaped their lives. Their reflections do not merely recount hardship, they reveal a refusal to accept its permanence. These are not passive narratives of survival, but active visions of transformation.

Their words show a need for solidarity, self-expression, and systemic change as interacting and necessary for creating conditions where young women can thrive. They articulate not just individual wishes, but a collective investment in building subcontexts where freedom, confidence, and self-worth can take root. These hopes reflect both an intuitive understanding of structural oppression and an insistence on imagining life beyond it.

Importantly, their visions transcend institutional ideologies and donor-driven frameworks. They do not speak from the scripts of NGOs or international agendas, but from the immediacy of lived experience, from conversations in homes, in taxis, in personal reflection. This is not about branding feminism or aligning with socio-political trends. It is about reshaping the everyday: transforming relationships, expectations, and modes of being that have largely governed by fear, shame, and limitation.

By articulating their hopes for younger generations, they signal a commitment to nurturing authenticity, inclusion, and resilience in ways that are not bound by policy but by purpose. They envision futures where young women can express themselves without fear, evolve without judgment, and build community without competition. Ultimately, their vision is one where young women are no longer confined by the same inherited struggles, but are empowered to chart their own paths, with confidence, clarity, and collective support. It is a vision that insists on the possibility of personal transformation as a form of political resistance, and of shared hope as a foundation for structural change.

This chapter demonstrates that while formal reforms often fail to address the root causes of women's subjugation, Palestinian and Jordanian women engage in everyday acts of reimagining and personal praxis that actively forge new possibilities towards gender equity. Through re-education, exposure, and organic solidarity, they confront and unsettle the interconnected forces of colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberalist conformity. Their practices reveal a profound dialectic: personal transformation cannot be separated from collective emancipation, and vice versa.

The chapter has shown that re-education functions as an intimate, reflective praxis. By unlearning inherited colonial-patriarchal narratives and excavating pre-colonial tradition of women's agency, participants dismantle the internalized shame (*'eib*) that polices behavior and

identity. This process of critical self-interrogation generates the conditions for solidarity: when one woman reeducates herself or others she invites others to question the very foundations of imposed gender hierarchies.

Exposure then extends this inner work into relational and technological spheres. Digital platforms, intergenerational storytelling, and peer-to-peer exchanges fracture monolithic cultural scripts and reveal alternative imaginaries of gender justice.

Organic feminism centers these epistemic and narrative shifts in material structures of unorganized mutual aid. Here, solidarity is neither rhetorical nor transactional but embodied: it is the shared labor of care, the co-construction of safe spaces, and the mutual cultivation of political clarity.

Participants' aspirations for younger generations, social and physical security, autonomy, and enduring intergenerational care, emerge not as abstract ideals but as actionable commitments. These hopes confront both state-led reforms, which too often infantilize women, and NGO-driven agendas, which risk depoliticization. Instead, the chapter articulates a vision of gender justice rooted in the dialectics of everyday praxis: one in which individual insight and collective action co-evolve to dismantle systemic oppression.

By positioning informal feminist practices at the core of transformation, this final chapter reframes Palestinian and Jordanian women's struggles as generative rather than marginal; proto-political. It argues that sustainable emancipation is cultivated not through external grants or legislative decrees but through the sustained, relational labor of unlearning, connecting, and caring. In foregrounding these unstructured yet effective strategies, the chapter presents as a blueprint for anticolonial futures, grounded in dignity, collective care, and a clear interdependence of personal and political liberation.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the complex and relational structures of gendered oppression as experienced by Palestinian and Jordanian women, articulating their understanding and navigation of institutional, interpersonal, and internalized challenges. Through a dialectical

approach, it has traced how historical, legal, and social forces construct and reinforce patriarchal constraints, while also shedding light on the deeply personal and often contradictory ways women respond to and negotiate these forces in their daily lives. By centering the research participants' voices the research has sought to provide a nuanced and grounded analysis of how oppression is both experienced and contested in multiple registers, from the macro-level of state and legal institutions to the meso-level of interpersonal relationships and self-perception within micro-level realm of the internal.

The first major finding of this research is that institutional structures, particularly legal frameworks governing civil and bodily rights, function as primary mechanisms of gendered oppression. Whether through personal status laws, nationality and citizenship policies, or the lethargic pace of legal reforms, these frameworks entrench male dominance and reinforce a patriarchal order that infantilizes women, limiting their autonomy and rendering them dependent on male relatives. These laws do not operate in a vacuum but rather within broader geopolitical and economic contexts, wherein settler-colonialism, neocolonial state structures, and Western hegemonic influence converge to maintain systemic inequalities. These legal mechanisms are not static; rather, they evolve in ways that both reflect and reinforce shifting state and imperial interests while remaining firmly rooted in patriarchal logics. Within the facet of the 'institutional' it interrogated 'feminism' as an institution, its relevance to the research participants and its co-opting by neoliberal institutions such as 'NGOs.'

The second key dimension of analysis has been the interpersonal realm, where patriarchal structures are both upheld and strategically maneuvered. Women employ what this study has termed 'bargaining with neo-patriarchal structures,' a process in which they make calculated compromises to secure greater personal freedoms or to mitigate social and familial restrictions. Whether through strategic marriages, the feigning of piety, or leveraging educational and employment opportunities, women's negotiations are complex, shaped by broader economic and social constraints. These acts are neither purely acts of resistance nor complete capitulations to patriarchal norms; rather, they exist within a dialectical tension, simultaneously reproducing and challenging the structures within which they unfold. The findings highlight that these strategies are deeply individualized, often producing incremental rather than structural changes, though their cumulative effects may signal shifts in gender norms over time.

The third layer of oppression examined in this thesis is internalized oppression, wherein external structures of domination become embedded in the psyche and self-perception of women. This study has argued that Palestinian and Jordanian women experience a form of 'triple consciousness,'an internalization of geopolitical instability, gendered subjugation, and cultural mechanisms of control, particularly the code of *'eib.* This internalization manifests in self-surveillance, compliance and distress, and the navigation of double lives, where women compartmentalize their identities to reconcile personal desires with societal expectations. At the same time, internalized oppression is not static; women demonstrate a capacity for self-awareness and critique, gradually unraveling these internalized constraints through exposure to alternative narratives, intergenerational dialogues, and collective reflection.

In examining these three dimensions, this research has sought to move beyond a binary framework of victimhood versus agency. The narratives and lived experiences of the women interviewed demonstrate that while structural constraints are deeply problematic and affect these women on a daily basis, in turn women continuously find ways to subvert, negotiate, and, sometimes, resist. Their resistance does not always take the form of organized activism or overt political struggle; rather, it is often embedded in the minutiae of daily life, reeducating themselves and others, forging solidarities, and redefining the terms of their own existence.

In drawing these threads together, it becomes clear that institutional, interpersonal, and internal domains of oppression are not discrete silos but mutually constitutive arenas in which the same gendered, colonial, and cultural pressures play out. What appears as a "bargain" in interpersonal exchanges, feigned piety, strategic marriage choices, reverberates through legal codes and informal state practices, just as the internalized shame that shapes self-surveillance is both produced by and feeds back into those very interpersonal and institutional constraints. In other words, internalization cannot be separated from bargaining or state coercion, nor can legal structures be understood apart from the psychic work they demand of women. Participants often described how personal negotiations with family members became sites where legal restrictions were felt most acutely, and how the threat of '*eib* shaped both public compliance and private subversion. This fluid interplay suggests that interventions at any one level, legal reform, community support, or psycho-social engagement, must account for spillover effects across the other domains. I have organized this analysis around participants' own framing, examining

results within these three dimensions, yet any one domain continually inflects and reshapes the others, highlighting their fluid, relational, and interchangeable nature. Rather than treating institutional, interpersonal, and internal oppressions as fixed categories, this adaptive framework invites a holistic understanding of how power circulates through law, social relations, and the self, mirroring lived experience and offering a blueprint for future research that captures oppression's dynamic reciprocity.

A key contribution of this thesis is its challenge to dominant feminist discourses that often frame Arab and Muslim women's oppression as primarily cultural or religious. Instead, it situates their experiences within intersecting local, national, and global systems of power, acknowledging how colonial histories, economic dependencies, and geopolitical dynamics shape gendered realities. This approach insists on a more historically and structurally attuned analysis that resists reductive and Orientalist framings. The research also highlights the limitations of externally imposed feminist interventions, particularly those driven by international NGOs and policy frameworks that fail to engage with the lived realities and priorities of the women they aim to support.

Furthermore, this study offers insights into the future possibilities of feminist mobilization in Palestine and Jordan. While independent feminist movements remain constrained by political repression and social conservatism, the findings suggest that informal, personal, and small-scale acts of resistance play a crucial role in challenging patriarchal norms. Women's emphasis on reeducation, exposure to new ideas, and the cultivation of organic feminisms, rooted in relational and collective knowledge-sharing, indicates potential pathways for transformative change. The desire for social and physical security, as well as for increased independence, emerged as central themes in women's aspirations for future generations, pointing to areas where future advocacy and research could focus.

This thesis does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of gendered oppression in Palestine and Jordan but rather offers a critical intervention that foregrounds the voices and strategies of women themselves. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating younger and older generations, providing more class and geographical representation in a larger sample, examining the role of digital activism in shaping feminist consciousness, or exploring

comparative experiences in other Arab or 'Global South' contexts. Ultimately, this study affirms that despite the weight of institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppressions, women continuously create spaces of possibility, however constrained, through their daily acts of resistance, negotiation, and reimagination of gendered realities.

The ongoing violence in Gaza and the broader Levant casts a shadow over this research, shaping both its urgency and its limitations. The conditions of war, occupation, and siege fundamentally alter the lived experiences of women, intensifying their vulnerabilities while simultaneously forging new modes of resilience and resistance. The testimonies and insights gathered in this thesis, while deeply rooted in the social and legal constraints of Palestine and Jordan, cannot be fully disentangled from the specter of mass displacement, generational trauma, and the daily threat of erasure that Palestinian women in Gaza (and the West Bank) face. These realities challenge any static understanding of gendered oppression, as violence, whether in the form of bombs, economic strangulation, or political disenfranchisement, reconfigures the very meaning of survival and agency.

On a personal level, this work is inseparable from the weight of bearing witness to these ongoing atrocities. The process of research, analysis, and writing has not been undertaken in a vacuum but against the backdrop of escalating destruction and loss. Every statistic, every policy, every structural critique contained in these pages is followed by guilt at its uselessness to confront and stop this life shattering violence. This is not an academic exercise; it is a reflection of a lived, painful reality – one that calls not just for analysis but for action. In this sense, the work itself is an act of resistance, an insistence on documentation, on testimony, and on the refusal to allow these stories to be buried beneath the rubble of history. The hope remains that by centering the voices of Palestinian and Jordanian women, this study contributes, however modestly, to the broader struggle for justice, dignity, and liberation.

Palestine will be free.

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Annex A. Interview Questions

(Drafted 31.01.22)
Interview Questions; Online & In-Person

This interview will be used as 'field data' as one of a total of 50 interviews conducted with women in the country as well as (Palestine/Jordan). These interviews are all completely anonymous except for general data describing your positionality. The audio of these files will not be shared; the content of this interview will be used towards completing my PhD at the University of Toulouse in France. All the data will be used in an honest and ethical manner. Please feel free to choose a pseudonym for yourself. Please confirm that you have understood this agreement and respond with: I consent or I do not consent.

1. Age and Nationality
2. Positionality within family structures (shrinking family size - causes?)
3. Data highlighted: Intergenerational changes in upbringing (social/political) grandmother-mother-daughter
4. Bargains/Sacrifices
5. Internalized misogyny in the home or society, have you felt oppressed by women in your life? Anecdotes as a way to highlight it
6. Perception of patriarchy
7. Perception of feminism
8. Personally affected by the patriarchy?
9. Barriers to achievement (self)
10. Changes for future generations of women?
11. Government, society, family, most influential in your lives? Most eager to please?

    1. Age nationality, number of siblings, number of kids
    2. Family size? Same or smaller than the one you grew up in? Why?
    3. What area had the most affect on you? Social, political, family?
    4. What are the biggest difference between how you and your mother and you and your daughter?

5. Whats the biggest sacrifice you feel you had to make in your life?
6. Have you felt double standards of women in your life? Do you feel you have these same double standards with your daughters/?
7. What is your perception of feminism? Is it important to you?
8. Have you been affected unfairly by ‘Nitham Abawy” in your life?
9. What do you hope for future generations of women?

Annex B. Expert Interview Questions

Dear [Title, Name],

Thank you again for taking the time to respond to these questions!

I understand they are quite heavy, so if you prefer to respond through voice notes, or a phone call, please let me know. As I mentioned, my thesis is a study on different types of patriarchal bargains and how they change intergenerationally. For this I interviewed participants from two age groups: from 24-35 and 54-65. From the younger group I spoke to some 20 women, and the elder around 10. I will be conducting 5 expert interviews to cross reference the findings and understand the applicability for a larger and more inclusive sample.

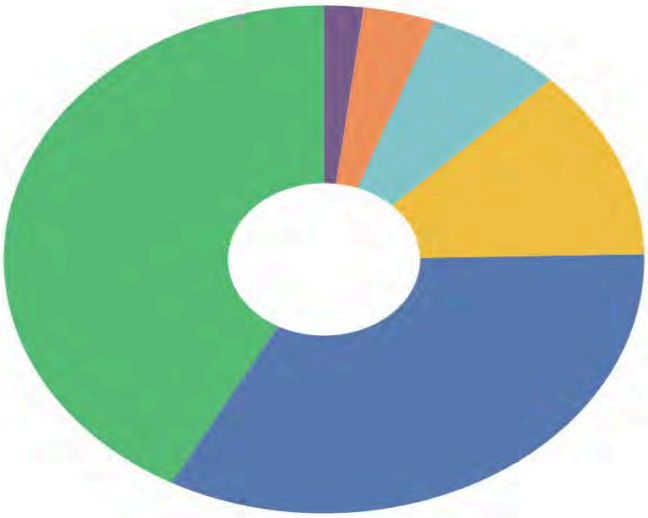
1) First, all participants cited a shift in how they were raised vis-a-vis their mothers upbringing. Majority responded that they were allowed many more personal freedoms than older generations. Is this reflected in a legal context as well? Is this disjunction between generations also found in your work? Is it viewed positively or negatively?
2) Women across both age groups feel that patriarchy is still very dominant in their lives and in the region. Rather than place it in a greater system of oppression which certainly exists, there seems to remain a heavier handed oppression of women. Is this reflected socially across all socio-economic backgrounds?
3) Family size in Jordan has dramatically shrunk since 1967, according to data it has gone from 8 to 2.5. Speaking to the women, a number mentioned that they do not want children at all. While this is both ideological and economic, it seems that there is no longer a need for children, specifically sons, to provide social security. Is this a trend that you have observed to any extent?
4) Women spoke of experiencing internalized misogyny; generally, this referred to more traditional or religious female family members, but also towards girls' treatment of one another at a school age. What would you say are the biggest causes for this phenomenon? How do you think we can stop it?
5) The women spoke of patriarchal bargains that they have made throughout their lives. Some examples include wearing the hijab as a response to social pressure, marrying for independence, education for independence, viewing themselves with a male gaze, raised under a different set of rules to their male siblings, and so on. Is this ‘bargaining’

something that can be viewed as a collective. Can we apply this logic to women's rights movements?

6) Is the focus on gender programming, specifically by foriegn agencies and NGOs, offering women actual opportunities or is the knowledge still de-contextualized? Is working with Western ideas of feminism a patriarchal bargain in itself?
7) What do you feel are the biggest gains women's rights movements in Jordan and Palestine are in the past couple of decades?
8) Aside from these movements, what other factors can be assigned to progress regarding gender equality? Economic? Familial?

Annex C. Survey Questions and Answers

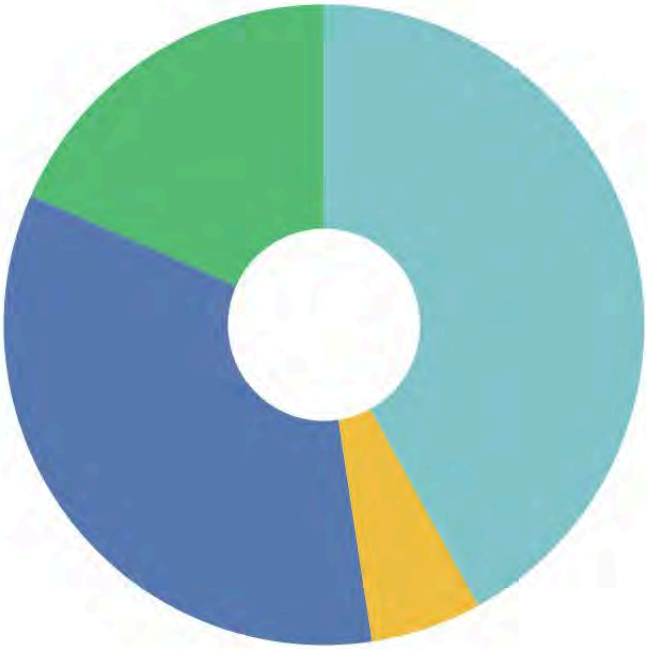
1. How old are you?
العمر؟



Skipped: 1 Answered: 304

	18-24	42 %	128
	25-34	33 %	101
	35-44	12 %	37
	45-54	7 %	21
	55-64	4 %	11
	65+	2 %	6

2. What is your nationality?
الجنسية ؟



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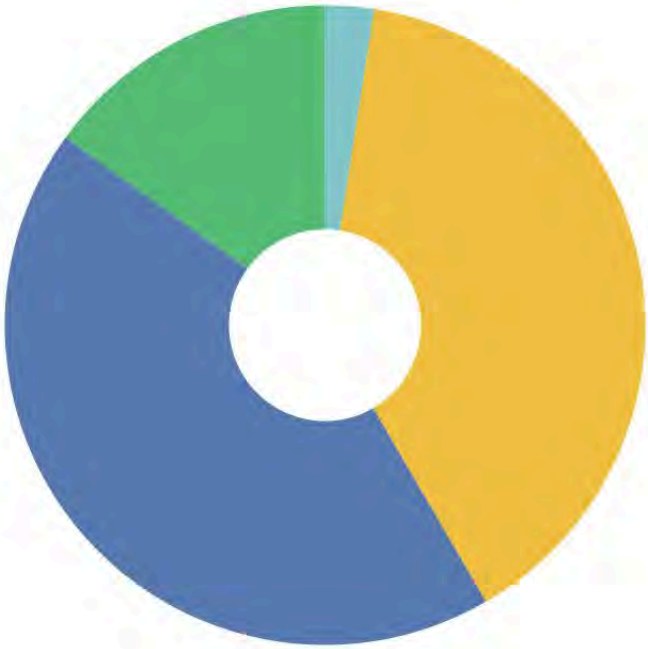
Lebanon	15 %	46
Jordan	28 %	85
Syria	5 %	14
Palestine	35 %	105
Other (please specify)		54 >

3. What do you prioritise as your primary social role? ما هو أهم دور اجتماعي بالنسبة لك؟



Skipped: 0 Answered: 305

Wife/Mother	الزوجة / الأم	14 %	43
Education/Employment	التعليم / العمل	41 %	124
Self or Social Improvement الذاتي أو الاجتماعي	التطوير	37 %	112
Daughter/Sibling	ابنة أو أخت	2 %	7
Other (please specify)			19

4. Do you feel you were raised under a different set of rules to your male siblings, cousins, friends etc.? هل اختلفت تربيتك عن تربية الذكور في



Skipped: 0 Answered: 305

Strongly agree	22 %	68
Agree	35 %	107
Neither agree nor disagree	17 %	53
Disagree	16 %	48
Strongly disagree	10 %	29

5. Do you currently feel as though you are living under a patriarchal system? هل تشعرين انك تحت نظام أبوي؟



Skipped: 0 Answered: 305

	Strongly agree	37 %	112
	Agree	32 %	99
	Neither agree nor disagree	11 %	33
	Disagree	13 %	40
	Strongly disagree	7 %	21

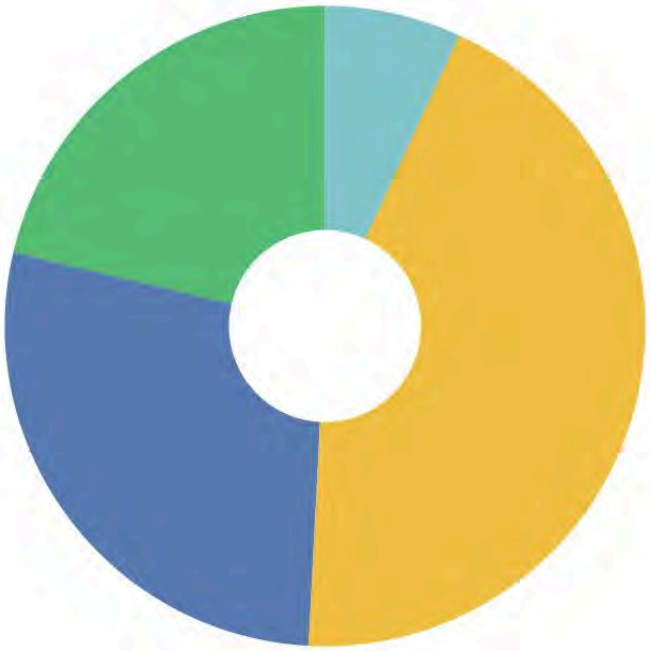
6. Would you say the social context of women has changed in your lifetime? i.e laws relating to women's rights, better or worse employment opportunities, access to healthcare etc. هل تغير الوضع الاجتماعي أو السياق الاجتماعي للمرأة في حياتك؟ (حقوق المرأة ، فرص عمل ، مزيد من الحرية)



Skipped: 1 Answered: 304

Strongly agree	11 %	33
Agree	54 %	165
Neither agree nor disagree	18 %	55
Disagree	14 %	42

7. Do you feel you spend more energy on what you want to do or what you are expected to do?
هل تبذلين مزيداً من الجهد فيما تريدين القيام به أو ما يُتوقع منك القيام به؟



Skipped: 0 Answered: 305

What you want to do	21 %	65
What you are expected to do	28 %	85
A balance between both	44 %	134
Neither	7 %	21

8. Would you say that you were raised under conservative conditions? برأيك هل نشأتي في بيئة أو في ظروف محافظة؟



Skipped: 1 Answered: 304

Agree	48 %	146
Neither agree nor disagree	27 %	82
Disagree	25 %	76

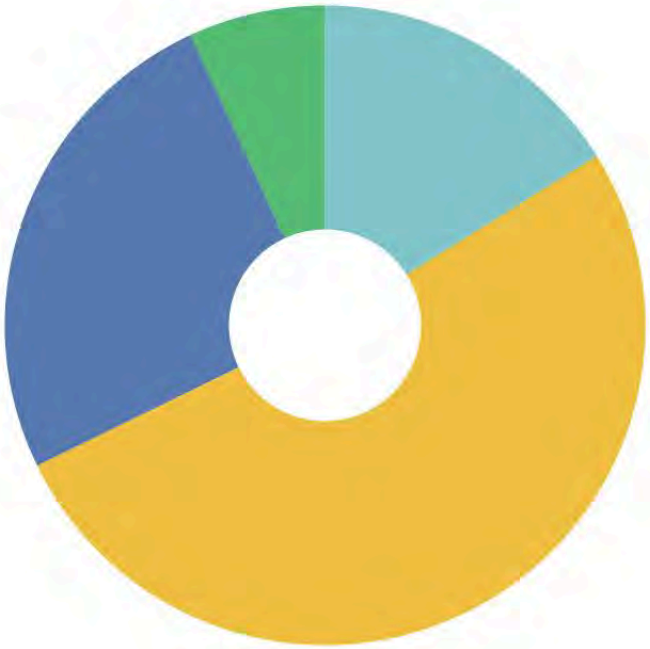
9. Did/do you desire more freedoms growing up? If yes, in which areas? هل كنتي ترغبين في مزيد من الحرية في منزل والديك؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم ، في أي مجالات؟



Skipped: 0 Answered: 305

	Education	8 %	23
	Socially	37 %	114
	Romantically	35 %	107
	Health and Well-being	14 %	42
	All of the above	23 %	71

10. Would you agree that you and your mother (or you and your daughter) were raised in a similar way? برأيك هل نشأتي في بيئة مشابهة لوالدتك أو ابنتك؟



Skipped: 1 Answered: 304

Strongly agree	7 %	21
Agree	25 %	77
Disagree	52 %	157
Strongly disagree	16 %	49

Annex D. Socio-demographic Tables

Socio-demographic Table 1. Research Participants					
Pseudonym	**Location**	**Ethnicity/Nationality**	**Socioeconomic Positionality (as of 2022)**	**Married (as of 2022)**	**Children (as of 2025)**
Bint Aya	Russia	Jordanian-Belarus	Participant is a 25-year old project manager. She is half Palestinian and half Belarusian. She has three siblings, one brother and two sisters, and she is the eldest. She is from a lower-middle class background.	No	0
Bint Aisha	Gaza	Palestine - Gaza	Participant is a 29 year-old Palestinian woman living in Gaza. She is in the creative industry but earned a degree in accounting. She is the third of four siblings, all brothers. Middle-upper class background.	No	0
Bint Aysha	Ramallah	Palestine - WB	Participant is a 27 year-old Palestinian woman living inside the West Bank. She is in the creative industry working freelance as a Writer/Director. She is recently wed. She is the eldest of her siblings in a family	Yes	0

			of 3 girls and 2 boys. She is from a middle class family.		
Bint Bee	Belgium	Palestine - Gaza	Participant is a 31 year old Palestinian woman from Gaza living in Europe. She is currently unemployed but is a teacher and is studying French. She has two brothers and a sister and is recently married. She is from a middle class background.	Yes	1
Bint Siham	Dubai	Palestine - WB	Participant is a 28 year-old Palestinian woman residing in the UAE. She works in the communications industry and has completed a Masters degree. She is also an active athlete. She is married and a mother of an infant, she is the second of four siblings, two sisters and a brother. middle-upper class background.	Yes	2
Bint Shadda	Vienna	Jordanian	Participant is a 27 year-old Jordanian PhD student living in Europe. She has one older brother and one younger sister. She is from a middle class background, though this has not always been the case (previously less financially secure)	Yes	0

Bint Dima	UK	Palestinian-Jordanian	Participant is a 34 year-old Jordanian woman with Palestinian origins living in the UK, she has worked in different sectors, she is currently a media researcher in the private sector. She has an elder and a younger brother. Middle class background. Family has faced financial struggles.	Yes	0
Bint Najla	USA	Palestinian-Jordanian	Participant is a 64 year old woman of Palestinian origin with Lebanese and Jordanian citizenship. She is one of six siblings and the mother of two children. She currently resides between Jordan, the UAE, and the USA. She is from a mid-upper socioeconomic bracket and was employed till retirement.	Yes	2
Bint Reem	JO	Jordanian	Participant is a 30 year old mechanical engineer with her own business in automotives based in Jordan. She is the youngest of three siblings. She is from a middle class background and is unmarried.	No	0

Bint Khadra	UK	Palestinian - WB	Participant is a 26 year-old Palestinian woman living in the UK, she was raised in the WB. She is a TV producer, and musician. She is the youngest of her siblings, with an elder sister and brother. She identifies as queer. She is from a middle class family that has faced financial struggles.	No	0
Bint Nour	Ramallah	Palestinian-WB	Participant is a 25 year-old Palestinian researcher working in the WB. Her focus is Sexual Health and Reproductive Services. She is from a middle-upper class family and an only child. She is not married.	No	0
Bint Mimi	JO	Jordanian	Participant is a 26 year-old Jordanian woman working in advertising in the capital, she identifies as a queer woman. She is the youngest in the family and has an elder brother. She is from a mid-upper class family.	No	0
Bint Nariman	LB	Palestinian-Lebanese	Participant is a 38 year-old Palestinian woman working in the arts sector as a curator and cultural organizer living in	No	0

			Lebanon. She is not married. Middle class background.		
Bint Nadia	UK	Palestinian-Kuwaiti	Participant is a 25 year-old Palestinian/Kuwaiti cultural anthropologist living in the UK. She was raised in Saudi Arabia and is from a wealthy family. She has three brothers, and is the second eldest amongst her siblings.	No	0
Bint Layla	Haifa	‘48 Palestine	Participant is a 28 year-old Palestinian woman living in 1948 Palestine, she is in the arts sector and works as a designer and cultural organizer and is a small business owner. She is the second in the family and has three sisters. Middle-lower class financial background.	No	0
Bint Sophia	Fr	Palestinian-Gaza	Participant is 34, an only girl to 3 older brothers. She is a communication officer at an Arab embassy in Paris, and was born and raised in Gaza. Middle class background.	No	0
Bint Yasmin	Germany	Palestinian- Jerusalem	Participant is a 30 year old Palestinian woman who is completing her PhD. She is the	Yes	1

			eldest of three siblings, a brother and a sister. Middle class background.		
Bint Haya	Dubai	Palestinian - WB	Participant is a 24-year old Master's student. She was raised in the UAE and is studying in the UK. She is the eldest of three brothers. She is from a particularly wealthy background.	Yes	0
Bint Saba	Ramallah	Palestinian - WB	Participant is a 27 year-old researcher working in the WB. She works on gender studies specifically at organized women's movements. She is the eldest and has one sister in a middle-upper class family. She is not married.	No	0

Socio-demographic Table 2. Expert Participants	
Sarah Kaddoura	Sarah Kaddoura is a Palestinian feminist activist, researcher, writer and content creator. She has experience as a Social Worker in education and sexual and reproductive health counseling in Lebanon for more than 7 years. As a student, she co-founded the first feminist club on a Lebanese university campus, focusing on issues of migrant domestic work, anticolonial resistance, and queer liberation. She holds an MA in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies. Besides her role at SFF, Sarah creates videos in Arabic on social movements, feminist theory

	and history, and critical contemporary debates through her channel, “Haki Nasawi”. Her main areas of interest are cybercultures, labour politics, and reproductive justice.
Dr Islah Jad	Islah Jad (born 1951) is a tenured assistant professor of Gender and Development at Birzeit University. She is also the co-founder and current Director of the Institute of Women’s Studies at Birzeit and a Core Group Member of the Arab Families Working Group. A prominent figure in the Palestinian women’s movement, Jad also helped to establish the Women’s Affair Centre in Gaza and Nablus, Les Amies du Francis, the Child Corner project in el-Bireh, and the WATC (Women’s Affairs Technical Committee).
Nermeen Murad-Garlick	Senior Gender Equality Advisor and Researcher with specialised knowledge of the overlap of politics and gender, justice and gender and USAID strategy and programming. Former Chief of Party of USAID flagship Gender Program in Jordan - USAID Takamol - working with both government and community. Long-standing, established and trusted reputation from a professional career encompassing high-profile roles.
Rana Husseini	Rana Husseini (Arabic:رنا الحسيني; born 1969) is a Jordanian journalist and human rights activist who exposed honour crimes in Jordan and campaigned for stronger legal penalties against perpetrators. She became a published author in 2009 with her book, Murder in the Name of Honor: The True Story of One Woman's Heroic Fight Against An Unbelievable Crime (Oneworld Publications). The government responded to her reports by implanting more serious legal and judicial changes and in 2017 the Penal Code was amended, improving human rights to women as well as people with disabilities. Her second book Years of Struggle: The Women's Movement in Jordan was published in 2021, and she is currently a senior reporter at

	The Jordan Times.
Beesan Jaber	Besan has 10 years of professional experience in research and development across different fields: cultural anthropology, journalism, and human rights. Her research is mainly focused on the theories of globalization and gender studies working with ethnographic research methods and feminist theories. Besan has worked and consulted for a number of regional and international organizations such as EnCompass LLC, Al Jazeera, Mercy Corps, International Rescue Committee, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. She holds a master's degree in Literature and Criticism and a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature
Thurraya Zreik	Zreik has been a research consultant in public health since 2016, working across Lebanon and the Arab region. Their experience includes collaborations with institutions such as the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2020–2024), the American University of Beirut (2016–present), the Lebanese Ministry of Health, local and international NGOs, and UN agencies (WHO, UNDP, UN ESCWA, UNICEF). Their research focuses on conflict and health, migrant and refugee health, youth and adolescent health, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health. They hold an MSc in Medical Anthropology from the University of Oxford (2015) and are currently a fully funded PhD candidate in Global Health at the University of Cagliari (since 2024).

Titre : État, société, psyché : Une analyse dialectique de l'oppression genrée multiscalaire dans la vie quotidienne des femmes palestiniennes et jordaniennes

Mots clés : Femmes, Arabes, Patriarcat, Palestine, Feminisme, Jordanie

Résumé : Cette thèse analyse l'oppression genrée selon trois dimensions interdépendantes : institutionnelle, interpersonnelle et intériorisée. Elle s'appuie sur des travaux académiques solides et sur des entretiens avec des femmes jordaniennes et palestiniennes concernant leurs expériences vécues au quotidien. Le travail met l'accent sur les formes d'oppression que les femmes elles-mêmes ont choisi de souligner et sur les manières dont elles y font face, les contournent ou les intériorisent.
La recherche repose sur une enquête menée auprès de 300 personnes dont les réponses ont orienté des entretiens semi-directifs avec des femmes âgées de 24 à 35 ans. Ce groupe a été choisi pour sa capacité à s'exprimer à la fois en tant que filles et, dans la plupart des cas, en tant que mères. Cinq expertes en genre ont également été interrogées pour enrichir l'analyse.
L'oppression institutionnelle principale, en Jordanie comme en Palestine, réside dans les lois étatiques régissant les droits civils et corporels, notamment le mariage, le divorce, la sexualité et l'héritage. Ces lois perpétuent la tutelle masculine et infantilisent les femmes au sein du système juridique, les forçant à une dépendance dans des sociétés elles-mêmes privées de liberté politique. Les femmes sont conscientes que leurs luttes s'inscrivent dans des structures géopolitiques imposées par l'Occident qui renforcent la domination patriarcale à travers l'occupation militaire, la répression politique et la dépendance économique.
La deuxième forme d'oppression est interpersonnelle. Les femmes doivent souvent négocier leur place dans le mariage, la famille et les relations intimes. Cela implique un marchandage patriarcal ou néo-patriarcal, dans lequel elles acceptent certains sacrifices en échange d'une autonomie partielle. Certaines ont décrit s'être mariées jeunes pour échapper à leur famille ou avoir simulé une religiosité pour protéger leurs sœurs cadettes. Ces négociations reflètent une conscience aiguë des compromis nécessaires à la survie dans un système oppressif.
La troisième forme d'oppression est intériorisée, et agit à la fois psychologiquement et corporellement. De nombreuses participantes ont exprimé un sentiment de contradiction interne, essayant de vivre librement tout en portant le poids des normes sociales et de la honte. Elles ont intériorisé une triple oppression : domination institutionnelle, restrictions culturelles et normes esthétiques mondialisées. Le concept de eib, ou honte, est apparu comme un outil de contrôle puissant. S'il encourage le respect et la cohésion sociale, il encadre aussi strictement les comportements féminins, en particulier en matière de modestie et de pureté.
La thèse montre que ces oppressions combinées mènent à des identités fragmentées et des vies doubles. Beaucoup de femmes poursuivent leurs aspirations sous des conditions qui punissent la visibilité et l'autonomie. Pourtant, elles résistent à travers des pratiques personnelles. Elles se rééduquent aux formes d'agency féminine précoloniale, accèdent aux savoirs féministes en ligne, et partagent leurs stratégies de survie entre générations.
Ces pratiques, souvent informelles et ignorées des institutions, représentent un féminisme enraciné dans le vécu. Il n'est pas dicté par les agendas des bailleurs ou les cadres internationaux, mais naît de la nécessité, du soin et de la mémoire. Dans leurs récits, les participantes imaginent des futurs où les filles ne seraient plus forcées de choisir entre sécurité et liberté, et où les relations seraient redéfinies par le soutien mutuel et une libération partagée.

Title: State, Society, Psyche: A Dialectical Analysis of Multiscalar Gendered Oppression in Palestinian and Jordanian Women's Everyday Lives

Key words: Women, Neo-patriarchy, Palestine, Jordan, Feminism

Abstract: This thesis analyzes gendered oppression across three interconnected dimensions: institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. It draws on both high-quality scholarship and interviews with Jordanian and Palestinian women about their daily lived experiences. The work pays close attention to the dimensions of oppression that women themselves chose to highlight, and how they navigate, confront, or absorb them.
The research is based on a survey conducted with 300 participants whose responses informed semi-structured interviews with women aged 24 to 35. This group was selected for their ability to speak as daughters and, in most cases, as mothers. Five gender experts were also interviewed to provide additional context.
The primary institutional oppression in both Jordan and Palestine stems from state legislation governing civil and bodily rights, including marriage, divorce, sexual conduct, and inheritance. These laws sustain male guardianship and infantilize women in the legal system, forcing them into dependence within societies that are themselves not politically free. Women are aware that their struggles exist within broader Western-imposed geopolitical structures that reinforce patriarchal dominance through military occupation, political repression, and economic dependency.
The second form of oppression is interpersonal. Women must often navigate marriage, family, and intimate relationships through constant negotiation. This involves what may be called patriarchal or neo-patriarchal bargaining, where women make calculated sacrifices in exchange for limited autonomy. Participants described marrying early to escape their natal families or performing religiosity to protect younger siblings. These negotiations often reflect a deep understanding of the trade-offs required for survival within oppressive systems.
The third form is internalized oppression, which affects both mind and body. Many participants expressed a sense of internal contradiction, trying to live freely while carrying the weight of social shame and restrictive norms. They internalized forms of triple oppression: institutional domination, cultural constraints, and globalized beauty standards. The concept of eib, or shame, emerged as a powerful mechanism of control. While it encourages respect and communal harmony, it also regulates female behavior, especially regarding modesty and purity.
The thesis finds that the layering of these oppressions leads to fragmented identities and double lives. Many women pursue desires and aspirations under conditions that punish visibility and autonomy. Yet within these constraints, women engage in personal forms of resistance. They described reeducating themselves on precolonial forms of female agency, accessing feminist knowledge online, and sharing survival strategies across generations.
These personal practices, though often informal and unrecognized by institutions, represent a grounded feminism rooted in lived reality. It is not shaped by donor agendas or international policy frameworks but by necessity, care, and memory. In their reflections, participants imagine futures where girls are not forced to choose between safety and freedom, and where relationships are redefined by mutual support and shared liberation.