In Pursuit of ‘Good Society’: Navigating Politics, Marriage, and Adulthood in Contemporary Jordan

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2016

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Abstract

This dissertation studies the role that marriage plays in contemporary Jordanian youths’ collective action and social imaginaries. I argue that marriage should be studied as part of politics as it is linked to popular perceptions regarding the state’s function (or dysfunction) in Jordan. In addition, I argue that marriage needs to be considered as a potential site for youths’ socio-political agency, as marriage involves not only practical considerations about money and employment but also strategies, practices, and efforts to realize their imagination of what state-society relationship should be (social imaginaries).

I study marriage through a variety of ethnographic and expressive cultural forms (through field interviews, popular literature, music, cartoons, graffiti, and films) in order to better understand what Ammani youth have to say about marriage and society. Popular culture appeals to young people in Amman because it often resembles their own lived experiences and depicts how individuals can overcome hardship. Field experiences and conversations reveal how marriage concerns are linked to national and everyday politics. The strategies youths actively pursue—from individual and familial networking to saving cooperatives and employment abroad—can be seen as expressions of agency in pursuit of their social imaginaries. Their search for educated, pious, and employed partner with similar views about marriage, society, and piety further emphasizes the link between the public and the private sphere, and the personal and the political. Despite
young people’s efforts to pursue individual and societal goals, generational fears allude to older generations pushing back against societal change.

Since decisions and actions regarding marriage are tightly connected to political, economic, and social institutions, marriage serves as a lens to understand popular debates and sentiments among Ammani youths. Thus, it offers insights into why Jordan has avoided the systemic change of recent “people’s revolutions” in the region.
Dedication

Dedicated to Allen Lee Villon Tuazon and Richard A. Lott II whose passion and genius for foreign languages and cultures continue to inspire those who knew them.
Acknowledgments

In Bahasa Melayu, there is a proverb: "Sedikit-sedikit lama-lama jadi bukit"; meaning, "Bit by bit, it will gradually become a hill.” Even though it is often said to remind children about the importance of continued savings and effort, this proverb aptly describes my dissertation journey. I am profoundly thankful to my advisor, Sabra Webber, for holding me to high standards of writing and analysis. I have been fortunate to have been the recipient of the time, effort, and support of a growing community of mentors, friends, and colleagues. Ila Nagar has devoted hours upon hours of keen observations and conversations throughout the academic year, for which I am thankful. I am grateful to my committee members, Morgan Liu and Johanna Sellman whose guidance and support have helped me see through the completion of this project. I am also appreciative of the learning opportunities afforded by Joseph Zeidan who have played a key role in nurturing my love of Arabic languages and cultures. Further acknowledgment goes to the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and the Mershon Center for International Security Studies for their financial support. Without their combined efforts and support, this quest for knowledge and understanding would have been much, much more difficult.

I owe a special thanks to the past and present students and the staff of the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures department for their years of help, support, and
camaraderie. Tara Najim, Della Winter, Maria Potter, and Christopher Hemmig are among those whose company and feedbacks have contributed to the success of this endeavor. There are those who continue to remain sources of strength and inspiration in spite of their passing: Richard Lott II and Allen Tuazon. Our many walkabouts and afternoon conversations will be sorely missed.

The number of those who contributed to this project grew along the way. In particular, M. Zaidan and M. Mohammad introduced me to many Jordanian literature, films, and music. No words can express my deep and sincere thanks for their generosity, support, patience, and friendship. A. Daoud and M. Alreem, and their families, opened their homes and treated me as an honored guest, if not as one of the family. S. Wray, J. Maggard, J. Moser, and A. Ghazal were great colleagues and companions during my stay in Amman. The directors, instructors, and staff members at the Qasid Institute endured my numerous questions about Jordanian literature and popular culture and made local resources more accessible to me. The Center for Arabic Study Abroad provided much-needed financial and local support. For all of these individuals and institutions, I am profoundly thankful.

Finally, I must acknowledge my family for tolerating years of absence in pursuit of higher education. Thank you, Paul, for supporting and keeping me well fed throughout this endeavor. My parents, siblings, cadre of adorable nieces and nephews, and extended relatives stand out for their Whatsapp conversations, Skype calls, voice messages, and digital pictures. Despite the constant dings of my phone, I am appreciative of being kept in the loop of familial activities and dramas.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Jordan: Not on the Brink but in Crisis”

“Jordan, Forever on the Brink”
-The Foreign Policy, 7 May 2012

“Jordan On The Brink—Muslim Brotherhood Mobilize For King Abdullah’s Overthrow”
-Reality in the News, 26 September 2012

“Jordan Is Living Dangerously as Syria Burns”
-The TIME Magazine, 16 January 2013

“Jordan on the Brink of Disaster”
-World Socialist Website, 29 January 2013

“Jordan: On the Brink between Censorship and Freedom
-Xindex, 10 June 2013

“Is Jordan’s 'Arab Spring' Over?”
-al-Monitor, 15 September 2013

After mass protests toppled the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and later forced the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the world followed the demonstrations taking root in major cities throughout the Arab world with great interest. Like many people, I became transfixed by the images on television, consuming coverage of youth demonstrations looking for insights into when, where, how, and why the next protest(s) would take place. International newspapers and online social media were
ablaze with predictions regarding the next regime change. Jordan too, in spite of its seemingly stable governance, came under scrutiny of many newspaper headlines and media coverage. Some headlines proclaimed the nation to be on the “brink” of revolution while others announced impending instability. A few even predicted the Hashemite royal family’s downfall. Therefore, when I arrived in Jordan during the summer of 2013, I was surprised to find little evidence of political unrest—other than the small Friday demonstrations near the al-Husseini Mosque downtown.

The young people I met seemed more interested in their personal transitions into adulthood than in political matters. By “young people,” I mean the “shabāb,” or youths between the ages of 18-35, who are at a certain life stage between childhood (dependence) and adulthood (independence). Other than some conversations about that summer’s local elections,¹ these young people talked about their efforts, goals, and expectations regarding marriage, as well as the recent or upcoming marriages of their peers. They related with popular television programs, music, and literature that share young people’s concerns about the lack of political, social, and economic opportunities. During my fieldwork conversations with young Ammanis, I observed when young people discuss their personal frustrations regarding their attempt to achieve a stable marriage—the first step in joining and affecting the adult world—their stories regularly implicate the state and its (mis)handling of contemporary challenges. However, their discontent and frustrations in regard to securing decent work opportunities and dignified lives are often

¹ Local elections took place on 27 August, 2013.
dismissed or not recognized as a critique of the system since they choose not to participate in state-sanctioned formal activities. Their agentival stance to not participate in local and national elections are judged as apathetic by those in power who do not recognize that it is they themselves who are being dismissed as corrupt (“In Jordan, Al-Hayat Addresses Youth Apathy in Political Process”; Greenfield; Hafferkamp 2013, 2014).

From their discussions relating to marriage, I realized that marriage concerns reveal a complex critique of the social, political and economic system within which young Ammanis are trying to find their place. These marriage discussions reveal that, to one degree or another, young, unmarried, people believe their state has let them down. These exchanges describe the lack of accessible and credible paths for youths to voice their political discontent and the lack of available opportunities for gainful employment despite long years of education and training. They likewise hinted at where young Ammanis look for their own sources of power and agency and how they negotiate unreliable social, political, and cultural terrains to attain their individual and societal objectives. Thus, their narratives reveal the linkages and fissures within the contemporary Jordanian society. This chapter locates their efforts and strategies to re-define what a state-society relationship could and should be as a process within local and temporal contexts. As a whole, my work delves into the everyday plight of these shabāb and investigates how they respond, imagine, and pursue possible solutions.
A Taste of Fieldwork

What happened with confrontation?
Ah, nothing but silence
That wonderful and huge silence…
Why isn’t silence, even for a while, seen as a rejection of reality and a rebellion against it? Why can’t silence be a fighter’s rest place in order for him to get his gear and to put on his brave face? Why can’t silence be a new method of resistance for identity? (Amayreh 61)

Good society does not depend on the government because the government needs to fix itself first. So it must start with the self and the family. Definitely not with the government—Ailya, a Palestinian-Jordanian university student in her early 20s

One late fall afternoon in 2013, I flagged a taxi to go meet my Palestinian-Jordanian friends. Once seated inside the taxi, I called my friend, “Ailya,” to give the driver detailed directions filled with local landmarks on how to get to her family’s apartment in a middle-class neighborhood in Eastern Amman, an area known for its large populations of both Iraqi and Syrian refugees. I discovered early on that having the driver speak to my friend or her brother ensured I would be delivered safely (and with less chance of being sexually propositioned) as an honored guest to the agreed location. The ways they greet, spoke, and give directions around known landmarks communicate their local ties, which, in turn, imposed a certain degree of implicit or explicit trust upon the driver and discouraged further inquiries and assumptions about my presumed
ethnicity and immorality as “Filipina” (see Chapter 2). After a “fluid” ten minutes\(^2\) of taxi ride, I arrived at the location to find my friend looking down, waving me inside her family’s apartment building.

After a quick thank you for safe delivery and paying the appropriate remuneration to the taxi driver, I walked into the building, past the hallways and the small group of children standing in front of Ailya’s uncle’s first-floor apartment, to head toward her family’s second-floor apartment. I smiled and greeted the children as I made my way up the stairs to her front door—where her youngest sister would be waiting, hoping to get the chance to play vocabulary games with me. When I walked in, I found her other sister, cousins, and friends all sitting in the living room, enjoying tea with cakes while discussing the Turkish television drama *Fatma* (shortened from *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?*) as it played on the screen. Ailya, a willowy, bespectacled university-aged student studying English literature, was seated next to “Muna,” a young, divorcée, in her mid-20s, who recently returned from the Gulf. Together with Muna’s younger sisters “Maysoon” and “Maysara,” they were talking and giggling about the actor, Engin Akyürek, who played Kerim.

While I was neither familiar with Turkish dramas, nor drawn to them before this trip to Amman, my Jordanian female friends and roommates soon had me watching *Fatma*. The drama tells the story of an innocent village girl whose life changes overnight when she runs into a group of drunken men celebrating the engagement of Selim

\(^2\) While it might be true that a ride to the neighborhood would take only 10 minutes without traffic, Amman is so congested that the trip regularly took 20-30 minutes.
Yaşaran, the only son of a wealthy and influential businessman. Three of the four young men—Erdoğan, Selim, and Vural—gang-rape Fatma, while their friend, Kerim, passes out with no recollection of his part (or lack thereof) in the event. When the town demands justice, Selim’s father pressures Kerim to marry her. Erdoğan and Selim, in the meantime, remain protected by their familial wealth and reputation. They continue to live as if nothing has happened while Vural becomes increasingly haunted by his guilt. Following these events, Fatma resolves to pursue legal justice.

In my friends’ case, television dramas invite reflection on sensitive issues such as corruption, honor, sex, gender, love, romance, and state-citizen relations. My friends enjoyed watching the lead female character’s transformation from traumatized victim to strong, self-possessed young woman. They were heartened when Kerim filed Fatma’s rape case in his bid to prove his love and to support her emotional recovery. They became frustrated when the Yaşarans—Selim’s parents—threatened Kerim and Fatma, paid off Mustafa (her former fiancé), and bribed the court witnesses. They became elated once again when media and grassroots movements supporting Fatma’s struggle challenged the discriminatory old Penal Code that absolved a rapist of his honor crime if he married his victim.

Discussions about program-induced topics often led to reflections and commentaries about their own social and political issues related to marriage and

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3 The audience soon discovers that Kerim is not among those who took part in the rape.
adulthood. For example, after watching Kerim’s support of Fatma and her life decisions, Ailya’s female relatives and friends talked about their own spousal and marital expectations. One of her friends talked about her desire to “fin[d] that person to be able to grow up with, to grow older, and to spend the rest of your life with.” Her cousin, on the other hand, hoped to find “someone religious and understanding. For me, personally, money is not the issue. I will be looking for someone from my social class because, first of all, you’re generally not going to meet someone not from your social class…. My family requests good family, education, religion, income, apartment, [and] a car.” Ailya paused to consider what she wanted to contribute to the discussion. She then said, “Good marriages help to establish good society. Good society does not depend on the government because the government needs to fix itself first. So it must start with the self and the family. Definitely not the government.”

By stating, “Good society does not depend on the government because the government needs to fix itself first,” Ailya was alluding to the corruption of state-society relationship from how it should be. Her imagination about the nature of such relationship is likely linked to religious narratives traditionally learned during childhood Islamic education about early Muslim believers who pledged allegiance, bay’ ā, to the Prophet Muhammad. In exchange for their allegiance and support, these early believers expected

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4 Lila Abu-Lughod (1995) explains that regardless of the embedded (“enlightening”) messages or lessons the writers and directors attempt to impart, the villagers she studied decode the events and the lives of the main characters of Hilmiyya Nights based on their lived experiences.
the caliph to secure stability and ensure their basic human needs. Since the current leadership is viewed as having deviated from its religio-political responsibilities, Ailya believes young people need to affect the Jordanian society through cultivating piety within themselves and their families. In her case, she trusts her parents to recommend a list of acceptable suitors from which she will make her own personal-political statement when the time draws near for her to graduate from the university and get married.

After the departure of a few guests, the five of us who remained at Ailya’s apartment continued our conversations about young people and marriage over dinner preparations. As I peeled the potatoes, cut the onions, and observed how to make chicken biryani from Muna (who learned to cook the dish from her maid when she lived with her then-husband in the Gulf), the often quiet Maysoon talked about how she was studying in the hopes of re-taking the university entrance exam. She wanted to continue college, attain respectable employment, and get married. She said, “Work and marriage are connected. Here, the guys need to be independent before they get married. After marriage, they get to make their own decisions and no longer need to depend on someone else. But these days, some girls work so they can help pay for the bulk of the engagement costs, except for the dress.” As Ailya added hot water to the rice, she talked about working as a secretary, while studying English, in order to save money and improve her marriage prospects. She confessed, “Shireen, here, women need to get

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5 Lawrence Rosen describes bay’a as an expression of wāṣṭa, since common people expect stability and security from the ruler in exchange for their allegiance (170).

6 Many of my Jordanian and Arab friends called me “Shireen,” or Sherine, which reminds them of the popular Egyptian singer Sherine Ahmed Abdel Wahhab.
married by a certain age. We need to get married so we can raise good children. There’s still hope. Good society might happen. But not through the government. There are no benefits to get involved with these kinds of things [politics]! “Isma’ min al-jihhah wa ṭala’ū min al-jihhat al-thāniya,” or, “In one ear and out the other,” she explained.

My friend then directed our conversation to a short story written by a Jordanian woman author, entitled, “Why Don’t You Open the Door?” which delved into the meanings of silence (Amayreh 59-63). In this story, the female main character, Salam, abruptly stops talking and expressing herself. Her silence takes the family by surprise as she had always been talkative and opinionated. Her mother exclaims, “Where is that talkativeness and chattery tongue? […] You were energetic, a ball of fire and flames. Where did your power disappear?” (60). However, Salam remains silent—but not because she is apathetic. Silence, Salam claims, can be purposefully employed as “a stand or an attitude, exactly as confrontation is” and as “a rejection of reality and a rebellion against it” (61). Ailya agreed, claiming, “I use silence when people are not accepting my opinions or what I do or what I want.” “Most Jordanians,” she continued, “are from Palestinian background and they are not interested in politics. They feel there is [sic] no benefits! They become silent and do what they want from life and what life wants from them underground.” After a few hours of cooking and talking, we sat down again on the living room floor to enjoy the chicken biryani and watch the film Home.

The term I frequently heard to express “good society” is “mujtama’ sāliḥ.” Young people often invoke the notion of “al- maṣlaḥa” or “al- maṣlaḥa al-‘āmma, which means the “common good” when talking about “good society.”
Alone (1990)—Muna’s favorite movie because the main character was “fighting to express himself, and that is why there is [sic] a lot of clashes.”

Through discussions of popular or expressive culture, otherwise-reserved young Ammanis felt comfortable talking about sensitive cultural topics such as the use of silence for social and political resistance against the inefficient and apathetic state. Popular entertainment such as literature, television dramas, and films that demonstrate contemporary social, political, and religious concerns—including marginalization and economic challenges in regard to romance and marriage—appeal to youth in Amman because these correspond to their own lived experiences and depict ways through which individuals can overcome hardships. Art affects reality, and vice versa, and becomes part of the brainstorming process through which young people imagine possible solutions.

Marriage as Political

The above-mentioned story, illustrating an afternoon in the life of an ethnographer, complicates certain assumptions about what constitutes the political. The story is semi-fictional in the sense that I brought together experiences and conversations derived from many afternoon conversations into one moment to spotlight young people’s imaginations about marriage and the family. In spite of this, the observations, activities, range of conversation topics, and commentaries are no less real. In fact, they delve into key issues—marriage, socio-economics, and good society—raised by university-aged young people in Jordan. The above-mentioned story touches on the connections young
people make between marriage and their individual and societal goals, influenced by how they perceive, respond to, and imagine their social, economic, and political system. Their social imaginaries about how state-society relationship should be are revealed by the ways they link their personal actions and decisions to societal improvements.

My definition of social imaginaries is built on Charles Taylor’s discussion of “Modern Social Imaginaries” (2002). It describes how people imagine their community should function, what they perceive as societal norms, what motivates them, and how they imagine their relationship with the state. Taylor believes “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” …[are] often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends” (106). His work points to the relevance of narratives and expressive cultures as crucial sources for studying where social, economic, and political conditions and relations currently stand.

The youths I spoke with in Jordan seem to believe their individual marital decisions to be connected to the establishment of “good society.” While marriage concerns may not always be political, the ways young people link marriage with good society in their narratives suggests the politicization of marriage. To elaborate, the concept of “good society” challenges the state and the community—each with their own respective roles—to live up to their responsibilities, and to communicate and collaborate with one another to ensure basic human needs, and to affirm the common good. Works
by Cornelius Castoriadis (1987; 1997) helped to shape my understanding of how young people’s relationship with other individuals, the society, the state, and the world and their responses to contemporary realities are shaped by their inherited (socialized) structure of system and sub-systems governing “what is worthwhile and what is not, what is fair and what is not” (“Cornelius Castoriadis On The Imaginary Institution of Society”). He wrote:

Every society up to now has attempted to give an answer to a few fundamental questions: who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want; what we desire; what are we lacking? Society must define its identity, its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and its desires…The role of an imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions….Society constitutes itself by producing a de facto answer to these questions in its life, in its activity. It is in the doing of each collectivity that the answer to these questions appears as an embodied meaning; this social doing allows itself to be understood only as a reply to the questions that it implicitly poses itself (cited in Liu 204).

Conversations about good society among my youth participants touched on how the dysfunction of the State (which in many ways disappoints them morally and practically) means young people cannot count on their state to meet their religio-political responsibilities and provide the basic needs of the community (the common good, or almāṣlaḥa). At the same time, they are skeptical about the effectiveness of direct confrontation with their state and leadership; lest, Jordan (like some of its Arab neighboring countries) dissolve into political and economic chaos. Their perception of the government’s inability to secure their common needs alongside their fear about societal breakdown affect their actions, strategies, and decisions regarding contracting
marriage, securing social adulthood, and establishing families in a manner supportive of the interests of the dominant elements of the society.

My dissertation focuses on the efforts of educated, middle-class young Ammanis (shabāb), aged 18-35, living in Amman, to negotiate and navigate cultural expectations, religious duties, personal identity, and financial independence in an effort to achieve individual and societal goals. Such goals include piety, citizenship, good society, social adulthood, and economic and political participation. Through analysis of fieldwork conversations and expressive cultures (literature, music, cartoons, graffiti, and films) dealing with the marriage processes, I uncover the economic, social, and political realities young people face (such as average monthly income between 300-500 JOD, monthly rent between 200-300 JOD, high domestic taxes, 24-33% youth unemployment rate, and increasing costs of living). I seek to understand not only how they go about affording marriage but also how they imagine marriage? How are young Ammanis responding to local socioeconomic conditions while negotiating their social imaginaries? What can discussions about marriage tell us about the nature of youth politics? And how do they envision the ideal Jordanian society? By concentrating on everyday actions and decisions wherein the personal is political, my work builds on the ethnographic and cultural studies

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8 In my conversations with my young Ammani participants, I was informed that those who make less than 300 JOD are considered lower class; those who make 300-500 JOD are middle-class; and those who make 500 or 600 JOD and above are upper class.

9 This figure is based on conversations with the local population and the website, “numbeo.”
of the Arab world inspired by Saba Mahmood (2005), Diane Singerman (1995), and Hanan Kholoussy (2010).

Based on my conversations with shabāb in Amman, I argue that marriage needs to be studied as part of politics, and as a site for youths’ socio-political agency. For many young Ammanis, marriage decisions seem to be influenced by their social imaginaries about good society. It involves individual and familial efforts to build reputation, gather scarce material and financial resources, and access good education. Since decisions and actions regarding marriage is tightly connected to various political, economic, and social institutions, marriage serves as a lens to understand popular debates and sentiments over contemporary realities and the state’s perceived dysfunction. To young people, marriage offers a peaceful, “underground” means to pursue social imaginaries in the face of perceived governmental lack of effort and support.

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10 Saba Mahmood contends the “ability to effect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific… [and that the] meaning and sense of agency…must emerge through an analysis of the particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity” (2005: 14-15). As such, women pietists’ claim and performance of bodily piety and virtuous behavior can be seen as a response to the marginalization of religious knowledge and as an attempt to affect the perceived secularization of the Egyptian society.

11 Avenues of Participation (Singerman 1995) describes everyday activities as potential ways through which marginalized peoples can access and enact power on the individual and societal level. Despite ever-increasing economic difficulties that have brought upon “waithood,” or delayed adulthood among average and lower-class Egyptian youths, young people and their families rally individual and familial efforts and connections to afford marriage and gain entry into adulthood and societal participation.

12 Hanan Kholoussy observed that, despite governmental efforts to regulate and promote the virtues of legal marriages, young people continued (and still continue) to perform unregistered (‘urfi) marriages (2010). Its continuing performance and popularity has enabled (‘urfi) marriages to maintain its quasi-legitimate status among average citizens, religious scholars, and experts.
Situating Amman

Our Majesty King Abdullah II in His Throne Speech at the opening of the 14th Parliament (2003) referred to “activating society's potential and involving all parties in its development, especially young people and women. The change which we aspire can only be achieved through mobilizing young people and listening to their views as they are the pillars of tomorrow and the substance of Change (The National Youth Strategy 3).

Jordan may have nothing but it has a refugee investment. When it wants greater population, it invites the Palestinians. When it wants money, it invites the Iraqis.—Māhir, a young Palestinian-Jordanian male in his early 20s

Despite plummeting optimism among young people, King Abdullah II has implemented limited changes to the political system since the Arab Spring/Revolution. He made it possible for twenty-seven seats (out of 150 seats) in the lower parliament to be elected through national voting. The seats reserved for women in the parliament were also increased in 2013 from 12 to 15 seats at the same time that the parliament seats were increased from 120 to 150 seats, thereby leaving women’s overall representation at 10%. In March 2016, the number of seats was reduced from 150 to 130. Additionally, an at-large voting system will be instituted for the upcoming October or November elections, whereby voters will have a number of votes equal to the number of seats allocated for
their district. Quotas reserving space for minorities Christians, Circassians, and women) in the parliament will remain (Ryan; JT).

Unfortunately, no further political reform to limit monarchical power and ensure full citizenship has taken place. As to why additional political changes have not taken place, Abdullah II commented, “[The] [i]nstitutions I had trusted were just not on board” (Goldberg). He believed, “It was the mukhabarat—the secret police—and the others, the old guard” who stood in the way of modernization, political liberalization, and anti-corruption measures—even though the King maintains final say in Parliament representation (Goldberg). If Abdullah II seeks to promote active involvement among young people, he will need to find ways to assure all Jordanians—tribalists, Transjordanians, and non-Transjordanians, men and women, elite and non-elite, rich and poor—that their beliefs and actions matter for the future growth of the nation.

Beyond politics, the state has implemented austerity economic measures in a continuing effort to secure external assistance from the International Monetary Fund and reduce national budget deficit. It has cut much of its long-standing economic security and subsidies (which involved decreasing fuel and bread subsidies and increasing the costs of electricity for local businesses) and raised taxes on imported products and cellular phone subscriptions. While these were necessary moves, local tribes and
Transjordanian communities saw these reforms and measures as signs of the
government’s abandonment of its historic social contract.13

The government has likewise continued to support educational reforms and
initiatives. Educational reforms launched by the government since the 1990s gave
promises of positive societal changes and improved quality of living. However, without
better technical training, teamwork building, critical thinking, and foreign language skills
in public and private classrooms, as well as a more relevant (and less corrupt) system for
national examination, young people will continue to struggle to achieve full-time
employment with decent wages and social benefits. Since marriage often signifies social
adulthood, and since marriages remains expensive to achieve or maintain, those who
cannot afford employment or financial independence remain under the protection of their
families, and thereby remain treated as inexperienced non-adults in the eyes of the larger
society.

Despite worsening pressures felt by youth who believe their government has little
regard for their difficulties to transition into adulthood, the Kingdom has maintained its
historic efforts to welcome immigration settlement. As Māhir suggests in the beginning
of this section, “Jordan may have nothing but it has a refugee investment.” The modern
history of Amman is built on continuous waves of immigration and refugee settlement.
A brief description of Jordan’s history of immigration will contextualize young people’s

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13 Through demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, they called for the royal family to intervene and address
problems such as youth unemployment, economic stagnation, cuts in subsidies, rising food and fuel prices,
increasing costs of living, and corruption.
frustrations and discontent with the present system of governance and explain past and present linkages, developing tensions, and the role of ethnicity in discussions and negotiations surrounding marriage, social imaginaries, individual rights and resource allocations.

Located in north-central Jordan, Amman was deserted until the late nineteenth century when diverse national and ethnic groups, starting with the Circassians and continuing most recently with the Syrians, came seeking refuge. The first wave of immigration began with the arrival of Circassian refugees to the Arab world in the late 1800s. The Circassian-Muslim population—fleeing from persecution under the Russian Empire—was dispatched into Syria and present-day Jordan to protect the region from the rebelling (indigenous) Bedouin population (Lewis). While many of these warrior-settlers later left, 150 Circassian farmers chose to remain in Amman, where they claimed and inhabited much of the city (Tobin). The Circassian-Muslims have been active political participants throughout various Jordanian regime changes. Alongside the indigenous Arab Christian tribes, the Circassians supported the leadership of Emir Abdullah I during the interwar and British mandate period. They similarly helped to pave the way for the Emirate when they successfully put down a mutiny in 1923 and when they supported the establishment of the "Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan," on 17 June 1946 (Tobin).

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14 They guarded the Hijaz Railway that travelled from Damascus to the holy city of Medina in Arabia, passing through the then-barren outpost of Amman.

15 Abdullah was the second son of Hussein bin Ali, Sharif and Emir of Mecca (1853/1854-1931).
Since then, the Jordanian Constitution has considered the Circassians citizens with full rights. Circassians dominated the royal guard, national army, and government structures until the 1940s. The Constitution assures their political presence and participation through a quota guaranteeing seats in the lower house of Parliament, and the upper house of the Jordanian National Assembly.

Figure 1: A photo of Amman, near the Roman theatre in 1900 (Bell)

While the descendants of these earlier settlers are more or less integrated within today’s Jordanian society and proudly consider themselves Circassian-Jordanians, members of this group still prefer to marry among themselves. When asked why, Dalia,
a recently-graduated student specializing in Architecture, stated, “I know that there are Jordanians [referring to native tribal Jordanians] who would not marry other than with Jordanians and that I don’t understand because the differences are faint but for us Circassian-Jordanians] there are real differences. As people, how we view each other and [our] families, we have our ways. It’s understandable for us.”

![Flag of Circassian and Chechen minority](image)

Figure 2: A flag combining the Circassian and Chechen flags with the Hashemite crown by Mohammad Husni Naghwai (“Circassian and Chechen Minority”)

The second wave of immigrants arrived with the settlement of refugees fleeing the Armenian Genocide during and after World War I. This genocide, believed to have

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16 When asked to elaborate, Dalia described a special dance Circassians perform at weddings. She also shared a unique, traditional marriage practice, which she considered romantic. The practice involves the potential groom taking the girl away from her family to his elder’s house; effectively, kidnapping her. She said, “My grandfather did that… It’s not really elopement. It is but it is also kidnapping. It’s both so it’s elopement-kidnapping.”
started on 24 April 1915, forced an estimated 1.5 million Armenians (majority Christians) to flee from the Ottoman Empire. “[U]nder the scorching sun, children, women and the elderly made their way to the deserts of Syria and Jordan. Some were killed on the way, others perished either from exhaustion or butchered at the hands of heartless soldiers” (Derderian). The ones who were lucky to survive this death march were offered protection and support by Sharif Hussein Bin Ali (father of King Abdullah I) and his sons, and the right to settle in areas such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.17

Within the last three decades, however, the Armenian population has dwindled as young Armenians leave for countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia for better education and career opportunities.

In spite of their dwindling population,18 the descendants of these earlier Armenian settlers continue to enjoy the protection of the Hashemite Kingdom. 9 out of 150 seats in the House of Representatives ("Majlis al-Nuwāb") are reserved for Christians (tribal Transjordanian and their allies). State relations often go through the Armenian Church as the latter represents Armenian-Jordanian cultural and political interests as a collective (Derderian-Aghajanian 38). Even though the Armenians of Jordan have largely become socially integrated within Jordanian society (many adopting the clothing, food, and language of their hosts), intermarriage with other Jordanians remains discouraged—even with other Jordanian-Christians—to avoid further erosion of their habits and customs.

17 The Arab-Israel war in 1948 (see page 28) added significantly to this existing Armenian population in Jordan (Derderian-Aghajanian).
18 In the absence of any official census, the Armenian cultural centers in Amman estimate their population around 4000-5000.
The next large wave of immigrants came from Palestine following the Arab–Israeli Wars. While more than one million Palestinians (including Muslims, Christians, Armenians, among others) entered Jordan after having been expelled from their homes in 1948, not all of these refugees have been fortunate in receiving or maintaining Jordanian citizenship. For example, Anis F. Kassim, an international law expert and practicing lawyer in Jordan, explained there were Palestinians who were issued Jordanian

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19 This antique photograph was restored by Kelvin J. Bown’s and is accessible through his online collection: reawakeningthepast.com. See http://www.reawakeningthepast.com/#foobox-1/18/philadelphia-amman-from-the-theatre-bw.jpg
citizenship (green-card holders) in 1948 but lived largely in the West Bank (Jamjoum).\textsuperscript{20} Then there were those who lived in Jordan but maintained strong affiliations with the West Bank (yellow-card holders). Following the 1988 announcement of Jordan’s disengagement from the West Bank, the green card holders found their citizenship status revoked overnight while the yellow card holders were able to keep their citizenship.\textsuperscript{21} Another group—the 400,000 Palestinians refugees who came from the occupied Gaza Strip in 1967—was never granted citizenship rights and, as such, remained unable to enjoy many of the social services (such as public education, health services, driver licenses, bank accounts, and land purchase) their brethren experienced. Whatever degree of citizenship they might enjoy, Palestinian-Jordanians widely believed (and still believe) that the system effectively bars them from enjoying full citizenship rights. Many believe they are denied high positions in the military, police, and civil services based on their status as Palestinians. While there are grassroots movements and diplomatic efforts arguing for the citizenship and improvements in social, economic, and political conditions for marginalized peoples in Jordan, it is generally believed that tribal (Bedouin or Jordanian-Jordanians), Circassian, and Armenian segments of the population\textsuperscript{22} will not allow full citizenship to be granted to the approximately 3.24 million Palestinian inhabitants (in 2009). To do so would risk the loss of their own preferential statuses in

\textsuperscript{20} In an interview for \textit{Jadaliyya}, Anis F. Kassim explained the different categories of citizenship among Palestinians living in Jordan (Jamjoum).

\textsuperscript{21} Jordan surrendered its claim to the West Bank on 31 July 1988. In doing so, King Hussein laid to rest his family’s long-time hope to expand the Hashemite Kingdom into Palestinian lands.

\textsuperscript{22} They are described intermittently in this work as Transjordanians.
the governing system. Adding to existing concerns among Palestinians regarding resource allocation and political, social, and employment opportunities is Jordan’s citizenship law, which offers citizenship only to children of Jordanian

After the Palestinians, the next wave of refugees arrived in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Operation Iraqi Freedom. Many of the Iraqi refugees who came to permanently settle in Amman and the surrounding areas belonged to the upper-middle class (including doctors, intellectuals, and teachers) and could afford to emigrate and begin life anew. They pursued employment opportunities in Jordan or in the Gulf countries, thus helping to improve regional economies through investments or remittances. Unfortunately, their economic participation also contributed to significant housing and living cost increases, which has since made it difficult for middle- or lower-class Jordanians to afford the costs of marriage and everyday living.

Unlike the economically privileged Iraqi refugees, the latest wave of refugee settlement came from predominantly lower and working classes. They came following the outbreak of Syrian uprising in March 2011. Over the next several years, approximately 600,000 refugees came to settle in urban areas and camps in Jordan. Despite the state’s attempts to “restrict their access to the labor market… [and] areas that

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23 This statistic is listed in a document by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS): http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/pop_2009-E.pdf
24 There were approximately 450,000-500,000 Iraqi residents in Jordan in 2007.
25 The cost of apartments in Amman went from 70,000JOD ($99,000) to 85,000JOD ($120,000) in the 1990s. The real estate market in Jordan increased from $93 million to nearly $381 million from 2000-2010, reflecting the investments by Jordan’s Iraqi residents. See “Amman’s Real Estate Market Booms with Iraqis Who Have Fled their Homeland for Good.” NU Journalism Abroad 2012. August 2, 2012. Web. See: https://northeasternuniversityjournalism2012.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/ammans-real-estate-market-booms-with-iraqi-investors-who-have-fled-their-homeland-for-good/
could enhance sustainability,” (Onishi) this latest group of refugees are showing signs of putting down roots. In “As Syrian Refugees Develop Roots, Jordan Grows Wary,” Norimitsu Onishi reports finding paved courtyards, decorative fixtures, and swimming pools in refugee-populated areas. Their continuing settlement is seen as contributing to the upward rise in costs for housing, everyday goods, and services (such as water delivery and garbage pickups) for Jordanian citizens and long-time residents in poor areas such as Mafraq and Zaatari, which are heavily populated by refugees.26 Many Palestinian-Jordanians I spoke with were also worried that the willingness of recent Syrian refugees (possessing little skills and education) to work menial labors for long hours, less pay, and in much harsher conditions will result in the loss of low-skilled and/or part-time employments for young Jordanians. The Syrian refugee population has already dominated the construction and retail industries and may soon dominate other low-skilled employment opportunities such as factory, craft, agriculture, forestry and fishing, in the future (Stave and Hillesund 8). If more and more industries become out-crowded by Syrian refugees, young Jordanians might find their already limited work opportunities substantially reduced. Furthermore, the scarce resources and opportunities available among Syrian refugees correspondingly mean that Jordanian families need to be especially vigilant against romantic entanglements between Syrian males and their

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daughters, lest their future grandchildren be born without Jordanian citizenship and social services. On the other hand, some Jordanian young males may consider this a welcome opportunity for negotiating affordable marriages (Abdih and Geginat; Doucet).

Depending on their historic circumstances, local alliances, and perceived contributions, it is unsurprising that members of the diverse communities living in Jordan largely identify themselves as, “Palestinians,” or “Jordanian-Jordanians,” rather than, “Jordanians.” Locating youth marital practices within these local and temporal contexts helps to reveal sharp divisions and struggles within Jordanian society. It also helps to explain the contemporary realities shaping youths’ awareness and understanding of why nationality, economics, and politics plays strongly into youths’ negotiations and decisions to marry and attain their social imaginaries.

Structure of the Dissertation

The processes of negotiating adulthood, citizenship, piety, and political participation are closely intertwined with marriage. In the following chapters, I will offer glimpses into the social, economic, and political factors involved in the marital process and examine some of its prominent issues. Each chapter provides different glimpses into how marriage issues tie into larger socio-economic debates and anxieties about youths’ ethnic and national identities, religious and societal roles, moral behaviors, and political participation.
Chapter 2 discusses regional factors and conditions including visual assessment of acceptability, and how they influenced my chosen field methodologies as a young woman traveler-scholar pursuing research in Amman, Jordan. I learned that I needed to establish an acceptable, respectable position within local middle class communities to commence field research on my chosen subject—learning what Ammani youth have to say about marriage. Navigating the “betwixt and between” places to facilitate conversations with local participants also enable me to better understand the social, ethnic, economic, geographical, and cultural divisions that make up Amman’s cultural terrain.

Chapter 3 explores the sociopolitical contexts and understandings of ṭāṣṭa (or making use of connections, clout, and patronage to facilitate individual or group interests) and how these influence youths’ ideas on citizenship, nationality, good governance, and social justice. Conversational narratives are intertwined with expressive and popular cultures to offer further insights into young Jordanian citizens’ and residents’ lived experiences with ṭāṣṭa and everyday politics. This multi-dimensional approach is especially helpful to understand the conditions that enable the link between marriage and politics, especially when dealing with sensitive issues in countries where freedom of speech can lead to accusations of speech “crimes”.

Chapter 4 analyzes the everyday lives, concerns, and worries of youths as they work to afford marriage. This section includes field conversations with young Ammanis about prevailing social and economic challenges, generally believed to be delaying or preventing youth from marrying. It examines young people’s individual and collective
efforts, agency, and power to gather the substantial economic and material resources required to afford marriage. Their serious efforts to learn how they can work within or around a frustrating, broken, system reveal youths’ active efforts to pursue marriage and enact change in Jordan.

Chapter 5 examines how youths’ need for and access to higher education has contributed to rising fears about immorality and societal dissolution. It begins by exploring youths’ access to formal and informal means of education perceived as contributing to transgressive practices within the society. Youths’ exposure to people of the opposite gender and a range of social classes and cultures, as well as to Western notions of independence, citizenship, and sexual and romantic behaviors, are seen by older generations as potentially threatening ethnic and national identities, normative moral behaviors, and local politics. The chapter concludes by examining suggested courses for action to maintain the stability of the family that is “the nucleus of society, which is the basic building block for the construction of our nation, a hotbed of ideology and values, and the site of its identity, civilization, cultural and moral construction” (Jam’iyyat al-‘Afaf al-Khayriyyah).

Overall, this dissertation is an exploration of how people interpret and adapt ideas and cultural signifiers from within and outside to find the expressive and practical “weapons” to negotiate long-term material, political, and social changes to attain their individual and societal goals. It delves into how marriage serves as an indicator of larger societal discontents with the government and the latter’s perceived inability to satisfy the
common (basic) needs of its diverse groups of citizens and residents. Understanding the social, economic, and political dimensions of marriage through personal and popular narratives may help to explain why—despite tough socioeconomic challenges—young people in Jordan do not employ revolutionary movements to demand change.
Chapter 2: Navigating the Strange-Familiar in Jordanian Society

The time when we could tolerate accounts presenting us the native as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being are gone...This picture is false, and like many other falsehoods, it has been killed by Science (Bronislaw Malinowski, quoted in Pratt 1986: 29).

[T]he formal ethnography is the one that counts as professional capital and as an authoritative representation; the personal narratives are often deemed self-indulgent, trivial, or theoretical in some ways. But despite such “disciplining,” they have kept appearing... [as] a conventional component of ethnographies. It turns up almost invariably in introductions or first chapters, where opening narratives commonly recount the writer’s arrival at the field site, for instance, the initial reception by the inhabitants, the slow, agonizing process of learning the language and overcoming rejection, the anguish and loss at leaving. Though they exist only in the margins...they play the crucial role of anchoring that description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork (Pratt 1986: 31-32).

In “Fieldwork in Common Places,” Mary Louise Pratt (1986) confronts Bronislaw Malinowski’s commendation of ethnography as a science distinct from travel-writing. She notes anthropologists and ethnographers like Malinowski oftentimes privilege their work over those by traveler-writers (or “mere travelers”) despite the fact that boundaries between the two tend to blur. Both groups still include personal experiences describing how they come to establish a viable position within the local communities upon arrival in order to return “home” with an authoritative narrative. For my part, I do not necessarily consider laying claim to authority to be a negative undertaking as my fieldwork occupies
only a part of my representation of the Ammani youth scene/situation. In addition to fieldwork, I listen to and learn about what Ammani youth have to say about marriage across various forms of media and expressive cultures (films, visual art, music, and literature) and offer personal observations and commentaries that blend objective and subjective, documentary and literary, and real and imaginary to tell their stories. By turning to these diverse forms of popular narratives, contemporary media, and literary genres to listen to youth’s voices, I hope to get a better understanding of the life situation of young Ammanis and offer readers a better “feel” for the cultural norms and boundaries. I also hope to offer an understanding of the strange and the familiar, and the linkages and conflicts that affect the strategies and decisions youth make to attain their individual and societal objectives.

This chapter tells my arrival story. It describes my (unexpected) journey to Jordan and my cautious exploration and navigation of the strange-familiar cultural system. It exposes the social, economic, and political conditions contributing to the development of my travel-knowledge, eventually leading to the point where I could employ my chosen methodology and begin my ethnographic research. My arrival story involves careful consideration of how my status as presumed Filipina traveler-wanderer, my Muslimness, and my knowledge of the languages and cultures of the contemporary Arab peoples could affect how Jordanians related to me. My roles and functions as traveler-wanderer initially resemble those of the wanderer-tricksters from which I sought ideas about how to navigate my role of being “betwixt and between” multiple boundaries.
within the Jordanian society. Once I discovered how to work within the societal system, I was able to begin working on my project. This enabled me to proceed to listen to, tell, and interpret the affective, social, political, and economic dimensions of marriage and marital process to understand what was going on among Ammani youth during my year-long research and studies.

Wandering the Strange-Familiar Path

Say: "Travel through the earth and see how Allah originated creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things—The Qur’an Translation 29:20 (Ali)

It is wise for those who go far from home to record everything they see and hear, since they may find some knowledge and value in it. There is no better way of obtaining useful information than by mixing with people. According to a wise saying of the ancients: “The eye never tires from seeing, nor the ear from hearing” (aṣ-Ṣaffār, Muḥammad, and Susan G. Miller 77)²⁷

By the time I traveled to Jordan in 2013, I had already spent approximately one and a half years living and studying in the Middle East. My almost decade-long relationship and adventures with the people living in the Arab World began in Sana’a, Yemen, in 2007, when I received the Critical Languages Scholarship (CLS). CLS was the means but not the end to my budding relationship with the region and its people. My motivation began much earlier while growing up in Malaysia. During my youth, I heard

²⁷ I consider the riḥla (travel) literature written by Muhammad aṣ-Ṣaffār (died in 1881) to be part of my literary isnād (chain of transmission or genealogy). aṣ-Ṣaffār, who was a secretary to the Moroccan ambassador, ‘Abd al-Qādir Ash‘āsh, during a fifty-day diplomatic mission (1845-46) to France, was tasked with learning about French military, commercial, and technological advances.
about the Arab-Hadramis (Yemenis from the Hadramawt region) and their long history of commercial contact (likely, spices and incense) with, and diaspora into, the Malay world—most probably dating back to the 18th century (Ho 2006). Due to this contact, the Hadrami colloquial language contains Malay loanwords such as *seterika/(i)*strīkah (iron), *kemeja/kmejih* (shirt), *kerupuk/krūbū* (crackers), *sepatu/sfattū* (shoes), and *terus/trūs* (direct, straightaway) (al-Saqqaf). I had hoped to find traces of Malay presence in existing folktales in Hadramawt. Unfortunately, other than seeing facial structures and coloring that reminded me, to a certain extent, of the physical characteristics of the Malay people, my dream to study the expressive products of historical intercultural exchanges between the two groups remained unrealized. Due to stringent travel restrictions, I was bound to follow the policies and guidelines established by CLS, the American Institute for Yemeni Studies, and the U.S. Department of State, which meant that I could only travel on program-approved trips.

After Yemen, traces of ancestral familial wanderings inspired me to travel to Cairo, Egypt. I remember having played with a bowl of strange coins of different weights, colors, and sizes during my childhood in Malaysia. According to my grandmother, they mostly came from the travels, pilgrimages, and/or studies abroad to neighboring and Islamic lands—including Egypt—of various members of her immediate and extended family. These coins inspired my curiosity about the world, and so I

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28 At that time, the Malay world consisted of the Malay Peninsula, east Sumatra, Singapore, the Riau Archipelago, and southwestern Borneo.

29 I was similarly inspired by travel narratives of earlier Muslims. Foundational texts for the *riḥla* genre are *Tuhfat an-Nuẓẓār fī Gharāʾ ib al-Amṣār waʾAjāʾ ib al-Asfār* (“A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the
applied to study Modern Standard Arabic and Arabic Literature through the Center for
Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) I in Cairo during my master’s studies in Near Eastern
Languages and Cultures at The Ohio State University. This program offered an
opportunity not only for the chance to pursue intensive Arabic study abroad, but also for
the chance to experience a place that lives on in the histories and imaginations of my
family.

My arrival to the Egyptian capital city, however, introduced new personal feelings
of confusion and dislocation. Despite my earlier travel to Yemen, I was still not used to
seeing so many Muslim women wearing the veil, or the hijab, when interacting in public.
I had spent the bulk of my childhood in Malaysia until my father’s pursuit of doctoral
education temporarily relocated the family to Columbus, Ohio, in 1989. At that point in
time, Malay-Muslim women wore knee-length or longer skirts, trousers with short or
long-sleeved shirts, as well as jeans with T-shirts, with little demonstration of visible,
external attachments to popular signs and symbols of Islam. (It was not until my visit home after the Asian Economic Crisis of 1995 that I first noticed the tudung, or the veil,
becoming increasingly popular among the general population.30) Thus, when I traveled and studied in Cairo in 2008-2009, I had not quite expected my lack of veiling and my
dark-colored skin to draw me into myriad complications. Without wearing the veil,

Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling”) and Riḥlat Ibn Battūta (“Journey of Ibn Battuta”).
Other important works in the Arabic and Islamic literary travel traditions (including the Persian safarnāmeh
and Malay Kisah Pelayaran) were written by Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣaffār, Rifā‘ah al-Ṭahṭāwī, Ḥajj Sayyah,
Nasir-i Khusraw, and Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munṣī (aṣ-Saffār, Muḥāmmād, Haddūn G. Miller 1992; al-
Ṭahṭāwī 1839; yy Hĳj nd ‘Aff Alhboldī 1984; Weeney 2005).

30 Previously, it was worn by a minority of older women to symbolize their pious devotion and/or status as
hajjah for having completed the pilgrimage to Mecca.
Egyptians generally associated my features and coloring as Filipina-Christian. Since Filipina-Christian women are perceived to be from the poor, working class, I enjoyed cheap, low prices on merchandise and cab fares but was rarely able to obtain services at local and international restaurants and hotels. Fortunately, my Egyptian language instructor was able to vouch for my character and credentials. In so doing, she negotiated a better social position for me as a traveling scholar within the local communities. These introductions facilitated my interaction and communication with young Cairenes, which then led to a burgeoning academic interest in Arab youth cultures and a deeper appreciation of various forms of contemporary media, literary genres, and visual arts as vital forms of communication under the leadership of Hosni Mobarak. By the end of my year-long study through CASA I, the relationships I had made outweighed constant fear and anxiety caused by daily verbal and physical sexual harassments on the streets, I felt I had found my place within the cosmopolitan Cairene society.

I had planned to travel back to Cairo in the summer of 2013\(^\text{31}\) but the overthrow of President Morsi led to the discontinuation of my research into Cairene youths’ temporary (‘\textit{urfi}’) marital practices. The University was no longer supporting study abroad or research fellowships to Egypt. I thought about the ironic games fate plays when it scheduled my connecting flight via Cairo for my unexpected re-route to another part of the Arab world: Jordan. I remembered experiencing a sense of the familiar as I

\(^{31}\)I had planned to continue my earlier research on youths’ ‘\textit{urfi}’ (unregistered) marital practices. What initially began as a class assignment for the CASA I program became the topic of my M.A. thesis, entitled, \textit{The Social (Re)construction of `Urﬁ Marriage} (2010).
watched the “line” for boarding grows sideways. I remembered the budding uncertainty, excitement, and anxieties brought forth by the growing signs of the strange as I heard bits and pieces of simultaneous conversations in what I assumed to be Jordanian and Levantine Arabic languages at the transitory airport terminal, and then on the plane as I waited to depart and begin anew the ritual of finding my place within another local community and conducting ethnographic research in Amman, Jordan.

“Betwixt and Between” the Hills, Stairs, and the Communities of Amman

[S]he has neither the history of Damascus nor the culture of Baghdad, she has not the mosques of Cairo nor the skyscrapers of Riyadh.

What she does have though is a million steps. The daughter of mountains can not but have a million steps, squiggling endlessly from mountain to mountain, a never ending bundle of lines that start at the center and edge outwards like veins extruding out a throbbing heart, giving life to the well-toned arms, the tattered legs, the dirty hair, and the jeweled limbs.

Amman. The city of stairs.

How I love her (al-ASSI)

With previous experiences from Egypt and Yemen in mind, I had expected to experience some degree of inaccessibility, tension, and/or struggle during initial encounters and conversations with the local population in Jordan. However, upon my arrival to Jordan, I found Amman itself to be a city not easily accessible. Originally built on seven hills, the city has two distinct parts: the conservative Eastern Amman and the
more liberal and contemporary Western Amman. Eastern Amman connects to the old commercial center (downtown) by long, and sometimes poorly maintained, stone stairs decorated by charming wall art and graffiti. These lead down to older mosques, aswāq (the plural form of souq or sūq), coffeehouses, and Roman Theater, or up to the old Citadel with its ancient Roman ruins. Travel between the eastern and western parts of the city requires passage through ever-widening streets and over the suspended, modern Abdoun Bridge that marks the entrance into Western Amman: an area housing Amman's luxurious contemporary buildings, residential districts, cafes, bars, malls, art galleries, and Jordan’s new elite. For those who cannot afford to own cars, public transportation can become rather expensive when traveling at night by taxis, or when traveling into areas not covered by bus routes.32 33 These geographical, social, fiscal and material markers affect the ways community and national bonds are strengthened or weakened, cultivated or discouraged, in the capital city.

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32 Though rumors of the government’s plan to build a three-line metro system (red, green, and yellow) within the city have circulated for years, this plan has not materialized (Petra; “Amman light rail design”). For now, Amman remains without operable railway or metro system to connect both sides of the city.

33 While crossing the Abdoun Bridge one day, I remarked to Ailya’s father (Ailya is first mentioned in “A Taste of Fieldwork” in Chapter 1) that I should have perhaps brought my passport since the physical environment and demography of the two areas are vastly different. The father laughed at my joke and nodded in acknowledgement.
Figure 4: The colorful stairs near downtown Amman

Figure 5: Border Crossing between Eastern and Western Amman through the Abdoun Bridge (Shahin)
With little prior knowledge about Amman and its people, I asked the staff members at the Qasid Institute for assistance in finding reasonable and accessible housing in a respectable neighborhood. After days of apartment hunting, I found an apartment located in I-Weibdeh, near the Masjid Mālik ʿAbdullah (Mosque of Sultan Abdullah) and the Kanīse Kuptiyye (Coptic Church). I decided to rent the apartment with two other female American graduate students because of its well-known location and vibrant diverse communities. I knew most taxi drivers would know the location of the mosque since it is the televised site for Friday prayers. The apartment was also located at the intersection of middle and working-class communities. Walking downhill from the mosque and the quiet street inhabited by middle and upper-middle class Jordanians would lead to the bustling site of the Friday market (Souq Abdali), which was largely frequented by immigrants and the working classes. Walking away from the mosque and church—past the modern stone villas adorned with evergreens and flowering shrubs, the small shops, grocers, boutiques, patisseries, and restaurants—I would arrive at the stretch of cafés, galleries, and the sitting park of Duwār Bārīs (Paris Circle). This sitting park is a site largely frequented by local artists, expatriates, as well as Jordanian and foreign students. The proximity of my apartment building to these nearby landmarks and semi-public venues would facilitate meetings and conversations with male and female participants from various religious communities and social classes. The central location
and thriving communities would enable greater opportunities for interactions and afford a more socially conscious perspective.

Figure 6: The Masjid Mālik ‘Abdullah and the Kanīse Kuptiyye (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan)
Figure 7: A quiet neighborhood street near the Kanīse Kuptiyye

Figure 8: The bustling Souq Abdali ("Abdali Souq")
In spite of these careful preparations, I was concerned about the various flavors of assumptions and biases I would find in Amman. I experienced my first taste of being a “matter out of place”\textsuperscript{35} during an ordinarily hot Thursday afternoon at one of the modern malls (City Mall) in Western Amman. I remember savoring the lingering taste of the Tex-Mex lunch I had just shared with another female American graduate student as I walked about the mall. I remember being fascinated by the Arab and non-Arab designer brands worn by the mostly fair-skinned mannequins, and appreciative of the myriad kaleidoscopic and subdued colors and designs worn by well-dressed young men and women in various degrees of traditional and contemporary attire. I remember these young men and women milling about, reserved or shouting, composed or laughing, in gender-segregated or mixed groups. Everything was going well until I was ordered to stop upon entering a European-brand store. Never having been denied entry into a store before (even in Cairo), I paused thinking maybe there was something wrong with the metal detector or the front entrance. Instead, the manager told me, “I do not want your

\textsuperscript{34} These are lines from the poem, “Devilishness,” published in \textit{Rain Inside} (Nasrallah 2009: 4).

\textsuperscript{35} In \textit{Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo} (1978), Mary Douglas asserts that dirt, when viewed as a “matter out of place,” implies the transgression of an established system of order (35).
kind in this store. Your kind causes trouble. I want to stop trouble.”

As the manager continued to insinuate the strong likelihood of theft by women from the Philippines, my friend assured him that I was American and could show my passport. Even with material evidence to challenge my presumed ethnic immorality, the manager still confined me to the front area of the store. That was my first—but not my last—encounter with local biases and stereotypes during the academic year.

Several weeks after that incident, I was to be denied hospitality—this time, at a Jordanian home. I remember sitting there being ignored by my friends’ Jordanian landlord and his family while they conversed with my friends at length about their experience in Jordan. My presence was not acknowledged until, much later, when the matriarch finally looked at me and dismissed me to her family as “like that” while pointing to her Sri Lankan maid—someone she had just berated and humiliated in front of guests for not properly mopping a thin trail of liquid on the floor.

When I mentioned the maltreatment and rude introduction during a lunch conversation with one of my English-speaking Jordanian friends some days later, the latter sympathized that I had many negatives going against me as “Filipina.” The stereotypes of domestic workers in Amman were humorously critiqued by the former Jordanian duo, Kashkash, composed of Atef Malhas and Lama Zakharia, in their musical parody of Miley Cyrus’ “Wrecking

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36 As this was in an expensive European brand-name store, the manager spoke in halting English.
37 “Zayy hadhi,” literally meaning, “like this,” is translated to mean, “like that,” since the matriarch was pointing simultaneously to the young female domestic worker in the room.
Ball,” entitled, “Baṭal ‘Indī Ṣawṭ” (or “I Don’t Have A Voice”). Garbed in a fake fur costume, Zakharia sang about the “light hands,” ignorance, and laziness (“You no listen no matter what happens”) of her maid, “Monica,” in the local Arabizi (the mixing of English with the Jordanian colloquial language).

Like Monica, I became an “Other” due to stereotypes about gender, ethnicity/race, and class. My assumed ethnic features broadcasted signs of financial desperation—a Filipina who left poor living conditions in her homeland and risked the loss of familial protection to perform menial (disreputable) tasks in Amman. I was considered uneducated since many immigrant women communicate in halting Arabic. I was judged immoral and criminal because Filipinas are commonly thought to engage in sexual affairs and criminal activities during their day off, or while working in Jordanian households, hotels, and salons (the last two, especially, were considered businesses of questionable reputation). Unlike my previous experiences in the Arab World, there was no local mediation to help negotiate my reputation and facilitate my integration into the conservative and reserved Ammani-Jordanian society—a place that did not, until recently, suffer many foreigners. For the first time, I truly felt like a “matter out of place.”

38 “Kashkash” disbanded in 2014. Its singer, Lama Zakharia has since performed with “Tarab 3al 7atab” and “Dozan Awtar,” among others. She performed with “Tarab 3al 7atab” in the popular television show, Arabs Got Talent, on February 21, 2015 and in her own musical comedic television series, Fa Sol Ya, for Ramadan 2014.
39 A copy of the lyric and its translation can be found in the Appendix A and B.
40 Unlike Cairo, Amman does not have an established history as educational and commercial hub for foreigners.
41 I was told that Filipinos first entered Jordan when they accompanied returning Palestinians expelled from Kuwait in the 1990s. The Filipina women I had known and spoken with were often bilingual or trilingual.
Re-Negotiating Marginality, Respectability and Credibility

I became someone who violates cultural norms, for better or for worse. The combination of my gender, skin color, external features, lack of visible symbols of Muslim piety, presumed ethnicity, and perceived immorality broadcasted signs of difference among Jordanians who consider family, clan and tribal, ethnic, and religious identities as linked to honor, morality, credibility, and identity. The societal notions and stereotypes linked to gender, ethnicity/race, and class I appeared to physically embody presented unexpected difficulties for obtaining viable qualitative data, developing connections with various communities, and studying the socio-political natures of everyday life of Jordanian youth in Amman. Before I could pursue viable fieldwork research, I needed to discover how to justify my presence in terms that would be respectable, acceptable, and relatable with the host population.

Having previously studied works discussing the roles, functions, and experiences of “out of place” wanderer-tricksters and traveler-ethnographers, these became my touchstones for understanding and re-defining the situation in which I found myself as “matter out of place” in the Jordanian society. Oftentimes, “tricksters,” like travelers, are portrayed as moving across social boundaries and in the process helping audiences re-see

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42 Many Sri Lankan, Indonesian, and Indian maids suffer from similar maltreatment and stereotypes in Amman, Jordan.
their own practices. In “Juha’s Sleeve,” a trickster from Arab folktales named Juha (or Goha), was turned away from a banquet due to his humble attire. After changing into more costly attire and arriving on his saddled mule to the banquet, he was greeted warmly by the servants and seated near the guests of honor. While enjoying the festivity, Juha’s sleeve slipped down into the food. To the consternation of the man seated next to him, however, Juha refused to adjust his sleeve. Instead, he told his sleeve to eat its fill since it was the one welcomed to attend the banquet. Through discord and impropriety, Juha, like other trickster characters, “called into question fundamental assumptions about the way the world is organized, and reveal the possibility of transforming them” (cited in Aigbedion 2). His decision to flout social convention was not due to lack of knowledge; on the contrary, it was to bring attention to prevailing customs practiced by normative culture and how such customs could help traveler-wanderers better position themselves within the host society. That is to say, Juha’s performance demonstrated how a change in my manner of dress and social behaviors, among other things, could help refine (and re-define) my embodied gender, ethnicity, and class, and enable my welcome in Jordanian department stores and middle class homes.

In “A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered,” Barbara Babcock-Abrahams called attention to personality traits, behaviors, and functions common among traveler-tricksters who occupy and move between cultures. The author asserts tricksters typically possess the following characteristics (159):
• “exhibit an independence from and an ignoring of temporal and spatial boundaries;”
• “frequently exhibit some mental and/or physical abnormality, especially exaggerated sexual characteristics;
• “have an ability to disperse and to disguise themselves and a tendency to be multiform and ambiguous”
• “be ambiguously situated between…good and evil”
• “are often ascribed to roles…in which an individual normally has privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code.”

The trickster defies simplistic comprehension and categorization. S/he is often mythified and vilified for being neither completely evil, nor completely good, and for being neither completely wrong, nor completely right. As a traveler-ethnographer, I appear to embody the above-mentioned five myth-ified characteristics in the eyes of Ammanis in some form or another: overly sexual, multiform, boundary-crosser, immoral, and lack of immediate social accountability. I would remain the “expression of ambiguity and paradox, of a confusion of all customary categories” unless I could alter or confound local interpretations of my character and defend my place within the existing cultural system (160). So what could I do to better position myself within Jordanian society?

I turned to the work of Homa Hoodfar, who conducted field research on the economic and material strategies of working-class households in Cairo, for guidance on how to establish social respectability and academic credibility as a marginal traveler-ethnographer. Hoodfar also struggled to find the answers to the following questions and sought accessible and culturally-appropriate methodology to conduct ethnography as from the margins of society: How can I be accepted by local citizens? How should I pursue integration within the society? And with what local processes should I familiarize
and establish contact? (1997: 22-32). She deliberated whether her Iranian nationality could affect her field research and relocation to Egypt, several years after the Iranian revolution called for popular opposition to western intervention in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Hoodfar thought about how she should make connections and establish reciprocity. Though many of these worries were later allayed by the help of host members within the society who had taken her under their wings and facilitated local introductions, relations, reputation management, and cultural immersion, her admittance about the challenges she needed to overcome to make herself familiar and accessible to Egyptians in a positive way influenced my own approach prior to beginning fieldwork.

After enrolling in courses on advanced Arabic literature, Jordanian colloquial Arabic, and local culture offered through the CASA II program, I actively engaged in conversations about cultural experiences with the instructors, the staff members, fellow CASA students (mostly Caucasian-Americans), and Qasid students.\textsuperscript{43,44} Several of the female Caucasian-American students mentioned Jordanians have labeled them “Rūsī” (a local euphemism for call girls) and subsequently propositioned them when they traveled unchaperoned at nights. Dark-skinned (non-American) Asian and Southeast-Asian male students complained about being called “Hindī,” a charged adjective locally implying ignorance or unintelligence.\textsuperscript{45} When I asked Jordanians about the living experiences of

\textsuperscript{43} CASA II is similar to CASA I, except it is meant for graduate students intent on pursuing individual studies and research on their chosen academic interests.

\textsuperscript{44} CASA 2013-14 relocated to Amman, Jordan due to concerns regarding political instability and safety after the overthrow of Morsi. There, it was hosted by the Qasid Institute.

\textsuperscript{45} I had attempted to engage in conversations with Filipina young women working in various salons and homes in East and West Amman as well. Of the Filipinas with whom I had tried to strike conversations,
the non-Arab immigrant population, many of the university-aged students and instructors repeated stereotypes with which I had already been acquainted: Filipinos are illiterate, uneducated, immoral, and unproductive. Several Jordanians replied with uncomfortable laughter and comments such as “that’s normal,” and “why talk about it.” Seeing my perplexity in response to these comments, one of the language instructors explained: many Jordanians remain unaware of their maltreatment and biases toward foreign immigrants and domestic workers until they are forced to relocate abroad (usually to Gulf countries). He admitted that he only came to recognize existing prejudices against the immigrant populations (predominantly Asian, Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian) after having lived and worked in Saudi Arabia.

Since my attempts to discover any hints regarding how to overcome negative intercultural contacts from Jordanian and non-Jordanian residents were more or less unfruitful, I turned to what I had learned about Arab culture and their love for adab to help complicate my assumed character and facilitate communication. Adab, which now means “literature,” had meant, in the past, “proper discrimination of correct order, behavior, and taste” (Ensel 180). It was comprised of good manners, behaviors, refinement, morals, and education and “presuppose[d] that there can be no true erudition without the polished character that goes with it” (cited in Kennedy 56). Since I suffered from multiple discriminations based on intertwining stereotypes of gender, ethnicity/race, only “Maria” revealed some personal information about herself. Others were uncertain as to how to relate with me—a seeming Filipina who spoke no Tagalog—and expressed shyness or hesitance about their living conditions for fear of being overheard and of losing their employment.
and class (or intersectionality), I decided to tap into this historical and cultural notions of literacy by sharing my “social résumé,” or my work, educational, and familial background, during conversations with Jordanians.46

I decided to put my social résumé to test at a dinner hosted by a Palestinian-Jordanian family for American students. I remember the first 15 minutes passing ever so slowly as the host family addressed and conversed with the rest of the Caucasian-American students, while somehow bypassing my presence (whether consciously or subconsciously) within the group. After mentally debating about the (in)appropriateness of injecting myself into the group conversation, I decided to dive in and share my own teaching experiences, previous studies, and interests in Arabic literature when the conversational topic switched to educational experience and interests. I talked about my previous courses in pre-Islamic poetry and modern literature and mentioned writers such as Taha Hussein, Naguib Mahfouz, and Yusuf Idris. I mentioned my passion for teaching Arab cultures and Modern Standard Arabic to undergraduate students. I shared my hope about studying contemporary Arab youth and expressive cultures, including works composed by Jordanian writers and performers.

The parents seemed surprised to hear about my academic interests and background. We talked about Taha Husayn’s semi-autobiography, al-Ayyām (2007),

46 For texts on intersectionality, or the interactions of race, gender, and class, I recommend initial readings of “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Application, and Praxis” and “Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory” (Crenshaw 1989; Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall 2013; Walby, Sylvia, Jo Armstrong, and Sofia Strid 2012).
after which the father responded by mentioning a written work by Abd al-Rahman Munif, a deceased Jordanian author. When he asked why I would travel so far and for so long without my family, I recited the popular hadith, 'Seek knowledge even as far as China,' and described my individual and familial history relating to the pursuit of knowledge. My parents, for example, had studied in the United States and one of my cousins had studied at al-Azhar, Egypt. Furthermore, Malaysia enjoyed long-established historical relations with Yemen; meaning, there are Malaysians who can claim Yemeni ancestry. Upon hearing this information, the family appeared to become more relaxed as they could now locate me within the annals of Arab collective memory, however, tenuous my claim to honor may be.

The decision to share my *social résumé* and converse about literature, religion, and culture, combined with another performance (wearing respectful [western] business casual attire), represented my attempt to perform literacy, honor, morality, and good manners. I employed the inclusive notion of *adab* not only to communicate my educational interests and background but also to convey respect and affinity with the host communities and cultures. In so doing, I had hoped to upset stereotypical notions of illiterate, dishonorable, and immoral dark-skinned Asian women traveler-immigrants, and to disrupt the dichotomy between "affective functions" and "intellectual functions" in order to negotiate a new space of honor, credibility, and power for myself within the Jordanian society (Lehmann 1990: 168).

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47 Al-Azhar University, associated with Al-Azhar Mosque, in Islamic Cairo, is commonly regarded one of the oldest and the most prestigious universities among Sunni Muslims.
Second “Arrival”

A city is life in all its various permutations. It is places, people, trees, the smell of rain, the earth and time itself in a state of flux. A city is people’s way of perceiving things: how they talk, how they dealt with events, how they faced and how they transcended them. A city is the dreams and disappointments that filled people’s mind and hearts, those dreams which came true and those which were frustrated leaving in their wake wounds and scars (Munif v).

Several months after my stay in Amman, I finally arrived to the point where I felt I could employ my mixed-method approach to ethnographic and cultural studies. My continued performances of *adab* to make myself less a traveler-trickster and more a traveler-scholar—not unlike the assertions of familiar “halfie” representations such as Arab-ness, or Muslim-ness, by ethnographers like Lila Abu-Lughod, Fida Adely, and Homa Hoodfar—aided in gaining trust and expanding local contacts. Though it took months and required continued “credential” performances in initial meetings with potential participants, news about my research on youth marital cultures and practices gradually spread. I started to receive more and more social invitations to attend events with friends of friends from CASA, Qasid, bookstores, and café hangouts, which led to

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48 While I was not a “halfie” Arab, I was raised in a devout Muslim household. In “Writing Against Culture” (2015), Lila Abu-Lughod talks about how her situation as young woman and half-Arab (“halfie”) affected her positionality as being simultaneously a part of and apart from the community she studied. As a result of her multiple perspectives, Abu-Lughod is concerned with issues relating to “positionality, audience, and the power inherent in distinctions in self and other” and the different ways people experience culture in everyday life (468).
lunch or dinner invitations with some of their families. These lunches and dinners then evolved into attending day-long wedding parties and engagements. I began to spend the weekends and holidays teaching English, and in return was taught practical Arabic vocabulary for everyday interactions. I was also shown how to cook Levantine dishes such as _ma‘lūbeh_ and _knāfeh_ by the young and older women of the families. (Cooking is an intrinsic component of _adab_ for women.) These contacts and friendships progressively extended to include their network of (mostly middle or middle-upper class) friends and colleagues, among whom I began to solicit thoughts regarding contemporary Jordanian youths’ marital cultures and practices.

I decided to conduct my ethnographic fieldwork and research in and near Amman, where many of Jordan’s universities and teaching institutes are located and where many Jordanians come in search of educational and job opportunities. The young participants (_shabāb_), aged 18-35, were identified via social interactions and chain referrals, and largely came from Eastern Amman. All of them claimed to have received secondary and/or higher education and identified themselves as coming from middle-class families (see footnote 8). Many were not surprised by academics conducting scholarly research about youth culture after the events of the Arab Spring. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 35 participants about the processes of contracting marriage. These

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49 After having established some measure of trust and comfort with these friends or contacts, I shared my experiences as perceived “Filipina” to help raise awareness about existing power imbalances and mistreatment of domestic and migrant workers.
conversations revealed information about the everyday lives, concerns, and worries of youth from the middle- and lower-upper classes, and from tribal-nationalist Transjordanians (Jordanian-Jordanians and their historical Circassian, Chechen, and Armenian allies) and non-Transjordanians (Palestinian-Jordanians, Palestinians, and Iraqis) living or working in East Amman about marriage. Since marriage is a slippery category encompassing a broad area of experiences, anxieties, and concerns, the semi-open nature of the interviews meant young people could bring up whatever issues they felt related to marriage—whether directly or obliquely—such as national and everyday politics, economics, education, citizenship, and personal or familial histories and circumstances. After the first few unscheduled interviews, I became accustomed to carrying recording devices and hard copies of written introduction, contact information, and preliminary interview questions. For events or activities where such devices are impermissible (i.e. weddings), I would often notate observations and insights when I returned to my apartment.

Media and literary selections were chosen from popular performances, songs, films, and books recommended by local youth, social media, and booksellers. I attended many of the concerts by Jordanian bands and performers such as Jadal, Autostrad, el-Morabba3, Kashkash, and Lama Zakharia at café-restaurants, performance halls, and theaters in the hope of learning about youth relations while developing a first-hand account as to why certain songs and performances were well-received. My weekly visits

50 When I was there, Syrians did not seem to be fully integrated into the local communities in Amman. I encountered only one Syrian young male during my academic year at CASA II.
to local bookstores such as *al-Ahliya* and *Azbakyah*, and conversations with their accommodating and knowledgeable owners, helped to introduce me to Jordanian and non-Jordanian books that were popular among youth and helped to put me in touch with nearby literary events and with Jordanian writers such as Jamal Naji and Ibrahim Nasrallah. An individual course with filmmaker, Nawras Abu Saleh, through CASA II, provided much-needed information about contemporary Jordanian films and the resources available at the Royal Film Commission on Rainbow Street. Oftentimes, talks about local music, literature, and films helped to initiate, smooth, or invigorate conversations with young people in Amman, eager to talk about expressive and popular cultures and its relevance to their lives.

Deriving inspiration from the works of Meili Steele (2005) who employs literature as a lens to study the affective dimensions of the human condition (particularly suffering, love, faith, citizenship, and selfhood), I listened to and learned about what Ammani youth have to say about marriage across the above-mentioned media and genres to engage readers “to wonder about themselves and the world they live in” (cited in Bottici 2014: 44). I paid attention to images, narratives, and popular expressive practices of a culture to better understand the “stories” they tell about their participation in national discourse and debate.

My role as traveler-ethnographer is “sort of like being a listener of stories and a teller of stories at the same time”—borrowing the words of Angela Cheng, a writer and filmmaker (“More on Tricksters Make This World”). Even though my embodied
appearance affected how I was initially welcomed into the reserved Jordanian society, I was eventually able to navigate the “betwixt and between” spaces in the host communities through my employment of the historical notion of *adab*. My multiple identities as Muslim and traveler-scholar of Arabic languages and cultures served to develop my connections, encourage conversations, as well as afford additional cultural insights into their individual and collective struggles relating to marriage. My intersectionality and affinity with the local cultures facilitated conversations with young Ammanis who are themselves finding ways to negotiate their own transition into social adulthood. The following chapter delves further into my conversations with these youths about their marital processes and practices and examines how marriage intertwines with larger conversations and debates about youths’ local and national participation.
Figure 9: A concert by the Jordanian pop-rock band, Jadal, in downtown, Amman.
Chapter 3: Navigating Participation

Your job as youth is incomplete without effective participation in public life. Such participation can take two forms: the first is to spread a culture of volunteerism and community service in several fields. It is through such work that individuals are acquainted with diverse issues, problems and challenges facing their country at present and in the future. Voluntary work enriches their [the individuals’] knowledge and experience in a way that prepares them for the other form of public participation; that is, joining national political parties that have practical and clear developmental manifestos. Speaking of political parties, the question you have to contemplate is: What kind of political parties you seek? Do you want to see major parties representing the centrist, rightist and leftist orientations…? Or do you want multiple parties, small and medium sized, as the case is in our country currently, bearing in mind that such parties have so far failed to have a strong foothold and so they enjoy no wide popular base? --King Abdullah (Speech of His Majesty)\textsuperscript{51}

When summer arrived in 2013, I had half expected the wave of demonstrations and civil wars in the Arab World to soon engulf Jordan. Egypt had by then experienced two government overthrows—the first removed the powerful figure of Hosni Mubarak whose presidency few thought would end, while the second soon removed the democratically elected Mohamed Morsi who had claimed unchecked political and legislative powers for the presidency. Protests had intensified in Egypt, following the

\textsuperscript{51} This is an excerpt from the speech given by King Abdullah II at the Jordan Youth Forum 2011, at the Dead Sea, Jordan, on 4 June 2011. See the following for further details: http://kingabdullah.jo/index.php/en_US/speeches/view/id/481/videoDisplay/0.html
overthrow of then-President Morsi by the military, and also in Tunisia, following the ongoing political struggles between the Islamist-led government and the mainly-secular opposition. In Libya, violence continued to rage in Benghazi two years after the onset of the Arab Uprisings. In such tense political climate, it seemed inevitable that the small desert kingdom could soon see the spread of revolutionary movements. Thus, when government crackdown on social media and unpopular reforms failed to produce large-scale youth uprising, questions regarding what was happening to Jordan occupied the international stage: Why did severe political and economic problems\(^52\) not materialize into revolution? Was this simply the calm before the storm or were Jordanian youth apathetic?

While a “people’s revolution” has yet to occur in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the seeds of discontent which produced political and economic instability in other parts of the region, over the past two years, can be found among its citizens. Young people under the age of 30 account for approximately 70% of the population and for 24-33% of the unemployment rate (“Youth Employment Generation Program”; “Unemployment, Youth Total”). Widespread poverty, diminishing quality of education, inadequate professional training, and limited job market contributed toward youths’ difficulty in coping with increasing costs of living, rising taxes on services and consumer

\(^{52}\) Que Newbill (2013) points to the continuing threat of political instability in Jordan as young people express skepticism towards government political and economic policies and reforms that still ignore widespread corruption, high youth unemployment and increasing living costs. David Rohde (2013), while noting similar economic and political concerns, however, believe young people are less likely to pursue rapid change through revolutionary movements after having seen its effects of in Egypt and Syria. Alaa Fazzaa, who suffered from Jordan’s media crackdown in June 2013 said, “I’m less aggressive toward the king because I saw what the Islamists could do, I see what is happening in the region” (cited in Rohde).
goods, lack of housing availability, and the exorbitant costs of marriage, among others (Laub; Obeidat 2015). The king and tribal leaders, in their attempts to stave off chaos and instability revolutionary movements would inevitably bring, have called for greater political participation among youth. Though I was curious to learn young people’s responses toward such call for action and to ascertain the likelihood of political revolution sweeping through the country, my interest was dampened by the realization direct questioning and discussions about politics would either prove unproductive due to the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and class (see discussion in Chapter 2) or dangerous due to the discreet but acknowledged presence of the police and intelligence forces. Nevertheless, discussions on marriage did raise comments about politics, albeit more about the dangers of political participation and the effects of corruption and \( \text{\textit{wāfî}} \) than about any government overthrow.

![Figure 10: Topics perceived as not allowed by Jordan’s Penal Code (El-Rayyes)](image)

Figure 10: Topics perceived as not allowed by Jordan’s Penal Code (El-Rayyes)
This chapter revolves around debates and anxieties about everyday politics (with concentration on corruption and *wāṣṭa*) and formal political participation that emerged through larger conversations on marriage. It delves into the meanings and socio-political context of *wāṣṭa*, while exploring how these issues affect youths’ ideas on the interstices of citizenship, nationality, good governance, and social justice. Literary and popular cultural elements are also deployed to uncover tensions and struggles between the government and the popular masses, and between Transjordanian tribalists-nationalists and the non-Transjordanian Palestinians and refugee members within the society. By examining these intertwining narratives, I hope to better understand the motivations, thought processes, and practices involved in Jordanian youths’ alternate strategies for engagement and resistance. The last section then examines the actual ploys and strategies youth perceive as possible and necessary to attain their individual and societal objectives. Perhaps they will help reveal why Jordan has so far avoided the systemic change endemic of recent “people’s revolutions” and why marriage has become a marker used to represent a whole set of societal discontents.

The Socio-Political Context of *Wāṣṭa*

I see Jordan as functioning through a circular manipulation and negotiation of *wāṣṭa*, resources, and power among the top leaders and elite in social, economic, and political spheres. Though the word *wāṣṭa* comes from the root *wasaṭ*—meaning, to be in
the middle—*wāṣṭa* today denotes making use of connections, clout, and patronage to obtain or facilitate access to various interests and objectives. As described by Kathleen Reedy, *wāṣṭa* functions as follows in the wider Arab culture,

*Wāṣṭa* is at the center of how Arabic culture and politics function. Have a dispute with your neighbor? Need a job? Need some help with a homework assignment? Want to buy or refurbish a home? Want to get out of a speeding ticket? Need to get a form filed with a government office? …Your *wāṣṭa* may be members of your family or tribe (where there are expectations of caring for each other), but they are just as likely to be acquaintances. *Wāṣṭa* builds prestige—when you use your pull to help someone else, you increase your honor. It also encourages reciprocity, for if someone does a favor for you, you must now maintain the relationship and return the favor at some point…In some cases, such as helping someone get a job, there is a strong patronage element, where there is clearly someone in a higher position of power, but more often, *wāṣṭa* is a matter of people helping out social equals (Reedy).

Described as, “an advance that people get from having connection,” by a young Jordanian woman, *wāṣṭa* functions in all levels of the society: from demonstrating preference toward select elite families and business allies in real-estate and commercial transactions, to overlooking student cheating in the university entrance examination *(tawjīhī)*.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{53}\) It is widely believed that violations regularly occur in the *Tawjihī* examination. *The Jordan Times* reports that “cheating was widespread and facilitated by some supervisors, who overlooked cheating incidents inside the examination halls” (Azzeh 2012).
Though the word *wājīḥ* more commonly bears negative connotations in recent times, it has historically enjoyed more positive connotations among the Arab and Bedouin societies. Its triliteral or triconsonantal root points to the act of being in the middle, whereby a respected person “mediated or interceded between the men, or people, for the purpose of accommodation” (Lane). For example, young men who were caught verbally harassing a young woman might need the intervention and mediation of a trusted...
elder to help vouch for their honor, reclaim the tribal honor, and smooth matters with the woman’s tribe.\textsuperscript{55} Or, if an accident were to occur between a tribal Jordanian and a Palestinian-Jordanian, the latter might choose to go speak with the tribesman’s elder in order to reach speedy and peaceful resolution. The positive, performative aspect of \textit{wāṣṭa} and relationship-building can still be seen in one of the marriage rituals, the \textit{jāha}, involving the traditional practice of mediation and vouching for the young man and woman to be married by the elders. While \textit{wāṣṭa} no longer holds its historical function and weight as a crucial intermediate step toward marriage, \textit{wāṣṭa} as an intermediary means to ensure the basic needs of individuals has continued—especially when dealing with governmental institutions perceived to be favoring the socioeconomic elite. The perpetuation of such practice has resulted, according to Naseem Tarawnah, in the corrupt and inefficient politicization of the public sector:

\begin{quote}
…[n]ot just on the ministerial level but on every level… government beucratic [sic] employees tend to gain their position through nepotism and connections, and their employment is usually secured for them by those possessing political power—be they ministers, member of parliament, senators, former officials, royal court officials, etc, etc. This methodogly [sic] of employment has of course demonstrated [that] we are now
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{55} A transplanted Iraqi refugee from Baghdad once described a narrative about a group of young men who were caught harassing a young woman on the street. Unfortunately, for these young men, their verbal harassment was witnessed by an elderly man who thought their verbal harassment shameful and demonstrated lack of honor and good upbringing. The latter then acted to remove and throw his headgear to the ground in front of these young men, at which point they responded by rushing to prevent the headgear from touching the ground and moved to place it back on the elder’s head. This act of removing, throwing, and intervening occurred back and forth several times until the young men apologized for their misbehavior to the elder. Thinking the matter regarding their “harmless flirtation” resolved, these young men returned home only to find a note requiring their attendance at a tribal meeting. So they went… and found themselves in the presence of tribal leaders (theirs and hers). “Things could have been bad,” said the narrator, if the intermediary had not vouched for the honor of these youth. This narrative offers insights into the performative, honorable, and positive aspects of \textit{wāṣṭa} and relationship-building.
encouraging a system... [that] further erod[es] any chance that our public sector may one day become a meritocracy (Tarawnah)

This culture of dependence and intercession has made *wāṣṭa* an inevitable aspect of Jordanian politics and everyday realities. The Hashemite family, in addition to receiving military, financial, and development aid and trade agreements from foreign countries such as Great Britain, the United States, and the Gulf Countries, enjoys strong social and political support from local tribal and nationalist Transjordanian population, leading bureaucrats and merchants, and the armed forces and intelligence services. Like his father and grandfather before him, King Abdullah II depends on the continued support of local tribes and ethnic Circassian and Armenian communities, along with the military and intelligence forces, to help maintain continuity, stability, and security at the border (especially now with the Syrian civil war and the terror and military activities performed by ISIS). Since 2010, however, even these segments of the population have voiced criticism against the king and the royal family. They criticized the queen for her lavish 40th birthday party in Wadi Rum on August 2010 (Zecchini). The following year, they accused the queen and her family of corruption and “call[ed] on the king to return to the treasury land and farms given to the [queen’s] Yasin family. The land belongs to the Jordanian people” (cited in Zecchini). During the small-scale youth protests and demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, popular slogans such as, “Freedom is from God, in spite of you, Abdullah,” and, “Revolution, revolution, it is a popular revolution,” could
be heard in Amman, Ma’an, Irbid, and Karak.\textsuperscript{56,57} Despite these events, the tribal and nationalist-Transjordanian populations were not necessarily calling for royal overthrow. Rather, they were calling for the king to intervene and address youth unemployment, cuts in subsidies, rising food and fuel prices, increasing costs of living, corruption, and lack of democratic reform. In response to these demonstrations, the king temporarily froze the government’s decision to lift fuel subsidies in September 2012—though by the end of the year, cuts in government subsidies for several fuel products, including gasoline and propane, still went through.\textsuperscript{58} He also shuffled five different prime ministers and six different governments from 2011-2013. The loyal tribal and Transjordanian citizens were further reassured of their privileged status and benefits in the civil service, the army, and the security forces with 1.2 billion JOD out of the 8.09 billion JOD in budget spending allotted for the salaries of civil servants and 1.1 billion JOD for the pension bill for retired civil and military personnel in 2014 (Obeidat 2014). These services and privileges, maintained despite rising fiscal difficulties experienced by the kingdom since the onset of the Arab Spring, demonstrated the king’s acknowledgement of and accommodation to his main base of support and legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{56} Statements such as “Huriyye min Allah, ghasban ‘annak Abdullah” (which used the King’s first name without his title) indicate the growing discontent with the royal family among the Transjordanian population. 
\textsuperscript{57} Some of my Palestinian-Jordanian participants were eager to talk about the letter addressed to King Abdullah by the Bedouin tribes, criticizing the extravagant spending and corruption of Queen Rania and her family. They criticized the Queen for spending too much on her (Western) clothes and 40th birthday party (“while her people are starving”) in Wadi Rum in 2010; where, guests were flown in by private jet to celebrate the occasion. See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/15/bedouin-accuse-jordan-queen-corruption
\textsuperscript{58} This caused a 15 to 33 percent jump in prices.
The king made some changes to the electoral laws as well. In 2012, King Abdullah II approved two votes for each voter (one vote for national parties in addition to one for local representatives). He then increased the quota set aside for women in the parliament from 12 to 15 seats, though the size of the parliament was also increased from 120 to 150 seats. In spite of these reforms, the electoral system remains favorable to large districts where rural tribes live, thus, maintaining the inefficiency of the political system.

The give-and-take nature ofُ wāṣṭaَ gives ground for corruption, nepotism, and lack of transparency—whether directly or indirectly. When asked about local impressions of the government, an informant met at a housewarming party said, “Shireen, in the US, if the government was given 20 million USD, several million would go to the politicians but the project gets completed. But here, if Jordanian officials and leaders were given 20 million JOD, they would take 10 million JOD but the project still would not be completed.” Favoring certain individuals and groups over others has led to failed government concessions in land and commercial transactions—i.e. the cancellation of a casino deal at the Dead Sea and projected railway and metro projects to neighboring countries and within Amman—and allegations of graft, embezzlement, and nepotism among members of the royal family such as Walid al-Kurdi, an uncle of King Abdullah II (Ersan; “Amman Light Rail Design”; Petra). Theُ wāṣṭaَ system also encourages misuse of political power and national resources—such as during the historic “Snowpocalypse” of 2013-14 when a certain minister (local sources never mentioned his/her name) from
the Ministry of Labor appropriated the services of multiple snowplows to clear the roads near his/her house when most of the major roads in Amman were covered by snow and ice. Despite the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2005 and a constitutional amendment enabling the civil courts to adjudicate on matters concerning corruption, it is generally understood that a nation functioning on favors, bribery, gifts, and social connections to facilitate bureaucratic process, overcome regulations, attain individual objectives, and influence interests, rarely delivers equal services and punishments, or rights and limits, to all citizens (Satkowski).

Uncovering Wāṣṭa: “When the Wolves Grow Old”

Depictions of desperate Jordanian youth torn between their desire to improve their socio-economic conditions by working with the corrupt system and their desire to maintain good morality by working around the system are common themes in Jordanian and Arab popular literature and films of late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *When the Wolves Grow Old*, or *‘Indamā Tashīkh al-Dhi‘āb*, written by Jamal Naji (2009), a Palestinian-Jordanian author born in the Aqbat Jaber refugee camp in 1954, tells the stories of marginalized citizens forced to struggle for survival and success. Through its characters, the author depicts what disadvantaged citizens have to confront and negotiate in their everyday lives. The novel imagines what they have to do, or can afford to do, to overcome a system saturated with wāṣṭa. In doing so, the novel explores issues and
debates that preoccupy youth, namely the choice between resisting or collaborating with the state.

Figure 12: Graffito of traditional Jordanian urban architecture. This graffito depicts traditional houses built on top of another, separated by small alleyways and stairs.

In *When the Wolves Grow Old*, the main characters struggle to respond to difficult life challenges along with diminishing natural resources such as food, water, and
shelter. Their shared neighborhood, Jabal al-Jawfa, is located on one of the hills near the old downtown in East Amman. The area is described as,

the hill where houses perch upon one another, separated by alleys or stairs...[where] life in our humble neighborhood possesses a certain order, despite the chaos caused by people waking and going to work. [This is where] the sparrows move back and forth in the neighborhood in the morning, not for its gardens and flowers (which do not exist) but, rather, for feeding on nearby worms emerging from the exhausted drains in the alleys...The cats, after their encounters with people who throw their plastics of scraps, gather around loose tires and occupy the area in the morning...leav[ing] behind clean bones for the columns of ants...The kingdom of the night is claimed by numerous creatures in the neighborhood: the cats and insects, especially mosquitoes and red cockroaches, that the Amman Municipality and its insecticides have not been able to eliminate... (my translation, Naji 2009; 8-9).

There, non-human (the insects, birds, and cats) and human inhabitants (Sundus, Rabīḥ, Sabri, Jibrān, Janzīr, ‘Azmi al-Wajih, and Bakr Ṭāyil) must make the best of their available options to ensure their continuing survival. Main characters like Sundus, for example, married Rabāḥ—a much older man who worked as legal clerk—in order to provide financial and material support for her mother and quell rumors about her immorality following sudden divorce from Sabri Abu-Hissah. As a secondary school graduate with little work experience and social connection, she was left with few options and, thus, chose survival over dwelling on luxuries such as happiness and sexual attraction. Another character, Bakr Tāyil, who shared a similar lack of opportunity, power, and connections, turned to Janzīr and extreme religious teachings for support and

59 According to my Jordanian participants, this area is mostly inhabited by Jordanians who came from Palestine.
60 Sundus’ sister-in-law mentioned, “Guys like to sleep with divorcees, but they prefer to marry those who are not (divorced)” (Naji 2009: 34).
guidance after days of scouring job advertisements and “walk[ing] to transportation stations and companies” led to the realization that “I was but a drop in the sea of unemployed: those who reproduce like ants” (103). Depicting this neighborhood as an urban jungle densely packed by residential buildings, trash, and worn infrastructure inhabited by creatures trying their best to survive using whatever means available serves to bring attention to the plight of all of its desperate and impoverished inhabitants.

Figure 13: Graffito of Amman as an urban jungle
As a result of their poverty, limited resources, and marginalization, these inhabitants often saw only two available options: survival and dominance through collaboration and exploitation or gradual deterioration through ignorance and submission. Janzīr (a play on the word “khanzīr,” meaning, “pig,” which is associated with lack of cleanliness in Islamic societies), a locally-known religious leader, for instance, stole money from religious endowments and from women who sought his medical and spiritual cures to afford living in wealthier neighborhoods and host political salons (156). ‘Azmi, who was first described as religious, wise, and strong beyond his years, gradually took on characteristics similar to his mentor, Janzīr, and became involved in drug smuggling to maintain the wealthy lifestyle and elite connections he acquired. Sundus was able to greatly improve her financial situation during her third marriage—though this occurred only after she agreed to a long-term extramarital affair with ‘Azmi. Bakr Ṭāyil, on the other hand, ensured his family’s survival and livelihood through executing acts of terror commissioned by Janzīr.61 Though developing a network of relations and dependence is not by itself necessarily harmful—in fact, Lawrence Rosen (2006) considers this to be a sign of a leader’s legitimacy and effectiveness in the Arab World—not one of these characters was able to successfully attain wealth and power without drawing on their ṭāṣta to partake in morally questionable economic and political activities. Each character, to some degree, fed on those who stood in their journey to strength and

dominance; thus, their transformation in character “traits and not only wealth” (Naji 2009: 89) into vicious, treacherous, and bloodthirsty characters is suggestive of the wild wolves (the novel’s title) that occupy flats and mountains in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Jordan and Israel. In such harsh living environment, those without strength and determination consign themselves to gradual deterioration and death.

*When the Wolves Grow Old* therefore forces readers to reflect on the lengths socially and economically disadvantaged individuals have to go through to attain a comfortable livelihood. It draws them into the everyday lives, concerns, and worries of fictional characters, thereby encouraging them to examine certain assumptions about “normative languages…personhood, history, language, rights, and the like,” and invite public discourse (Bottici 44). Interested readers in Amman had the opportunity to interact further with the characters and contemporary issues described in the novel through participation in literary events and reading salons sponsored by local residents, organizations, and bookstores.

While I was not able to attend recent events hosted by the author of *When the Wolves Grow Old* (2009), I imagined that they were not unlike the event that launched the controversial novel, *Soldiers’ Tales* (or *Hadīth al-Junūd*), hosted by the Mujamma’ al-Naqābāt al-Mahniyya (The Association of Veiled Professionals), on April 21, 2014. I was invited to attend the event by a Jordanian graduate student in literature to learn

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62 Written by Ayman al-Otoum (2014), the novel is based on the 1986 Yarmouk University student protests against the Jordanian authorities on issues ranging from lack of student voice and participation in university governance, religiosity, Islamic activism, and national restrictions on freedom of assembly and speech.
63 This event resulted in three student deaths, dozens of injured, and 800 students taken into custody.
about the controversy surrounding the novel, which focused on the historic 1986 Yarmouk student riot. There, I was immediately struck by its popular reception—people were not only sitting and standing inside the lecture hall, they also spilled out of the removable side doors and into the nearby sidewalk! I found educators, scholars, literary personalities, and older and younger members of the community discussing, commenting, and debating about how then-student communities understood their social, economic, and political realities and pushed for real change. There were people who composed and recited poetry about the riot. A few brought pictures and shared stories about their activism and participation in the riot and the changes it helped to produce in university governance—student unions were mentioned several times. Others made comparisons with and debated about recent events of the Arab Spring, to which young attendees responded by engaging in discussions about the harsh realities they face today.

Based on the overflowing attendance for *Hadīth al-Junūd* (and other book fairs, concerts, and film festivals I had attended and observed), cultural events such as this serve as sites for popular participation and resistance as young people gathered to discuss the content of a novel banned in Jordan (or at least in many Jordanian public universities) and made connections between why youths demonstrated in the recent political demonstrations with why the 1987 Yarmouk student riot occurred. Young citizens and residents in Amman are well apprised of local events through visual notification on Facebook and words of mouth. They make good use of such opportunities to participate

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64 The event was mainly attended by university students. There were also many educators from Jordanian universities and local literary figures who participated in the event.
in conversations and activities such as literary discussion, poetry reading, musical concerts, and film festivals that speak to their socio-economic conditions. While it may not be the case for all young people, those I had observed seemed interested in taking part in local and national dialogues and giving voice to their continuing frustrations, fears, and anxieties. For these reasons, seemingly apolitical events can take on greater significance and can offer deeper insights into young people’s thoughts, opinions, moods, and behaviors regarding state-citizen relations, citizenship, and common needs, especially when a large segment of the population feel they cannot access formal political participation without risking societal instability and harmful confrontations.

Figure 14: A literary event open to the public to discuss *Hadith al-Junūd*
Historical Memory and State Trajectory: Narratives of Participation

She decided to keep silent, even if it is for a while. Since confrontation means failure, she decided to mute her tongue… but who said that silence is the weapon of the weak only. Silence is a stand or an attitude exactly as confrontation is…

Silence may be sometimes more effective than a foolish confrontation, especially the unplanned for confrontation, the reactive confrontation.

She decided to keep silent. She decided to face others with her silence, which is her shield and weapon at the same time (Amayreh 59-60).

When 56.6% of registered Jordanian voters went to the polls on January 23, 2013 to elect a new lower house of parliament, this figure was considered to meet governmental expectations. Despite such turnout, online and print articles still expressed anxieties and concerns about youths’ lack of participation and disinterest in politics (Dudley 2013; Tucker 2013; Hafferkamp 2013). My conversations and interviews with young Jordanians in Amman confirmed young people’s disinclination (rejection) to participate in state-sanctioned political activities; however, their narratives suggest this was not due to apathy, powerlessness, or lack of political awareness. Rather, it was indicative of their unwillingness to risk the punitive effects of overt resistances, war, and exile previously experienced by their forefathers.
Many among the Palestinian-Jordanian and youth population I had spoken with strongly rejected political participation after having grown up listening to the stories of their parents, grandparents, and/or relatives who have lived through the events of 1948, 1967, 1970-71, and 1990. During my stay in Amman, I came to know mostly Jordanian-Palestinian citizens and residents, and long-time Iraqi residents of ages 18-35. One of these Palestinian-Jordanians—let’s call him “Māhir”—was first introduced to me by one of my language partners, with whom he had studied in college. After months of attending and participating together in much of the same cultural and social events around town—with Māhir being the more voluble of the two—and conversing about literature and youth cultures, I felt confident we had reached a certain level of mutual trust. So, one day, I commented that while he and his friends enjoyed talking about literature, films, and social events at dinner parties, coffeehouses, and cafés, they rarely (if ever) talked about politics. This soon led to a series of more politically-related exchange during our wider conversation about his family’s marriage practices. The following represents a small part of our dialogue:

Me [S]: Māhir, why [do] the *shabāb* not vote?
Māhir [M]: The diversity is definitely one of [the reasons]. The second reason is [that] a lot of people come from refugee-like background and they witnessed what this revolution can lead… so they think they have to be…more careful about these things.

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65 Information regarding actual numbers of Palestinians living in the country vary: ranging from 43 percent of the population, to "more than half," and at least two thirds of Jordan's current population. King Abdullah II’s 2011 book, *Our Last Best Chance*, claimed that Jordanians of Palestinian origin represent 43 percent of the national population (2011).

66 Among my Jordanian friends and acquaintances, only one came from Circassian-Jordanian and another from Jordanian tribal background.
S: When you say “revolution can lead,” are you talking about the Black September or the Arab-Israeli Wars?

M: Both. All of these events. Even the closer [recent] events like the Iraqi War or the War in Syria, or even in like the 90s [with] the war between Kuwait and Iraq, when all of the Palestinians living in Kuwait and then after that they re-settled in Jordan.

S: Are there other impediments for youth to participate in politics?

M: All the youth… they don’t care to vote unless someone asks them to do [it]—like someone related to this family in this part of the country—and they participate, you know?...If you look at statistics, every year or two years, the majority of youth in Amman, they don’t vote. All the voting had been in Irbid, Ajloun, or the places outside Amman.

S: So why do you think the voter turnout is lower in Amman than in other areas? What’s the difference?

M: [T]he people in Amman, most of them are from Palestinian background so that’s why...

S: How does this [affect] politics?

M: For Palestinians, their grandparents or parents tried the Palestinian-Israeli wars. When they resettled in Jordan and they live in a peaceful way, they think they respect this royal family and government.

Since the unexpected departure and exile of his father’s family from a village near Jerusalem, Palestine, in 1948, Māhir’s family has, time and again, been adversely affected by the recurring whims of war and politics. His father’s family first found refuge in a cave in Jordan. Then, at age 10, Māhir’s father left in search of a job in Kuwait, where he ended up spending the remainder of his adolescence and much of his married life (approximately 40 years of residence). When the Iraq-Kuwait War broke out in 1991, however, he was again forced to leave, re-settle, and begin anew in Jordan. He described his father’s experiences:

M: For my family—especially for my father—they re-settled in Jordan but all the money he had was stuck in Kuwait for one or two years. These two years was really difficult knowing that the amount of money [he had] saved in another country… [he would] never know what would happen [to it]. After that, he started new again…He changed his career [from a ship’s
captain] because, you know, there is no sea in Jordan! Only in Aqaba. And they offered him like 150 JOD! His salary in Kuwait was 3000 KD so he refused to work in [shipping in] Jordan after he got back because the salary was nothing… I think modern Amman was built when modern Palestinians came back from Kuwait.

His father’s lessons from war and political instability taught Māhir to be thankful to Jordan for allowing them to (re)settle and build new lives in the country. Though he wished the socio-economic conditions were improved and the government could function more efficiently, he was nevertheless appreciative of the continued welcome and stability extended by the Hashemite royal family and was careful to stress that they were, “doing the best that they can. I really believe that because it is a country with no resources.” If political participation in the public sphere through local and national elections is seen as potentially harmful to familial and national stability, it is understandable why Māhir and his non-tribal and non-Transjordanian friends were disinclined to talk about politics and participate in local and national elections.

Based on conversations with my Ammani participants, Palestinian-Jordanian youth have grown up listening to narratives of revolution, exile, and displacement. Through familial narratives passed down from their elders, they learned the monarchy historically does not tolerate acts of rebellion. For example, the previous King Hussein had quelled Palestinian guerilla movements in the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970-71 Black September. He had also firmly subdued austerity and student riots in the 1980s and 1990s. These were in addition to imposing martial law and limiting freedom of expression for twenty-two years following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Under the current
King Abdullah II, violent measures continued to be performed by plain-clothes assailants and gendarmerie against demonstrators to protect the security and stability of the country. Nimr, a Palestinian-Jordanian in his mid-20s, had shown me videos of local demonstrations and described that, on 24-25 March 2011, intelligence officers, police, and gendarmerie fired tear gas canisters and proceeded to beat, attack, and arrest demonstrators, which resulted in at least 100 injured and 1 death (“Jordan's March 24 Youth Sit-in”). On 13-18 November 2012, many of the demonstrators (among them, youth, teachers, leftists, Islamists, and tribal members) who protested against cuts in subsidies, increase in fuel and energy prices (over 50% increase in the costs of household cooking gas, 33% increase for diesel and kerosene and 15% for lower-grade gasoline), poverty, corruption, and lack of transparency were met with similar violence and arrests in Amman and other major cities (such as Irbid, Ma’an, Karak, Salt, and Tafileh). However, since they were mostly tribal members, less stringent measures were meted out than the kingdom had historically deployed against Palestinian demonstrators and dissidents.
Due to its delicate nature, however, talk of sectarianism and differential treatments between the tribalist-nationalist Transjordanian and non-Transjordanian groups within the population are rarely heard in public. One of the places where discourse about economics, politics, power, and resistance emerge is in the soccer matches, especially when Jordan’s *al-Wihdat* (of Palestinian origin) team plays against Faisali (of Transjordanian origins). In 2009, a match between the two was abruptly cancelled when inflammatory chants against the Palestinian population and King

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67 This political cartoon was shown at the “Caricature Exhibition and Talk” sponsored by the Shoman Foundation in October 2013.
Abdullah’s Palestinian wife, Queen Rania, were heard. Faisali fans were reported to have chanted, ““Wahid, itnen, talagha ya Abu Hussein”—“One, two, divorce her Abu Hussein”—and “divorce her you father of Hussein, and we'll marry you to two of ours" (Tuastad 2014; “Jordanian Soccer Game Halted”). The first chant referring not only to separation and divorce from Queen Rania but also to other Palestinian inhabitants. While anti-Palestinian chants such as these frequently emerged during sports matches in Jordan, this was especially news-worthy as it was the first time such chants were directed against members of the royal family.

In spite of the gravity behind popular criticism of the royal family, the stadium remained as a socially-acceptable place outside the political sphere for communicating repressed anger and frustration. In December 2010, 250 al-Wihdat fans became injured after a fence collapsed as they attempted to escape from being bombarded by rocks thrown by Faisali fans and from being beaten by the police (Montague). Cars and properties were also damaged as chaos and panic grew. Despite growing tension and struggle between the two groups, as long as the nationalistic performances and behaviors did not spill over into a civil war, it remained likely King Abdullah and other government leaders would continue to allow young fans this cultural space for individual and collective expression. Even when their official silence could be mistaken as implicit affirmation of their political connection with the tribal-nationalist Transjordanian members of the population and approval of the latter’s use of intimidation and fear tactics against non-Transjordanian citizens and residents.
Sectarian tension between the tribalist-nationalist Transjordanians and non-Transjordanians remained. After the tragic 2010 soccer match, *al-Wihdat* club president Tareq Khoury (a former member of parliament who lost in the recent elections) who was quite vocal about what he referred to as “massacre,” was sent to jail for two years. Though his detainment was said to have been caused by an altercation with a security officer a year and a half prior, an online source pointed to his then-upcoming interview on football violence as a more plausible cause (“Wehdat Club President Tareq Khoury Going to Jail?”). This event occurred a few weeks after a former parliamentary candidate, Tahir Nassar, was detained for speaking about group identities, sectarianism, and national unity (“Tahir Nassar and Stirring Some Sectarian Strife”). The following year, the constitution passed an amendment to ban the appointment of senators and ministers “or a high-ranking official of similar salary and benefits unless s/he is a Jordanian not holding nationality of another state,” which has only served to underline the dangers of overtly political expression and participation in demonstrations, protests, and elections in the public sphere. For young residents and citizens of Jordan, revolutionary movements would likely not alleviate national tensions and improve socio-economic conditions. Instead, it could ignite civil war and government recrimination (the likes of Black September) previously heard from familial narratives and leave the country even more vulnerable to the expansionist threats of the nearby al-Dawla al-Islāmiyya fī al-‘Irāq wa al-Shām (Daesh), or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).
Figure 16: Violence broke out after a match between al-Wihdat-Faisali in 2010 (dw07)

Figure 17: Strong police and military presence for the 2014 World Cup Qualifying game between Jordan and Uruguay
In Search of Good Society

Palestinian-Jordanian (and other non-Transjordanian) informants were hopeful to avoid greater political and economic instability. Ibtissam, a 24 year-old Palestinian-Jordanian young woman then studying for her Master’s degree at the University of Jordan, informed me, “Shireen, why would we want an Arab Spring (ar-rabī‘ al-‘arabī)? We want stability (istiqrār). We don’t want an Arab Spring like what we see in Egypt and in Syria.” While, at first glance, such a statement, along with other official statistics, articles, and reports indicating youths’ low turnout at local and national elections might seem to point to youths’ disinterest in politics, these numbers would in fact be misleading. Conversations with and observations of youth about contemporary realities reveal not only their interest and active engagement in everyday socio-political relations. They also reveal youths’ decisions to pursue “good society” through marriage, which enables circumvention of the state’s politicized system of governance.

Young Jordanians imagine “good society” as an interdependent relationship between the state and society. They seem to believe the government and its leaders are entrusted with leadership in order to provide the stability and security necessary for the people to carry out and live according to God’s will. They also believe it is among the
primary responsibilities of both parties to act to ensure the community’s well-being. When asked to describe “good society,” Yousra, a 26-year-old, university-educated, said:

[A good society] is by its nature built upon justice…and the principles of reason and morality, all of which are related to religion…sincerity and equality.

Central to popular discussions and debates about “good society” is the concept of the common good. Young people used the term, “al- maṣḥaḥa,” or “al- maṣḥaḥa al-‘āmma,” to talk about “the common good.” This term was explained by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), a Muslim jurist, theologian, and philosopher, in al-Mustaṣfa min ‘Īlm al-Uṣūl as, “the preservation of the objective [maqasid] of the Law [shar], which consists of five things: the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Whatever ensures the protection of these five principles is maṣḥaḥa [public interest];

68 whatever goes against their protection is mafsada [harm, evil, or corrupt],

69 and to avoid it is maṣḥaḥa” (cited by Ramadan).

Often, the notion of “al-maṣḥaḥa, or al- maṣḥaḥa al-‘āmma, are invoked when young people talk about how they relate with other individuals, the society, the state, and the world: their social imaginaries. As previously mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, al-maṣḥaḥa, or al- maṣḥaḥa al-‘āmma (the “common good”), relates

68 This word is derived from the trilateral root, ș-l-h, which denotes “good, right, or virtuous affair” (Lane).
69 This word is derived from the trilateral root, ʃ-s-d, whose meaning is associated with, being or becoming “bad, evil, corrupt, unsound, wrong, wrongful behavior, unrighteous…. [and] devoid of virtue or efficacy” (Lane).
70 Tariq Ramadan discussed the numerous debates and developments on the notion of al- maṣḥaḥa in the following website: http://tariqramadan.com/english/2016/01/25/al-maslaha-the-common-good/.
71 At times, I also heard the injunction of “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (al-amr bi l-ma`ruf wa n-nahï `an l-munkar”) being invoked in conversations about marriage with Ammani youths.
with social imaginaries of good society, justice, fairness, and virtue and the processes through which individuals act to promote collective interests. Castoriadis believed individuals were raised and informed by an inherited (socialized) structure of system and sub-systems governing “what is worthwhile and what is not, what is fair and what is not,” when assessing and responding to realities (“Cornelius Castoriadis On The Imaginary Institution of Society”). Morgan Liu (2012), building on the works by Charles Taylor, describes social imaginaries as “the grasp people have of the conventional actors, groups, actions, places, contexts, times, meanings, and interests involved in their collective life and how all those are expected to work within and open-ended yet graded scale of possibility” (14). “Social imaginaries” also encompasses “the largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have” (cited in Liu 14). In the case of young participants I had met in Amman, their social imaginaries is connected with ensuring the moral beliefs, rights, needs, and practices of fellow members within the community, which is connected to public perception of the state’s legitimate governance and moral and administrative competence.

The inability of the state to maintain an environment where youth can feasibly pursue marriage, local participation, and dignified lives is seen as sign of dissipating legitimacy. King Abdullah II has been described as "not the same as…his father. There's negligence in the state. He lets things go. It's like the shepherd that leaves his sheep to go astray. And for this reason, corruption has spread everywhere" (Murphy). His efforts
toward implementing democratic and economic reforms have been criticized as too slow. His failure to provide a welcoming environment for all people to feasibly pursue marriage, social participation, and dignified lives has been seen as a sign of dissipating legitimacy and of fomenting “anger, extreme frustration, extremism problems between groups.” Field allegations of nepotism and dissolution among family members further underlined popular belief that the royal family and Jordan’s system of governance have deviated from the Islamic principles of “common good” (al-маšлаha al-‘āmma) and “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” (al-amr bi l-ma`rūf wa n-nahī ‘an l-munkar”). As related by Yousra, the current society’s “principles are unclear…We don't know whether it is [sic] based on religion, society. It is built on principles which only benefit some people in the society…For that reason…we now end up with big problems that affect personal happiness even to the matter of marriage.” Due to perceived government immorality, corruption, lack of commitment to the well-being and development of non-Transjordanian groups—especially those of Palestinian-Jordanian origin—as well as fear of government reprisal and worsening socio-economic conditions, Palestinian-Jordanian youth are disinclined to participate in the formal political sphere and have turned instead to marriage as a means to attain their envisioned individual and societal goals.
A few months into my fieldwork, I was introduced to “Sami,” a 28 year-old university-educated, Palestinian-Jordanian, by a colleague at Qasid Institute. After some initial moments of shyness, Sami mentioned that he was soon to be married to a Palestinian-Jordanian woman who, he hoped, would be able to help nurture, protect, and promote his Palestinian-Jordanian and Islamic identity, cultural traditions, and oral history. He explained that he had searched for a potential bride from within his ethnic group in the hopes of avoiding large cultural pitfalls and misunderstandings. In addition, he was looking for a non-career, college-educated, life partner (“with acceptable looks,
good heart, and piety") who could ably become full-time caregiver and homemaker in charge of caring for his elderly mother and of raising and educating their future children according to Islamic and Palestinian-Jordanian values. He stressed that a good, Islamic society must begin at home:

[We need] good governance…and good laws. Leave the corruption…Unfortunately, our schools have become playgrounds where not-good ideas are being exchanged between teachers and students and vice versa. This is also a problem…We need to reform corrupt young men into good young men from its roots.

His words are similar to those uttered by Yousra, who stated, “If I want a good society, then I need good people. To attain that, I need good laws built on good principles, good thoughts…[that] fall on the country's leader and anyone or anything that is responsible for someone or something else—such as the father, who's in charge of his child, the law that is responsible for citizens, and the government that is responsible for individuals…”

By properly raising children and impressing upon them correct Islamic principles and values, both believed that Jordanians can gradually and eventually bring about social, religious, and political change despite their corrupt and ineffective government.

Sami’s thoughts regarding the importance of social and religious compatibility were echoed by Nadia, a 35-year-old divorcée. She shared what she had learned from her first marriage:

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72 Following a popular hadith, wealth, lineage, beauty, and piety are often cited as important characteristics one should look for in a wife. In the case of Sami, he was looking for a spouse with “acceptable” looks (attractive), good heart, and piety.

73 Becoming full-time caregiver to an elderly parent is something which many Jordanian women are unlikely to accept, according to Sami.
When I was married I did not look at how he related with me. I did not look at how he treated me. Only that I loved this person and that I will do what he wanted me to do for him. I did not look at…whether he was a suitable person for me or not. It was just selfishness. I was not looking at the problems that were before me. If you don’t understand…

Me: No, I understand. You were speaking about difficulties: what are some of the social difficulties?

N: Social difficulties? I am from a conservative family…from a family with an environment different than his. Even though I am from the country and he is from the country, I am Palestinian, he is Jordanian. They [the Jordanians] have different traditions and customs and we have different traditions and customs. In the end…there are great differences.

Me: What are these differences?

N: They appear to be something simple but they add up. Maybe you can accept them in the beginning but they keep on adding and adding.

Though she was vague on details about these Jordanian-Palestinian cultural differences, she was clear about how she could contribute to future establishment of good society.

Nadia said:

A good society concerns each person…beginning with him/herself and his relation with the family, then with the outside society, and the workplace… If you are righteous, your child will be righteous, the school will be righteous [and] the society will function as if it was a righteous person—without stealing, lying, without all of those things…Good learning and upbringing… It’s a cyclical, continuous project… [that] begins with the family. I am teaching my child the foundations of marriage… First, I will say to her, like I said to you, know your rights and duties…Everything always refers back to religion…this is not shameful. Wrong, right…if the learning teaches you right and wrong you will succeed. So with regard to marriage, I believe that if you reach maturity and are aware of your needs, wants, rights, and duties, then you can choose a person…who can understand [your] special ways. But my role is to teach her about her duties [and] her rights in Islam.

Nadia’s thought processes, based not only on notions of compatibility, nationality, and piety but also on notions of correct civic and political society, are revealing of
contemporary challenges, tensions, and frustrations. They assert particular notions of communal values, normative traditions, and social practices.

Marriage has been re-imagined into an entryway from which individuals and groups can engage in complex and less “dangerous” conversations in semi-private venues—much like coffeehouses or home visits—about the laws, policies, and measures of the state and their effects on everyday lives of citizens. Marriage conversations serve as a figurative space bearing similar transformative potential to Jurgen Habermas’ “rational-critical” space, where members of the society can engage in critical debate about the state’s performance and negotiate for the well-being of the community as a whole (Habermas 1989). As such, the strategies these members choose to employ and the directions they choose to take to realize particular visions of state-society relations must not be casually dismissed as being merely social and individualistic. They can also be political and nationalistic—like grassroots movements that challenge the consolidation of power and wealth in the office of the ruler (and the ruling elite) and advocate group prosperity.

This chapter has been focused around conversations about everyday politics (with concentration on corruption and wāṣṭa) and formal political participation among young people. Honwana and De Boeck states, “the voices, views and visions of young people [in Africa] themselves still wait to be heard and considered. We know remarkably little about them. Children and youth…have often remained our ‘silent others,’ our voiceless enfants terribles” (as cited in Herrera 129). During my time in Amman, I had sought to
better understand youths’ perspectives by analyzing not only the field conversations and observations but also the popular narratives, literature, and expressive cultures that speak of the experiences of the majority middle-class citizens who have been raised by parents who subscribe to the popular (generational) belief that education and hard-work would eventually lead to social adulthood and political participation. However, upon entering and/or graduating the university, these young people find their socio-political system to be saturated by wāṣṭa and political and societal corruption, thus presenting real and significant challenges for accessing national resources, attaining gainful employment, achieving economic independence, and getting married through individual (legitimate) merit and efforts alone. Though they expressed disinclination toward adopting these methods to attain individual and societal success and well-being, their increasing skepticism should not be interpreted as their unwillingness to participate in political activities. Rather, it is indicative of their refusal to become complicit actors in a corrupt socio-political system. It is also indicative of their commitment to forge a gradual and, perhaps, more faithful, less confrontational path toward societal change. Through careful negotiations of the religious, cultural, and financial dimensions of marriage, young people hope to (re)integrate and (re)establish the notions of common good and good society, and bring about religio-political societal transformation.
Chapter 4: Marriage Economics

“Marriage should be more than economics”—The Legend, a young, Iraqi-Jordanian male

"When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half”—popular expression, commonly believed to be a hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik

During the course of conducting fieldwork in Jordan, I heard the expression, “Marriage is half the religion,” uttered multiple times. I first heard this expression in 2007, while studying in Egypt. Since then, I have been curious about the sources and origins of this popular phrase and have pressed Egyptian and Jordanian shabāb alike to share where it came from. However, while they confidently claimed it originated from a hadith, few could point to the actual source and the soundness of this expression. Yet, there is nothing in the Quran or the collection of sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by trusted Muslim scholars Bukhari and Muslim that speaks of marriage as constituting half of the religion. When searching online, there are references to a (weak) hadith, narrated by Anas ibn Malik, claiming to have heard the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) say, "When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half," and to a similar hadith collected by al-
Tirmidhi. Despite the inability to trace the origins and sources of this hadith-turned-popular expression, or perhaps popular belief-turned imagined hadith, what remains certain is the firm belief of many Arabs and Muslims that marriage stands as one of their most sacred religious duties. Marriage is something young males must initiate when they become financially, mentally, and spiritually prepared to assume their position as active members within the society. Failure to fulfill what many consider a religious imperative by the ages of 30-35, among males, and 25-30, among females, rouses suspicions and pity among other members within the communities about the individuals’ mental and physical health.

Unfortunately, due to the harsh socio-economic realities and challenges contemporary youth face in Jordan, middle-class young men often cannot perform their gendered, traditional, and religious responsibilities without familial and communal help. Both familial and societal pressures demand they secure gainful employment after graduating from high school or university and find suitable women (by the ages of 30-35). As one Iraqi-Jordanian young male I spoke with said, the ideal wife is one with whom they can “share [their] way of thinking, [their] soul, [their] mentality, [their] way of enjoying life… [because] at the end of the day, first of all [marriage] is a religious duty.” However, unemployment and widespread poverty combined with the exorbitant housing costs, high material expectations, and the high costs of marriage have made it difficult for young men to bear the majority of the financial costs of weddings and contract timely marriages. As a result of these socio-economic challenges, parents often
prepare for their children’s future weddings following the release of their tawjihi (university entrance examination) results or college graduation.74 Some young Jordanian women, on the other hand, enter the workforce to help increase their chances for marriage and provide some financial relief for their future grooms. The strategies young men and women have undertaken to lead toward marriage challenge the notion of “waithood,” which suggests youths as passively waiting for their situation to change (see discussion in “Marriage Context”).

This chapter explores Jordan’s recent marriage crisis by delving into the everyday lives and concerns of the youth as they negotiate marriage despite current and anticipated socio-economic challenges. The first section describes the socio-economic contexts and challenges faced by youth, generally perceived to be among the main causes for prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood. The second section introduces conversations with youths about the factors, strategies, attitudes, and practices involved in negotiating marriage and adulthood. The third section delves into familial and communal financial interventions designed to enable the youths’ pursuit of marriage as well as their individual and societal goals. Finally, the last section of this chapter examines the vital roles of marriage among youth in the Jordanian community and explores what happens when youths’ efforts fail to produce a “productive” marriage. Conversations with youth regarding their expectations and efforts, combined with cultural narratives that speak of youths’ efforts and sentiments, help to situate my work within the scopes of

74 More well-to-do middle-class families build apartments on the existing building they own and rent them during the intervening years to help supplement the money.
anthropology, ethnography, and cultural studies while challenging existing perceptions of youth as passively waiting for the realization of adulthood, marriage, and good society.

Marriage Context

Marriage has become a problem that cannot be solved… Nevertheless, marriage is one of God’s commands… Unemployment—along with limited, traditional career opportunities—plays an important role in continuing bachelorhood… Unemployment has prevented youth from getting jobs [that can] provide real income [and] bear the burdens of marriage. If the young man finds a job, it is still impossible for him to find adequate, moderately-priced housing [that will] enable him to marry… Young and older girls are maturing without (contracting) marriage due to the high costs of weddings and overpricing… If [this] continues… continuing bachelorhood or «spinsterhood» will become a social phenomenon that will threaten the existence of the family… [and] the society and its system of inherited and prevailing values.—Diana al-Namri (al-Namri 2011)

In the *al-Rai* newspaper, a Jordanian daily published by the government-owned Jordan Press Foundation, Diana al-Namri blamed social and economic challenges, along with high cultural expectations, for perpetuating prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood (2011). Limited employment opportunities, expensive housing, inflation and high living costs, as well as prohibitive wedding expenses have made it challenging for young men to afford the costs of starting new households. Their diminishing social and economic capabilities “threaten the existence of the family… the society and its system of inherited and prevailing values” as young people are prevented from transitioning from childhood into productive and contributing adult members within the
society (al-Namri). al-Namri’s discussions about how these challenges contribute to delayed marriages are similar to the points raised by Diana Singerman (2007) as well as Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Youssef (2009) when discussing the notion of “waithood” in the Middle East and North Africa since the late 2000s. “Waithood” emphasizes the socio-economic realities contributing to prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood and suggests the victimization of Arab youth. al-Namri, on the other hand, blames the Jordanian society for its roles in producing exaggerated wedding expectations and harsh living conditions. Together, they paint youth as passive victims waiting for their socio-economic conditions to improve. However, as we have seen, they can surmount limited prospects and opportunities to attain marriage—a symbol of adulthood and success—through concerted individual and communal efforts.

The notion of “waithood,” first used by Singerman (2007) and Dhillon and Youssef (2009), refers to contemporary youth who could not transition into adulthood and contract marriage. “Waithood” engages with Victor Turner’s concept of liminality, whereby youths are perceived as liminal figures, on the threshold of a new stage in life “assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial,” a period viewed with “ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories” (1967: 95). It initially referred to young people living in liminality in the Middle East and North Africa. However, the term can be used to describe the liminal experiences of youth in other parts of the world. For example, Honwana mentions in West Africa, the term youthman is used to describe youth who cannot successfully transition into adulthood (2013). In Italy,
*bamboccioni* is used to describe bachelors who continue to depend on and live with their parents (Honwana). In Malaysia, “waithood” has been used to refer to the phenomenon of delayed marriages among non-Malays (Nai Peng). In Jordan, “waithood” concerns the *shabāb*, or young people generally between the ages of 18-35, who are moving “from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to independence... [and] making the shift from being recipient of society’s care and services, to becoming contributors to society’s growth and development...” (“National Youth Strategy for Jordan: 2005-2009”). *Shabāb* is a flexible term that can extend to include people over the age of forty if the latter cannot transition into adulthood through attaining employment, economic power, or marriage.

Based on conversations with Jordanian youth and their extended families, young people hoping to resolve “waithood” often need to be involved (and their families before them) in the wedding process well before the engagement and wedding ceremonies. This process follows one of two scenarios: 1) the future groom informs his family of his readiness to marry but has no specific bride in mind; or 2) the individual informs his/her family that s/he is prepared for marriage and has a prospective spouse in mind. Regardless of the scenario, the mother or other family relative would usually ask about the groom’s initial demands. Additional family members may also be involved in this process, as well. When participants were asked to describe their demands, the following hadith was raised in separate focused group and individual conversations: “A woman is

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75 The term, “waithood,” has likewise been used to describe the state of “not being neither here nor there as a country” when talking about Malaysia’s adoption of democracy (Nik Ahmad 2009).
married for four things: her wealth, for her lineage, for her beauty or for her piety. Select the pious, may you be blessed!”76 Most of the male participants agreed they would seek spouses with good morals and education to help raise ethical and educated children. Employment, on the other hand, was considered important by only half of the male participants. One participant explained, “How can women raise good citizens if they are never at home?” While another Palestinian-Jordanian (half-jokingly) mentioned, “American!” as part of his marriage requirements. Following similar lines of conversation with their parents and families, the mother or female relative of the young males would inquire about eligible young women within their familial and communal network. They would also investigate the individual and familial background of these young women to ensure compatibility on various levels (social, economic, religious, attractiveness, and education). If a likely candidate is found, the bride’s family would be contacted for an appropriate time to meet and “drink coffee.” If this initial meeting goes well, there is the potential for a second (or third) visit, this time accompanied by the future groom and other relatives.

If the potential groom’s suit remains agreeable to the bride and her family, the former will go with his parents to ask for her hand, after which informal negotiations will ensure gendered responsibilities and future marital harmony. During these negotiations (representing the greatest sources of stress among male young adults), the groom and his family usually demand to know whether the bride plans to work and/or wear the veil after

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76 The translation for this hadith was found on Sunnah.com. See: http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/364
marriage and childbirth, how much money (if any) the working bride plans to contribute toward wedding preparations and/or household expenditures, what kinds of occupation and working hours are considered acceptable after the marriage, what educational degrees she possesses or plans to possess, as well as what household skills she can offer, among other topics. The bride’s family, on the other hand, typically inquires and makes demands about where the couple will live, what kind of apartment and transportation the groom will provide, what levels of education he possesses or plans to possess, how much income the groom plans to bring into the household, how much money the groom (and his family) can allocate towards bride-wealth (the “mahr”), as well as wedding costs and preparations.

An important part of this intermediate stage involves negotiating the bride-wealth (the “mahr”). Even though Islam imposes no maximum or minimum requirements for the “mahr,” there is often an amount commonly regarded as acceptable among members within the local community. This amount varies according to the age, education, prior marital status, religious affiliation, and social class. The amount also varies according to the individual and familial reputation of the future bride, signaling the prospective groom’s consideration and respect for both the bride’s individual and familial reputation and honor. Muslims living in Jordan negotiate for the “mahr” to be disbursed into two payments: the immediate payment (the “muqaddam”) and the guaranteed payment (the “mu’akhkhar”). The immediate payment is used to purchase the bride’s giswa (the clothes for the engagement and wedding), shabke (gold jewelry worn for the engagement
such as necklace and ring), *talbīsa* (the gold jewelry worn for the wedding) and the costs of the wedding makeup, and/or housing furniture. The guaranteed payment, which is often set at a much higher amount, traditionally comes into play in cases of divorce in order to serve as the final deterrent. Interestingly, many of the male youth interviewed did not mention the “*mu‘akhkhar,*” which leads to the question, is this amount still regarded as materially and contractually significant? Or is it merely symbolic? Since the bride-wealth involves the transferal of wealth between both the husband and the wife and the parents and the new couple, and also communicates respect for the bride’s individual and familial reputation and honor, negotiating (or, at least publicly announcing) a culturally significant amount is seen as a vital aspect of fulfilling familial and societal duty and expectations.

Negotiations regarding the bride-wealth and the future couple’s demands usually end with a series of informal and formal agreements between the parties. The informal agreement between the immediate families is marked by a reading of *al-Fātiha* (a sura from the Qur’an). A week later, the now-symbolic performance of *jāha* takes places, whereby approximately 150 trusted male elders from each family gather to speak for the honor and reputation of the young man and woman to be married. This celebration is followed by a separate engagement party for women and the *katba al-kitāb* (the marriage contract), although the timing of the latter depends on the family and how strict they adhere to religion. Among religious families, the bride’s family may insist on a signed contract before the couple can begin their engagement and go out together in public.
However, it should be noted once the contract is signed, regardless of if/when the formal wedding ceremony will take place, the couple is considered married under Islamic law. Among less religious families, the *katba al-kitāb* may take place a week before the actual wedding “to make sure that the choice they made is the right one.” In the meantime, the couple is free to date each other publicly. Finally, if everything continues to go well, the formal wedding ceremony will take place in a hotel or a wedding hall following a period of several months, or up to a year after the engagement ceremony.\footnote{According to Māhir, since Jordanian and Arab families are so large and the costs of holding a ceremony at a hall or a hotel are so high, extended relatives or neighbors about whom the couple and their families feel less strongly to invite to the actual wedding ceremony are usually invited to eat *mansaf* (a traditional Jordanian and Palestinian dish made of lamb cooked in thin, fermented yogurt sauce and served with rice). By inviting these extended relatives to lunch before or on the wedding day, they reduce the chance of alienating certain segments of their familial and communal network.}

*Bikaffi Tghallo*, a song performed by Kashkash (2012), a musical duo whose presence was gaining popularity among young people and the local music circuit in 2012, gives voice to the challenges confronted by youth who hope to get married after graduating from secondary or higher education.

\begin{verbatim}
I don’t have money in my wallet anymore
A kilo of tomatoes is almost a dinar
Even when we plan to go out
Friday becomes a day to hibernate
How can we live like this?
And now winter comes
and the cold will kill us
My stomach rumbles loudly
Enough with the price increase
A liter of the 95 octane became a dollar
My car is in the garage
I’m too shy (to answer) when anyone ask for a free ride x2
I finished my studies so now it’s my turn
All of my diplomas hang on the wall
\end{verbatim}
The neighbor's sitting around without a job  
He's smoking at the house  
So don't increase the cigarette prices  
Or Amman will be destroyed  
He is tired from his debt  
The only thing left is to increase the price of shit  
Enough with the price increase  
A liter of the 95 octane became a dollar  
My car is in the garage  
I’m too shy (to answer) if anyone ask for a free ride x2

Artist: Kashkash

Title: “Bikaffi Tghallo,” (Enough with the price increase),  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c6H2rKITPA

The unknown narrator, like many young people living in Jordan, faced pressing issues such as poverty, high living costs, lack of marketable skills, expansive leisure time, and unemployment after graduation. Whatever money he has available is spent on cigarettes to help allay anger and frustration that the narrator feels as he cannot afford basic necessities such as heating and food, much less transportation. Bikaffi Tghallo—performed around the time when Jordan’s fuel subsidies were reduced to meet the requirements for the $2 billion IMF loan resulted in soaring energy costs (a 50% increase to cooking, heating, and car gas prices)—also implies that even if young people qualify for employment, they likely cannot afford to pay the costs of transportation necessary to apply for work or attend interviews (Kashkash 2012; "Jordan's Starved Economy").

Thus, it was not surprising to find young people rise in protest when the Jordanian

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78 Their grievances brought youth to the streets to protest, thus triggering demonstrations in Amman, Irbid, Ma’ān and Karak.
government moved to cut fuel subsidies and increase fuel prices in 2012. Even though King Abdullah was quick to halt the move, my young informants confided they suspected this to be a temporary measure and braced themselves for future government retreat from other subsidies—such as bread. The continuing reduction in subsidies to meet foreign economic demands, followed by rising costs of living and basic necessities over the years has been especially hard for those whose families live under the poverty level of USD 2.6 a day (13% of the population) and spend less than the minimum daily middle class income of USD 5.6, or 4 JOD (51% of the population). When “There isn't any more work/There's no work left, dude,” young people find it difficult to fulfill cultural and religious expectations for marriage and social adulthood (Tabbaa; Bzour).

Most of the participants I interviewed pointed to the high costs of living and housing as one of the main obstacles to timely marriages. Of those interviewed, many were already working part-time or full-time in the private sector with an average monthly income range of 300-500 JOD. Before the men can propose marriage to their potential brides, they need to demonstrate their financial capability for future housing or monthly rent (the latter running approximately 200-300 JOD for an average apartment in East Amman) and everyday living. An article in *ad-Dustour* reported the costs of purchasing or renting land and apartment to be comparable to two-thirds of the salary of low-income employee in 2005 (“Inti’āsh al-Sūq al-Khalijyya”). When asked about housing issues,

79 Young people fear impending riot reminiscent of the devastating 1996 bread riots. 
80 This is the average salary for those living in Amman, based on daily conversations with Jordanians working at the Qasid Language Institute. The average monthly income for Jordan, derived from the Gross National Income (for 2011) provided by the United Nations, is $383.00. (See http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=JORDAN)
many of the participants blamed the high costs of rent on the settlement of Iraqi expatriates who came after the US-led invasion of Iraq. They also pointed to the real estate ventures of Gulf citizens who saw Jordan as haven from the harsh summers and politico-religious climate of their homeland. A few even blamed Syrian refugees who fled refugee camps to settle in urban neighborhoods inside Jordan. Regardless of who was or was not to blame, these young participants who were living in Amman at the time, admitted they would rather rent than purchase apartments for their future brides, as they could not afford to purchase apartments. The few who commuted from rural areas shared they were planning to live with their brides in their familial homes.

Despite housing and socio-economic difficulties, young people seemed unbowed—and even defiant—toward existing local pressures. They were proud of what they accomplished so far and claimed their ability to withstand contemporary challenges as sign of their overall maturity and readiness to transition into social adulthood. One of the participants explained:

“What do I mean by ‘pressure’? Pressure is the family, or the government, for example. Pressure is expenses. Pressure is one’s studies. [These are] some societal pressures. Amongst all these pressure, can he still succeed? Or does he try to run away? If he tries to run away—if things don’t work out for him and he tries to run, it means that he’s still not an adult. What does handling pressure mean? It means that I am able to overcome this stage successfully so we consider him an adult [since he can] meet basic living needs and pursue happiness.

The participant believes if the individual cannot demonstrate that s/he can handle these pressures, then s/he will likely not be able to successfully manage their end of the marital negotiations, and bear the stresses of marriage. According to Mahmoud, these pressures
can even be interpreted as a form of societal examination to determine whether the person is “ready for marriage. This means that the person can handle material, mental, and social concerns. These are the things that will determine when the marriage will take place.” Sami agreed, adding, “After all, it is a great responsibility to start a family. I mean, I become a man [when] I want to raise a family. The responsibilities will only grow as the family grows.” Even though these young male participants expressed little hesitance about taking on the myriad difficulties in attaining marriage and social adulthood, they still believed contemporary Islamic marriage practices can focus less on the economic aspect and more on its religious aspect as a means to practice piety and serve the community.

Overpricing Marriage

Young and older girls are maturing without (contracting) marriage because of the high costs of weddings and overpricing by some parents insisting on certain wedding and furniture demands, which exceed the capacity and wages of most young people...Thus, society flounders between customs and traditions and notions of civilization. Worn habits, such as the insistence of some fathers or mothers not to contract marriage for young daughters before their older [sisters], and their insistence on the wedding venue and ceremony to be no less than those of the bride’s sisters, or even her friend or neighbor, also contributed to the increasing rate of spinsterhood. Some young women and their parents desire fantastical wedding ceremonies about which people will talk. This is unfortunately what we find … due to some families’ lack of understanding about modern economic transformations and its accompanying crises and social changes. Some families are still making difficult demands from whoever proposes marriage to their daughters. Based on this trend, the
problem of spinsterhood is transformed into a purely material problem (al-Namri).

You see, the situation for everyone is very bad. No money, no work, the situation is very, very deplorable... [Someone] who is 34 years might want to get married...but the situation is very bad. In the past, [he] could marry two, three, or four and that is normal (“Ra’ī Shārī”).

There are many reasons: increasing bride-wealth, unemployment...My opinion is for women’s families, it is not necessary for young men to...or it’s difficult to prepare for the house, car, bride-wealth ... [They] are expensive! My opinion for men is not to respond to the demands for marriage even if [their] condition is effective (“Ra’ī Shārī”).

In the letter published by al-Rai, al-Namri blamed the material demands of women and their families for “threaten[ing] the existence of the family... [and] the society and its system of inherited and prevailing values.” The author believed Jordanian brides and their families’ insistence on extravagant social and economic features of marriage compounded the already harsh conditions wrought by “economic transformations and its accompanying crises and social changes.” Her criticisms regarding how these continuing high demands made it even more difficult for young men to afford the wedding and household costs, thus, contributing to delayed marriages and prolonged bachelorhood and spinsterhood, echo another similar debate that took place in Egypt in the early 1900s (Kholoussy). While unrealistic expectations by women and their families certainly still exist, the role cultural expectations play in defining what features and compromises women can and cannot accept to avoid shame and be able to continue navigating everyday social relations, and the efforts women make to facilitate marriage, need be given greater attention.
Young women are often blamed for adding to young males’ difficulties in contracting timely marriages. *Enta Nasibi* (“You Are My Destiny”), another song by Kashkash, pokes fun at public perceptions of young women’s material demands (Kashkash 24 February 2014):

Did you see the guy hanging around in the circle driving the BMX 5? The one talking on his mobile—his looks pleases me

We must marry and have four kids
Live far from your family, you are my destiny!

Look we haven’t been introduced but ask for my hand [anyway] The story’s well known that you are my destiny x2

Mama says, “Enough!”
She said to me, “Look at your younger sister, she’s married before you
You need to lose some weight and change your looks into Nancy81

Kusa…Mansaf…flowers, a dress, a veil, a ring, and jewelry The wedding, trills, and the contract

Like the narrator of the song, most of the young women interviewed and observed generally expected to live far from their husbands’ families. They sought potential spouses who could afford to start a family, provide housing, and contribute monetarily and materially toward socially acceptable engagement and wedding ceremonies (preferably held in wedding halls)—a BMX 5 was never mentioned as part of such arrangement. Yousra remarked the following regarding young women’s wedding demands:

81 Nancy Ajram, a Lebanese pop singer, is extremely popular among Arabs.
Some women compare themselves to friends and other family members…and ask for the same amount as them even if the groom is not rich; Some of them fear that they might separate in the future, so it might be a form of financial security; …Some girls [think] that if they get the groom to pay as much as she likes, than it is a sign of dominance and power. She can ask him for anything later…Too much pressure from media and society to have the perfect house, dress, party…etc.

Whatever the case—whether it is security, self-esteem, dominance, power, or familial and societal pressures—young women’s material demands are described by Mahmoud as having originated from “what’s called qualification. The religious origin of the term, “kifā’a.” [or] qualification, is that every Muslim male must be qualified for every Muslim female.” In practice, contemporary youths’ notions and imaginations about marriage are regularly criticized as being related more to economics than to “kifā’a”: “If someone has money, it’s ‘okay’, and if he doesn’t have money it’s not okay,” said a young Palestinian-Jordanian who preferred to be anonymous.

But the material demands of young Jordanians are not based solely on economic considerations. Young women participants and their families insisted they make high marital demands for fear of communal talks about the wealth, social statuses, honor, and respectability of their families. If they set their demands too high, many people might wonder what caused the change in fortune. Some might be impressed. Meanwhile, others might consider them pretentious and wasteful. If they set their demands too low, community members might wonder about what caused the fall of the family’s fortune, or

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82 Women’s marital demands are influenced by the inherited Islamic notions of “kifā’a” (or “tanāṣub”), which considers social, economic, and religious compatibility (or comparability) as prerequisites for marital harmony.
what caused the parental disregard. To avoid unnecessary talks, young women and their families therefore need to be continually aware of changing marriage trends and standards. A male Palestinian-Jordanian participant acknowledged correlation between women’s high demands and fiscal expenditures and the growing censure among the male population. He states:

J2: Let me tell you something… Simply put, we talk. We all talk nice theoretical speech [about the need for women to lower marriage costs and demands]… but the idea is that it’s a matter of custom. The meaning is as follows: if someone didn’t do it—we have the matter of people gossiping. It’s very important, you can’t deny it. So if I didn’t produce a good wedding, the result will be, “why didn’t you have a good wedding?” Because [I’m] stingy…

J: Because you don’t have money.

J2: … [B]ecause the girls’ parents “threw away their daughter” [they gave her to anyone]

J: They want to marry her off in order to get rid of her.

If the accoutrements of wedding can raise such immediate judgments about the bride and her individual and familial honor, worth, and reputation, they can conversely affect future relations between the young couples and other members of the community. This is especially true for communities that function on wāṣṭa (social connections and patronage) in order to ably function in everyday lives.

Despite the common rhetoric of women burdening men with extravagant demands they must solely bear, the young women with whom I spoke appeared quite aware of contemporary socio-economic challenges and were prepared to assume a greater role in the marriage process. Four were pursuing bachelor’s degrees in nearby colleges and
universities. Following graduation, they anticipated finding employment in order to facilitate the costs of marriage and to pursue their careers. Nadia, the 35-year-old divorcée previously mentioned in Chapter 3, talked about her past experiences and preparations for marriage. The following represents a small slice of our almost hour-long conversation regarding the process:

Me: How old were you when you got married?

Divorcee: I was 29 years old...For us, in our society, (the age) when I got married, 29, is very old. For us here, 24, 23, this is the age of marriage [for women]. Maybe after university graduation, you marry. But not me. I was working....

Me: What happened in your experience?

D: My experience was different. I knew him from work. I said to my mother, I want to marry. We want this...We want to marry. I told my mother, “There is someone who wants to marry me.”

Me: Based on your experience, how much did each step toward marriage costs? Do you remember?

D: I think that the *mahr* was 2000 JOD—we call that the *muqaddam*. The *muakhkhar* was 3000 JOD. But really, he did not give me anything...I did not want anything. I worked for what I needed. I had thought that his money was not mine and we agreed on this. I wanted to marry this man so the money that I gave him was more than what he had. The engagement party was around 1000 JOD, and I took that after the divorce. He did not have to pay for anything except for the bedroom [furniture]. I even bought the wedding clothes! I bought the gold jewelry—not Arab gold, but Russian gold. It is not of the same quality...Except for the bedroom furniture, we [my family and I] did not require anything from him. We were not demanding...Economic circumstances are difficult here, with the unemployment and [high] rent. Housing, rent, and food. There's a lot of pressure and stress. Maybe a person could manage with such beginning but, usually, the marriage begins with a debt. Many people begin their marriage with a lot of debt, which leads to problems and difficulties that the couple then has to face. I was surprised to find, after the wedding, that
he had a debt of 8000 JOD for throwing a separate lunch party: something I was not previously made aware.

Me: Did he pay the bride-wealth?

D: He did not…I did not take the [advanced] bride-wealth…I did not take [it]. The bride-wealth is [customarily] meant for clothes, gold jewelry, but I did not buy [Arab] gold and I bought my gown with my own wage…I was surprised, after the wedding, that he had a large debt. We then paid for the engagement party together. We threw a small [wedding] party. The clothing I wore was something I bought so it cost him nothing—not even the make-up. I paid for that too. He just paid for the hall, dessert, and Pepsi. The engagement party came to approximately 1000 JOD.

Me: What do you consider to be the average costs for Jordanian weddings?

D: Now? The average is…maybe 10000 JOD. Some girls want a lot of things but I did not ask for these things…

Me: So…how do Jordanians overcome this [financial challenge]?

D: They don't marry…or they go in debt…They ask for help from siblings, take out a loan, and go into debt [as] it is difficult for a person to possess 10000 JOD and [get married] at 25-30 years of age without loan or family help.

Based on this conversation, the bride performed what she considered essential components for the ritual of marriage: the bride-wealth, the marriage contract, and the engagement and wedding parties. Much of these appeared to be largely symbolic as her husband contributed only 1000 JOD of the 3000 JOD for the guaranteed payment. He offered nothing for the advanced bride-wealth, which was supposed to help cover the costs wedding attire, jewelry, make-up, etc. He was not even required to pay the costs for the wedding party. She later related that there were other culturally expected features she either overlooked or contributed in light of contemporary challenges in Amman—
including mansaf, a large wedding party at a hall or hotel, housing (they went to live at his familial house), and Arab (high-quality) jewelry. The fact that she was her father had long passed away may help to explain the lack of male familial presence to protect her material interests, which consequently led to the unpleasant discovery of 8000 JOD worth of debt. Even if her experiences may not have been representative of the local marital norms and practices, her narrative still provides insights into how women participate in the marriage process and contribute toward the marriage costs.

Young women’s material demands need to be seen alongside their contributions and their consideration for what the society considers socially acceptable. Their participation in and material contributions to the marriage process need to be further studied to provide counter narratives to the familiar rhetoric about their excessive marital demands. Such narratives would reveal other ways young women have contributed, what areas they believe they can and cannot contribute, and how they regard their changing roles in this process. Young women’s thoughts, sentiments, and motivations are especially important since they have a vested interest in making sure the wedding takes place without devastating effects to present and future individual and familial reputation, honor, social statuses, and social relations. The next section delves into greater details about the ways through which young couples attempt to solve the marriage economics and start a family.
“But from Where Will the Money Come?”

I am a young Arab man  
I live in an Arab land  
I talk with my friends in Arabic  
I bank with the Arab Bank  
I eat my Arab shawarma  
I have a round Arab belly  
I like the Arab belly dance  
even my looks are Arabic

I want to live like everyone else  
I want to hook up with a beautiful girl  
I went and “poked” her on Facebook  
Shame on her, she added me to the block list.  
First time I tried to take her out on a date  
but she stood me up so I stayed at my "bayt" [house]  
She knew I don’t have a car

Soon I’ll be begging by the traffic lights  
I want to marry and start a "bayt" [household]  
Hang pictures of my kids up on the wall  
Attend a game at Barcelona  
But from where will this money come?

I went to the Arab Bank  
I took out a loan for Arab young men  
I threw the biggest Arab wedding party  
and invited half of the Arab population  
I will remain an Arab man  
I’ll be eating my Arabic food  
I love Arab belly dance  
Everything about me is Arabic

Artist: Humam Ammari and Nadim Masr

Title: “Ana Shāb ‘Arabī” (I Am an Arab Young Man)\textsuperscript{83}

Music Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUdDYo4mI8U

Even though the notion of “waithood” suggests a sense of passivity, of just waiting for good employment, decent wages, affordable housing, and better living conditions to

\textsuperscript{83} This song also appeared as part of the Arab Bank Commercial: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR1GHZTFAh0&feature=youtu.be
occur, my conversations with Jordanian youth revealed, as I’ve said previously, that they are not merely waiting for improved conditions to take place. On the contrary, these *shabāb* were proactively working toward attaining social adulthood while attempting to negotiate piety, wealth, and individual and cultural objectives. When pressed to answer, “From where will [the] money come [to pay for the wedding]?” in order to attain social adulthood, young participants who first answered with, “Allah bsahhal,” or, “God facilitates,” soon voiced a much more complex process involving both individual and group efforts as well as familial and communal networking. This further demonstrated general perceptions of young males as sole financial contributor for marriages and of youth as merely “generation in waiting.”

My query about marriage economics led me to Mahmoud, briefly mentioned earlier, whose long years of careful saving and preparation for wedding was finally coming to a close. I initially came to know Mahmoud who helped me with my technical problems during one of my daily struggles with the less-than-optimal internet speed and data coverage, and unpredictable electrical surge within the capital city. When he found out from one of our mutual friends about my interests in studying Jordanian marriages, he volunteered to talk about his experiences in the marriage process (the first of several hour-long sessions), believing it important I understand why young people would work hard for years to attain marriage. He explained, “[M]arriage is the continuation of life and is a Prophetic teaching. Based on the religion [Islam], people become ready for marriage when they are ready mentally and financially. At that point, it becomes their
responsibility to get married. The religion decrees that people get married… [I]t doesn’t ask, it mandates marriage for people.” Keeping in mind the multiple social and economic variables at play—average monthly income between 300-500 JOD,\(^{84}\) monthly rent going for 200-300 JOD, domestic taxes ranking among the highest not only regionally but internationally, and high costs of living disproportionate to their stagnant income—I was curious to learn about the costs distribution in traditional marriage process and the ways Mahmoud went about preparing for these costs:

Me: Can you share how much you are paying for the various components of marriage?

Mahmoud: For each component or total?

Me: If possible, I would like to know the [cost] distribution.

Mahmoud: Alright. Like I told you, the *mahr* was average, around 3000-5000 JOD. …When it comes to the *mahr*, its average according to society is now 3000-5000 JOD paid in cash, known as the muqaddam. This concerns the gold, cash, and clothes that she needs to prepare herself for marriage. This is the first portion. What follows this amount is called the "muakhkhar." This is paid according to the society and not the religion. This is what will be paid if a divorce occurs [as] a debt to her. She can ask for it whenever she wants. But, normally, this is left for when there's a problem and a divorce would separate us…I must then pay her 10000 JOD for muqaddam and muakhkhar: 3000 JOD for gold, 2000 JOD for cash and clothes, totaling now to 5000 JOD [for the *muqaddam*]. The rest of the 5000 will be the muakhkhar…

Me: How much did you end up paying for the engagement party?

Mahmoud: … [W]e are talking about our condition now. I rented an apartment. After I rented it, I wanted some household furniture. So I'm now at the stage of buying no less than 5000 JOD for furniture that I want

\(^{84}\)This figure is based on conversations with the local population and the website, “numbeo.”
for this residence. The furniture, preparation, and kitchen appliances cost approximately 5000 JOD. I will be paying monthly rents...every year...The average is 250 JOD a month for rental... [This is for] an apartment, not a house! ...This is if it is located in a regular, common, place, and not an area like this, in Eastern Amman. It is more expensive in Western Amman... I will be paying for all of this! The girl will pay nothing...That's a lot. I will pay for everything ...There are those who will pay for a hall and those who will pay for a hotel. I took the hall and paid 1000 JOD. The engagement costs me 700 JOD, the wedding costs me 1000 JOD. Of course, the medium amount is 1500 JOD; these are for the halls! For the hotels, the average cost is 3000-4000JOD... Food is not found in all of the wedding parties. For example, in (my) wedding, there will be the juice and cake only. [Otherwise,] it would be more expensive...I want a honeymoon [costing] 1000 JOD...The costs of the wedding from the engagement party to the wedding, including the honeymoon, totals to 15000 JOD...This does not include the costs of housing! This is for the wedding only.

Me: And you consider these to be the average costs?

Mahmoud: Yes. I have been working since the age of 23 and I have been working for 6 years. Now, I can get married. The portion that I pay is small. [This was later revealed to be 5000 JOD.] The bigger portion will be paid by my family. Because they can help me. Another individual may not have anyone to help [him]; thus, he must depend on himself to pay everything. I hear that a lot of people seek loans from banks.

Mahmoud considered himself (rather than his future bride) responsible for the costs of marriage. He declared, “I will pay for everything,” when, in fact, the years of saving his hard-earned monthly income (approximately 500-600 JOD) produced only one-third of the entire costs of the wedding (which he considered to be average). A focused group discussion with another group of seven 20-30 year-olds (two still in universities, three unemployed, and two employed), representing various walks of the Jordanian middle-

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85 Shmeisani was a popular commerce and entertainment site in the 1980s-90s. It is now undergoing a state of decline as middle class and rich Jordanians flock to wealthier neighborhoods in Abdoun, Deir Ghbar and so on.
class, revealed that they understood to what lengths they needed to work to afford the average costs of marriage in Amman.

S: How many years do you expect to work in order to pay all of the expenses?

J: How many years do you have to work? [He repeated my question.] Five or six years

J2: For me, it depends on the site, Chances.com, on whether it works out or not. (*Laughter*)

J1: You cannot define a specific number because there are people who leave one job and go to another. You can’t... We’re talking about a college student who studied and graduated and worked right after [that]. Now, there are also people who, sorry, they don’t study in the university or who don’t finish their studies before they work. For them, you may find that their marriage comes early. I mean, you’ll find someone who’s 22 or 23 years old getting married...

J: You know [name omitted], the calculation isn’t going to work with the solution, *because how the Jordanian guy gets married in the end, no one in the world knows*. (Uncomfortable laughter). We can’t sit here talking about the solution. If [only] we knew the solution...

S: That’s what I would like to know—the economics. How...?


Like Mahmoud, these participants realized long hours and years of working in their chosen or assigned career paths would likely fall short of meeting the entire or majority costs of marriage. They understood an important venture such as marriage cannot occur largely through their individual efforts alone (unless they were able to obtain decent wages through employment in the Gulf countries) and, in fact, will involve the concerted efforts of their families and communities to help transform into reality. In the case of
Mahmoud, understanding that members of his family and community would and could help him attain social adulthood and piety did not mean he worked any less nor relaxed in his efforts—in fact, six years of hard work was required to gather a significant portion of the monetary components needed to afford the cultural trappings demanded of marriage. Their combined narratives helped explain the meaning of the popular expression, “Allah bsahhal,” or, “God facilitates,” which I came to understand to mean the fervent hope and belief marriage can be attained through individual and communal efforts, regardless of the lack of state institutions and harsh socio-economic conditions.

The same focused group discussion mentioned above delved into parental, familial, and communal contributions to marriage and how they are affected by youths’ decisions to attain timely or delayed marriages. Mediated and emboldened by our common contact and the informal public location (a café), the group—composed of rural and urban, conservative and liberal, employed and non-employed, engaged and not-engaged young Palestinian-Jordanian males—did not shy away from making jokes, offering sarcasm, and pressing one another to give thorough, realistic, and accessible answers relating to how local marital practices offer spaces for the community to extend socially acceptable material support to youth.

J: Now, there’s a respectable side other than the word “loans,” and this is a truth amongst most Jordanian guys, there’s the matter of help from the parents. This is prevalent.

[Multiple agreements saying, “Exactly. Yeah yeah.”]
J1: **Faz’āt.** We have faz’āt. [The colloquial term, reflecting the rural background of the speaker, resembles a word in Iraqi slang, meaning, everyone participates or chips in.]

J2: She’s not going to know that word.

J: We want to convert our loans into grants, you know what I mean? Not a loan, a grant. [I think this refers to their general preference against bank loans.] In the end, his parents can help him especially [if] the expenditures are not going to be paid in installments: the expenses for which he has to pay cash. Like the wedding hall, or the wedding itself.

J1: In the wedding, there’s also something called **nugūt.** From this **nugūt,** you collect around 4000 to 5000 dinars and it covers the expenses you’ve paid.

J1: Correct. Okay? We have faz’āt? What does this mean? It means that people participate with you. For example, I speak with someone—and maybe [name omitted] will help me out—and he will support me. It’s like savings cooperatives (*jamʿiyyāt*).

J2: Let me tell her something. When we say goodbye to the groom at the end of the wedding, everyone gives him money. It varies - this is what we call nugūt [or nuqūt, referring to cash gifts given at wedding to help couples with wedding costs.] [They range] from 20 dinars to 100 dinars [per male guest], depending on his circumstances. Depending on his financial position. …

J1: And after the wedding, we have another custom that if you go and visit the newlywed couple the first day, you should bring with you, for example, maybe a set, or I don’t know, a table, plates, chairs… Things like that.

[Murmur and laughter around the coffee table]

J2: We always tell them to *bring māddi, but don’t bring balādi.* [Perhaps he means here to bring something material rather than something common—or *shaʾbi*—which may be less valuable or more symbolic than material. But that is a guess having never heard this expression before.]

S: And usually how much do the parents help with the expenses of the marriage?
J1: It depends. Let me tell you something. The matter [is not] simple –

J2: You can’t define it specifically.

J1: You can’t define [parental contribution] to a single number, you understand? Of course, if someone, as soon as he graduates from college, insists that he wants to get married, the parents are going to pay 100 percent. After 4 or 5 years, this may drop to 50%, depending on his work and his income. There’s not a specific percentage. But for me, at least, you might say that my parents will help with around 50% [of the costs].

The conversation touched on the connection between education and early marriages. They mentioned early marriages generally occur among Jordanians who decide against pursuing higher education. Young people also pursue early marriages during (or not long after) their pursuit of higher education, though with the understanding parents would play greater roles in facilitating the material and fiscal components for marriage. One of the participants mentioned, “If someone, as soon as he graduates from college, insists that he wants to get married, the parents are going to pay 100 percent. After 4 or 5 years, this [the parental contribution] may drop to 50%, depending on his work and his income.” Early marriage therefore means greater parental contribution toward the marriage costs. Regardless of whether young citizens and residents entered the workforce immediately after secondary school, during their undergraduate studies at the university, or after attaining their bachelor’s degree, they expect familial and communal contribution to a certain (and often large) extent.

When two of the participants voiced their extreme reluctance toward accepting financial assistance from family and the community, one of the participants in the process
of preparing for marriage, said, “Now, you don’t want to. You don’t want to, but they’re going to pay. ... And you’re going to be okay with it. This [act of rejecting financial assistance] is a nice stance, and it deserves respect, but we’re talking about the reality of the community...it’s really nice that one would depend upon himself 100%, but... you can’t. And it’s like a gift...” Interestingly, while there seemed to be reluctance toward accepting material assistance from parents, there was little hesitance about accepting help from friends, relatives, and neighbors—especially within existing marital practices and rituals. *Nuqūt*, for example, expects guests to leave money with the couple or their families to assist with wedding costs. *Faz’at* refers to youths’ solicitation of material assistance from their familial and communal network. The popular expression, “*bring māddī, but don’t bring balādī,*” even specifies what guests need to bring to help improve the lives of the newly married couple. Of these practices, *faz’at*, especially, suggests youth not only save their hard-earned money through work, they also play more active roles (to a greater or lesser degree) in requesting assistance from the community. Young participants explained they were more amenable to accepting these kinds of financial and material assistance because they expect to reciprocate such aid and generosity in the future.

A conversation with Sami, the 28-year-old, university-educated, Palestinian-Jordanian first introduced in Chapter 3, revealed young people turn to informal savings cooperatives to help bolster individual savings and familial and communal support. Sami
was thankful his family and friends were able to help him through payment of *nuqūt*. He was similarly grateful to his future wife who “just wants [his] house furniture” and her family who “is really nice to [him]” and made little material demands. Through their help and compromises, Sami would end up paying only 7500 JOD (compared to 15000 JOD) since he already owned and was living in his familial house with his mother (as her caregiver). Without familial and communal help, without his future wife’s agreement to forego much of the expenses involved in today’s customary weddings in Jordan—lavish engagement and wedding ceremonies in big halls, possible late-night soirees at the bride’s or groom’s house, and a new, furnished apartment or house—and without participation in communal collectives, Sami would have had a much harder time gathering the material and financial resources for marriage.

Despite his family’s assistance, and despite having worked since the age of 23, Sami was still experiencing difficulties in meeting his living needs and was concerned that he might be unable to afford a proper marriage. When asked, “From where will [the] money come [to pay for the wedding]?” Sami expressed grave anxieties similar to other Jordanian male youths with whom I spoke. They, too, were concerned about the rising costs of *mahr*, weddings, and household preparations (approximately 10000-15000 JOD overall). With a monthly income in the 300-500 JOD bracket (the average income in Amman), and with an elderly mother depending on him as primary caregiver, Sami felt

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86 Sami explained, *nuqūt* is “what friends, family, relatives, and neighbors would give to the groom to help meet the costs of the marriage. Friends would give 5-10 JOD; siblings may give 200; an uncle may give 300 at the wedding.”

87 See footnote 8
it necessary to participate in multiple savings cooperatives (*jam`iyyāt*) to meet his living needs and still afford marriage.\(^{88}\) Since 2010, he has been a member of two cooperatives.

He shared:

> For example, I just took 4000 JOD from a *jam`iyya* that I participated in since 2010 and 2000 JOD from another *jam`iyya* that I got into in 2012: both adding to 6000 JOD. Not much remains (to pay for the wedding); so, the wedding gets paid in increments. 200 JOD comes out each month from my wage to go towards the *jam`iyya*. In my *jam`iyya*, there are 24 people so if each pay 100 JOD, someone will get 2400 JOD and, if we pay 200 JOD, we will get 4800 JOD. It is important that I pay into this. Even so, I have had to ask my family and friends for “nuqūṭ” due to the high financial costs of weddings and *mahr*.

Sami successfully gathered the large sum needed to purchase household furniture, appliances, and the advanced bride-wealth (which is used to pay for gold jewelry, make-up, and the engagement and wedding gowns, among others) through the help of other members in the savings cooperatives. Their help meant he could afford to rely less on his married, older siblings, close friends, and extended relatives to help meet wedding costs.

His experiences support the findings by Singerman (1995), who noted the marginalization of the Egyptian *sha`b* (popular classes) from formal social, economic, and/or political channels did not mean they must avoid pursuing their goals, but rather they needed to pursue alternative and informal ways to achieve their objectives. For the *shabāb* living in Jordan, state institutions (unlike their counterparts in the United Arab Emirates) provided little help with preparing for social and economic problems that come with the forming and sustaining a family. Sami, Mahmoud, and Māhir, among others,

\(^{88}\) Sami explained that he initially became acquainted with and participated in informal financial or savings cooperative at the age of 23, when he needed to purchase a car after college graduation.
laughed with great incredulity when I inquired about existing government services such as a Marriage Fund to help improve the marital conditions of youths.\(^8^9\) They were, however, quite aware of loans available through banks and charitable organizations, though they were reluctant to apply for fear of accruing interests and of defaulting on payments.

Field conversations about marriage economics and strategies with Jordanian youth sometimes ventured to unexpected and uncomfortable directions on strategies, behaviors, practices, and cultural stereotypes relating to marriage. During one of the group discussions, two of the participants aggressively attempted to draw me into a debate on American stereotypes of Arab-Islamic marital cultures—specifically, polygamous marriages—because they thought that I was Christian (generally assumed to be the religion of most Americans). They compared the American culture of casual dating and sexual practices (as portrayed in the media and online) to Arab-Islamic practices of polygamous marriages and declared their own cultures to be far more responsible for offering better protection to women and children. This conversation, which slowly moved to allow my input on familial religious affiliation, gradually led to discussions about the potential benefits of marrying foreigners as alternative means to help reduce marriage costs.

\(J: \textit{(laughter)}\) Seriously, there’s no other way. Either you travel to Saudi Arabia [for work], or you marry a girl who has American citizenship. \(\textit{(laughter)}\)

\(^{8^9}\) The United Arab Emirates established a marital fund to help provide financial, material, and counselling services to citizens.
J2: I have something that will help with all of that, because you don’t have any expenditure. You can marry an Indian girl, because the costs of the wedding are all on her.

J: Egyptians too. *(Multiple people agreed here)*

J2: Egyptians are half and half, yeah.

J: Egyptians will give you all of the furniture…My love also has to have American citizenship. *(laughter)*

Even as they laughed about local stereotypes regarding foreign women, they were serious about their willingness to marry non-Jordanians if employment in Saudi Arabia failed to materialize and if such a decision would enable marriage. Americans, they explained, are considered to be viable brides since they hold different (lower) expectations about wedding and household financial responsibilities. Egyptian women also make good brides since they traditionally contribute to the fiscal and material preparations for marriage (albeit a smaller portion) alongside men. Indian women are seen as another viable option as they are believed to assume the bulk of the wedding costs. (I am uncertain as to what degree the last stereotype holds true since the Jordanians I had met who employed South and Southeast Asian domestic workers had few intimate conversations with them.)

Beyond these nationalities, there was growing popularity among young Jordanian men to marry Syrian refugee brides. I had heard from Jordanian males the cost can drop as low as 100 JOD (USD 150) to marry Syrian young women. Syrian refugee parents expect little in terms of *mahr*, housing, furnishing, and wedding compared to Jordanian
parents (“JORDAN: Early Marriage”; Sweis; “A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan in 2014”). They are more concerned about providing their daughters with protection from the threats of sexual harassment and violence, and escaping from the squalor of refugee camps. By marrying into Jordanian families, Syrian young women can look forward to beginning new lives in their host country as well. If they possess legal documents, they can even apply to attain Jordanian citizenship in the future. Unfortunately, current difficulties with obtaining necessary legal documents from the Syrian embassy meant many marriages go unregistered with the shari’a court in Jordan. This has resulted in the practices of ‘urfi’ (unregistered) marriages in the refugee camps, which, in turn, can lead to a growing population of nationless and dispossessed children (“JORDAN: Early Marriage”).

For young Jordanian women, the recent Syrian settlement meant increased competition in the marriage market. Young female Jordanian citizens and residents worried about the low financial and material demands among Syrian young women and their families. They feared for their (in)ability to leave familial home, fulfill “half of the religion” and become mothers. When I asked about stories they have heard pertaining to Jordanian marriages with Syrians, one confirmed, “It’s really common for Jordanians to

90 While at a public lecture, I heard a narrative about a Jordanian couple who visited a refugee camp to purchase warm winter clothing for their children. When the couple arrived, the wife went in search of coat vendors. The husband in the meantime went to talk to an older salesman, who was being helped by his daughters. The latter offered to sell him coats at a good price. The husband agreed. When his wife returned to the car, she found three young women seated in the back of the car, wearing and carrying winter clothing. Her husband told her, “You said that you wanted coats. The coats come with them. Meet my new wives.” Even though I presumed that this was a fictional narrative told to communicate the desperation of Syrian fathers to marry their daughters at a young age, coupled with the financial hardships experienced by Jordanians, it nevertheless conveyed the ease of contracting marriages with Syrian women in refugee camps.
marry Syrians because it is cheaper. You can just pay 100 JOD (USD 150). You can just go to the refugee camp because they need Jordanians [husbands] to sponsor [their citizenship]. So the family won’t ask for much. The requirements are not so strict.” The lack of requirements in ‘urfi (unregistered) marriage is generally perceived as dangerous because it leaves the potential bride (and potential her offspring) vulnerable in cases of divorce. The offspring, especially, might be regarded as illegitimate and non-citizens with little to no rights to social services, healthcare, or education without the necessary legal papers to prove citizenship.

Figure 19: A picture depicting issues surrounding Syrian refugee marriages—lack of marital consent, the lack of education consigning them to a cycle of poverty, and potential death that could be caused by early childbirth (“Too Young to Wed”).
In the end, young people contract marriage for practical and biological reasons just as much as communal pressures and piety. One of the participants said,

No, I will get married, honestly, because I will not be able to take it anymore. I’m going to be frank with you guys, I want to get married to take relieve my instinctual [sexual] needs. That’s why I will get married. [But] I don’t have any money [currently]. I will not get married because of “her religion” as we said and because of the Prophet and his teachings. [When we say] that kind of talk, we’re laughing at ourselves [kidding ourselves]. Our entire society – I’m talking about myself, [while addressing another participant whose name is omitted]. I don’t know about you. – but all of the things that you talked about, that “oh, I think of the one with beauty and the one with religion” – now that’s our religious teachings, but as far as our society goes, that’s not what’s happening. Now, if you have money you get married. If you don’t have money, you don’t get married.

Through this long narrative, he raised question about the contemporary relevance of the well-known hadith listing a woman’s wealth, lineage, beauty, and piety as popular reasons for marriage. He questioned how young men and members of the Jordanian society often talk about the central roles of the society and religion when they cared more about exploring their sexuality and experiencing sexual fulfillment. A young Iraqi resident also mentioned that the popularity of foreign (Syrian) prostitutes as well as illegal pornography theaters were popular among those who were frustrated with their prolonged bachelorhood and growing socio-economic hardships, and were looking for some semblance of companionship.91

91 See Mat Wolf’s article, “Penetrating Jordan’s Illegal Porn Cinemas,” on the transformation of a once-abandoned theater in Amman into a “people’s theater” (2013). 7aki Jarayed, a popular news satire television program shown at the time, also devoted an episode on “Amman’s Nightlife” (2013).
Multiple Effects of Delayed Marriage

Since many Jordanians believe, or at least publicly profess, “Marriage is half the religion,” I wanted to derive greater understanding of the social and emotional effects of prolonged bachelorhood or spinsterhood on youth. Participants were asked to talk about how the society view those who are not married or could not marry—whether for financial, physical, or psychological reasons—and how these stresses affect such individuals. Depending on the conversational flow, some of the following questions were asked to help generate discussions: when do societal pressures relating to marriage begin? Why do male youth agree to the high costs and expectations of wedding? How do they feel when confronted by years of prolonged bachelorhood or spinsterhood? How do they cope with delayed marriage? What impressions or conclusions are made by members of the community when young people cannot marry?

Conversations with shabāb revealed little reticence toward discussing financial, physical, or psychological reasons for not getting married. Sami revealed, “There is just too much in the society now—meaning, it is not moderate…A good hall that would be rented just so people would clap. That's why young men are getting married at the ages of 30, 33, 38…and young women at the age of 24…which is old in the society.” Mahmoud, conurred, stating, “99% of the problem is material. It is difficult for them
[shabāb] to marry without material problems...Material obstacles are the biggest but there may be special situations, if the person has problems such as health or mental—these kinds of special problems. But generally, it is material.” Even if the individual can scrape together the costs of marriage, he said, “Financial...is the biggest problem...The continuation of marriage after that will be the problem. There will be children, new responsibilities...If his wife does not work, he cannot maintain the household with the rent, transportation, drink [basic necessities].”

For young men, the ability to cope with societal pressures and overcome socio-economic challenges is perceived as directly relevant to the idea of adulthood. A Palestinian-Jordanian young male involved in one of the large group discussions said, “I tie the matter to your ability to provide for yourself. If everything is normal, if you’re a mature adult, one way or another you should be able to find the resources to provide for yourself.” He continued, “When I say ‘adulthood,’ I can’t say a particular age, like the brothers said. No. A long time ago, according to our grandfathers, there are those who married when they were 12 or 13 years old. ...Now, a guy can turn 25 or 30 years old, like he said, but he’s still not an adult....Because the idea of adulthood depends on how much you can depend upon yourself.” Another participant agreed, emphasizing the individual’s ability to cope with the stresses and overcome socio-economic obstacles as signs of his transition into social adulthood: In my opinion, there’s a person you can try to take and put him under pressure. If he can handle the pressure, you can say that he’s an adult. Transitioning into adulthood involves the individual’s possession of “certain
financial capabilities, administrative abilities, mental maturity (qudrāt ʿidrākiya), and the ability to handle pressures,” said Mahmoud. If the young male reaches mid-30s and demonstrates the ability to cope with everyday financial and emotional stresses, his parents will pressure him to pursue marriage and to assume the burdens of adulthood for the stability and the prosperity of the family and society. This pressure builds as other members of the community contribute their opinions and as the male individual gets closer to the age of 40. According to Mahmoud, if the bachelor then reaches the age of 40 and remains unmarried, members of the community will speculate, “He has a problem or he's ill.” To allay such gossiping about their individual and familial reputation, young men often consider marriage as soon as they are mentally and spiritually prepared, and can gather the resources.

Young females who reach the age of 30 similarly suffer from gossip and concerns regarding her “old” age and un-marriageability. How societal stresses affect young women who remain unmarried by the age of 30 is deftly described in the Jordanian novel, The Bride of Amman (2015). Told from a penta-polyphonic narrative drawing on multiple voices and points of view, the novel confronts charged topics such as delayed marriage (especially spinsterhood), unrelenting societal pressures, homosexuality, sexual abuse, sexual harassment in the workplace, extramarital affairs, as well as interreligious and intergroup marriages experienced by four females and one male.92 The stories of Leila and her older sister, Salma, especially, examine the different ways women can

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92 The novel is said to be based on a collection of previous short stories published by Zaghmout on his popular blog, The Arab Observer.
respond to outdated patriarchal views on marriage, individual’s personal happiness, achievement, and freedom. Leila accepts the inevitability of patriarchy, which expects men to attain educational and career successes and personal independence to establish households and expects women to receive well-rounded education to become good wives and mothers, even though she suffers from its flaws. Her marginalization by guests at her own university graduation party following her cousin’s announcement of pregnancy drives home the fact survival and success in Jordanian society are tightly bound to women’s traditional roles as wife and mother. She states:

I was no longer the aroos, the bride, the star of the party: there’s no bride without a groom after all. This reality struck me that moment like a bolt of lightning. All those years I’d wasted trying to prove myself. I genuinely believed that getting a degree would raise my value in everyone’s eyes and establish my status as a fully independent woman. But at that moment, I was stopped by the realization that my degree was in fact nothing more than another step on the path towards the ultimate goal: marriage (20).

Consequently, Leila carefully considers the cultural message her employment would bear on future marriage prospects. She soon chooses not to apply for high-level positions for the following reasons: 1) “a Jordanian man would never marry a woman with a higher salary or a more important job than his;” and 2) “Most people think that the higher a woman gets promoted, the less chance she has of ever getting married!” (46). To protect her future marriage opportunities and leave the door open for cultural success, she applies for a respectable and socially-acceptable entry position at a bank.

Salma, on the other hand, writes an anonymous, popular blog entitled, The Jordanian Spinster, in order to “communicate with people, and talk about my fears and
dreams, and about the great expectations placed on my shoulders as a Jordanian woman in a society that is full of pressures and obligations” toward marriage and motherhood (24). She describes success in Jordanian society as won by women who are “lucky enough to be snapped off [or snapped up]… [before being] written off as surplus goods, marked down as a social failure, and condemned to a marginal role on the fringes of society” (22). Despairing of forever experiencing insults, harsh judgments, and marginalization alone, Salma walks off a summit in full bridal costume and in full view of digital recording and becomes a bride to her beloved city on her younger sister’s wedding day.

Through the stories of Leila and Salma, *The Bride of Amman* comments on how marriage remains central to women’s societal role and existence. The novel offers insights into the intense pressures faced by young women who often feel “shackled, like I’m paralysed” when thinking about marriage (119). Regardless of their personal goals, they must marry to meet society’s gendered expectations. Increasingly, they are also faced with the need to find respectable employment in order to help afford the high costs of customary marriage—something for which they are too often blamed. These dominant narratives about marriage economics, however, discount the role cultural expectations play in determining what young women can and cannot offer to facilitate marriage. Unfortunately, due to lack of secure long-term employment, decent wages, high housing and living costs, it is currently difficult for young couples to achieve the requisite economic independence to afford timely marriage. Even after significant contributions
and compromises by young women (that can threaten individual and familial honor and reputation), it still remains unguaranteed that young people can attain marriage as they face the challenges that come with long-distant relationships, years of waiting, and cheaper marriage options (with Syrian refugees), among others. Without marriage, young people become unable to transition from childhood to adulthood, which consequently means they cannot pave the gradual though more assured path to reach their social imaginaries and societal change.
Chapter 5: Higher Education Matters

“What some call freedom is a way to moral decay” – Ahmad al-Shugairi, a Saudi televangelist widely followed in Jordan (Hamwi)

The family is the nucleus of society, which is the basic building block for the construction of our nation, a hotbed of ideology and values, and the site of its identity, civilization, cultural and moral construction. [Its morality] is affected by fierce assault ..., which exposed the nation to cultural invasion of world powers hostile in its plans towards the destruction and dismantling of Muslim families and communities” – Mufid Sarhan (Jam’iyyāt al-Afāf)

Higher education in Jordan traditionally signifies good upbringing, reputable lineage, better financial and material prospects, and individual maturity. Until the mid-twentieth century, only the elite (or those with great talents) could aspire for advanced knowledge and training. However, the educational reforms that started in the early 1990s, and continued under King Abdullah II, significantly expanded and improved educational access among Jordanian youths. Their higher educational qualifications are generally believed to provide cumulative advantages toward attaining full-time employment and individual and financial freedom, considered vital elements for the pursuit of marriage.93 The years spent learning at co-educational facilities, on the other hand, raise great alarm among the older generations. The latter worry about the negative

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93 Some of the educational programs undertaken during this time were National Vision and Mission for Education and the Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy Program (ERfKE).
consequences that foreign ideas, behaviors, temptations, and complications could bear upon societal stability and youth morality.

This chapter focuses on the cultural meanings, symbols, and significations attached to higher education and how they affect marriage negotiations. It begins with a quick discussion of the history of Jordanian universities, educational access, and university reforms, then moves to exploring societal imaginations about higher education and the roles co-educational universities play in youths’ understanding of independence, success, citizenship, and sexual and romantic behaviors. Today’s young women consider the educational level of their future spouses as linked to social and economic stability. Young men, on the other hand, stress women’s roles inside and outside the home, as economic conditions have made it difficult to sustain single-income households. Even though I cannot make a general claim about the link between marriage and education, their main views reveal popular trends and opinions among young people living in Amman. The next section then engages more specifically with generational fears about young people’s learned modern views on romantic relationships and marriage. The chapter ends by exploring what can be done to prevent unrealistic (incompatible) marriages that underestimate the importance of traditional norms (among them, patriarchy, national/ethnic cultural norms, financial and material interests, and social class) to the preservation of the traditional family. While young people explore

\footnote{Daniele Cantini (2016) discusses the role of state institutions such as educational facilities to enable national expression among some groups while limiting that of other groups is informative. Youth and Education in the Middle East: Shaping Identity and Politics in Jordan provides insights into the performance of authoritarianism, maintenance of power, and the pursuit of neoliberal reforms by the Jordanian government.}
their social and educational environment in an effort to pursue individual and societal goals, older people fear the ways these behaviors threaten the stability of the Jordanian family: “the nucleus of society, the basic building block for the construction of our nation, a hotbed of ideology and values, and the site of its identity, civilization, cultural and moral construction” (Jam‘iyyāt al-‘Afāf).

The Pursuit of Higher Education

"My Lord! Enrich me with knowledge"—the Quran, 20:114

My thoughts were all focused on that piece of paper that represents the keys to my future—or so I thought. A small white sheet of paper listing the results of four years of my life at university and the long nights spent surrounded by equations and numbers, dreams of success and fulfilling the ambition I’ve had since a child (Zaghmout 15).

“[M]oderates can win the war of ideas, but…young people [who are] drawn to extremism also need practical alternatives, including jobs”—cited from a conversation with Abdel Fattah al-Madi, a government-trained preacher (Laub and Daraghmeh).

Increased literacy and educational opportunities, in conjunction with limited job opportunities, competitive job market, and economic crisis, have contributed to young people’s socio-economic and marriage conditions in Jordan. Since the ascension of King Abdullah II in 1999, the Jordanian government has worked to improve educational access and quality. They pushed for English to be taught as early as first grade in public schools. They constructed new schools, encouraged the inclusion of computer skills in the national curriculum, and promoted advanced training for teachers. They were
developing a knowledge-based economy based on “modernizing their educational systems, encouraging creative thinking, problem solving, and trusting their students to make their own judgments about what is right and wrong” (“Combating Terrorism through Education”).  

In 2009, the government partnered with the World Bank to further improve the quality of and access to higher education. The Higher Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (HERfKE) was launched to “improve the Government’s capacity to diversify and improve financing mechanisms; modernize the governance and management efficacy of the sector; and strengthen quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms” (World Bank April 2009). One key objective of the reform was to improve the competitiveness of Jordanian university graduates and enable their participation in the knowledge-based economy. In spite of the improvements and changes implemented through this project, young graduates entering the Jordanian workforce feel they continue to suffer from lack of teamwork, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, and foreign language skills (Smadi 27 March 2013, 8 April 2013). In an article about a Jordanian-Arabic musical parody of the smash-hit single “Uptown Funk,” Muath al-Bzour discussed the educational training and work prospects of Jordan's young graduates. He stated: “The

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95 Educators expressed concern about the feasibility of large-scale changes suggested by the Education Reform for Knowledge Economy (ERfKE). They noted the lack of updated learning materials and overcrowded classrooms in areas outside the capital city (“Overflowing Classrooms”). Regardless of what was said regarding the application of ERfKE, primary and secondary education enrolment increased from 71 percent to 98.2 percent and 63 percent to 79 percent between 1994 and 2006. The literacy rate also improved from 89.9 to 95.9 between 2003 and 2011.

96 The project proved to be ambitious and was later halted in July 2007 for budgetary reasons (Cantini 76).

97 While Bruno Mars celebrates youths’ socializing with women and friends, Muath al-Bzour and his group of Jordanian performers sing a parody about Jordan's high rate of youth unemployment and young people’s inability to afford gas and local goods.
problem is that the system doesn't encourage us to educate ourselves in areas that innovate and create jobs… [T]here's a huge discrepancy between what we get taught and what the job market needs” (Bzour 2015).

Despite the deteriorating quality of education, higher education continues to be seen as an indicator of good social status, wealth, upbringing, and talent in the eyes of the general public. Born into an educated, upper-middle class Palestinian-Jordanian family, the respectably veiled and dressed Yousra is expected to marry someone with equal or better educational degree. A comparable (or better) college education is indicative of good citizenry and marital success and harmony. She stated: “There are certain expectations of me as an educated person to marry another person of equal or better education.” If, someday, Yousra decides to marry someone less educated (rather than someone from the same social ladder with comparable education), members of the community would question her mental and physical health as well as her family’s well-being and reputation. They would also discuss her future spouse’s ability to function as a capable lifetime partner, which could affect not only her individual dealings with the community but also her unmarried siblings’ future marriage prospects.

Good higher education similarly communicates marital compatibility and maturity. Nadia, the divorcée introduced in an earlier chapter, said, “I mean, if the person had not received good education [then] it would be difficult to…accept another [spouse]

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98 Those who perform well in the tawjīhi are expected to study medicine, engineering, or law. 98 Generally, women and those who performed poorly in the tawjīhi are expected to pursue studies in the humanities, arts, and education; thus, marginalizing vocational and technical fields and contributing to restrictive educational and career paths.
because there needs to be good upbringing, good thoughts to make the marriage work. If this is attained, then the person can accept another.” She stressed that individuals who have attained good education and upbringing would likely be more attuned to their individual thoughts, desires, and needs, and possess similar behaviors, beliefs, and practices—thus, making them more likely to become compatible marriage partners. Yousra agreed with Nadia’s statement, stating, “As a person, I would prefer not to marry rather than marry just for social reasons, as a means to avoid ending life alone, or because everyone else has or will marry. Marriage is very important…But it needs to be built on good foundations.” These statements suggest young women’s careful consideration of higher educational qualifications as indicative of marital harmony and success.

When young male Ammanis are pressed to explain why higher education matters in marriage decisions, they pointed to the vital role women play in raising future generations of believers. A 20-year-old Palestinian-Jordanian male interviewed said, “Why? Because, for me, it’s important that the wife brings up a good generation.” His response was quickly followed by yet another recitation of the following prophetic hadith by Adel, a recently-engaged Palestinian-Jordanian male: “A woman would be taken [in marriage] for her wealth, her religion, her beauty, her family line.” He explained:

I want my wife to be educated, not to bring in money but in order to educate the children, in order to raise a good generation. [This is] because she’s the one who’s going to raise them, not me. Why? Because when she produces a good generation, that generation will bring another good generation, which will bring another good generation. “The mother is a
Adel added, “Education is the most important thing. In school. At home. In the family. And we don’t forget the religious side. Knowledge builds the house with a column, and ignorance tears down the house of strength and generosity.” He believes, if the individual knows “her rights and responsibilities towards herself, her family, her neighbors, her environment, and her society, if she has these correct foundations, understanding, and awareness, then we will attain good society. Good society…begins with the self, then with the family, and then with the outside society and the workplace.” Highly educated wives can help to attain youth’s collective social imaginaries of good society by raising children with a good sense of self, citizenship, identity, and piety. In time, their children can pursue fair and effective governance based on ethical and just Islamic teachings. Higher education, in this sense, can be seen as an extension of the individual’s practice of Islam as an “intellectual, behavioral system that demands respect for humankind, promotes the intellectual activity and encourages learning, work and creative activity” (cited in Cantini 35).

Due to ever-increasing living costs, many of my young male participants expressed the need to find wives with good education and professional training who can participate in the workforce and help supplement household income. One of the 99 The last line comes from a poem—“al-ummu madrasatun, in ‘adadtaha, ‘adadta sha’ba tayyib al-a’raaq”—by Hafiz Ibrahim (http://ar-encyclopedia.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post_9717.html). Ibrahim is considered one of “the greatest and the most universally esteemed of Arabic poets” (Arberry, A. J. “Hāfiz Ibrāhim and Shauqi”. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. (1937): 41–58. Print
participants explained, “young men would like [their wives] to work… [and] would require them to be educated so that they could get [or bring in] higher income. This is the men’s right because the economic condition in Jordan is weak. Young men cannot live on their own [wages].” Another younger male participant concurred with this statement, stating, “Of course. It’s become necessary with expenditures in this country and with the rise of taxes…."

Despite their laudable sentiments regarding women’s vital roles as pious educators, role models, and financial contributors, several young men I interviewed still perceived young women living in Jordan as frivolous and dependent. Ahmad, for example, described young Jordanian women as wanting to “sit at home [after they get their degrees]. They always try to get a guy with money so they can sit at home afterward. Sometimes they say this out loud so everyone knows.” One of his male friends concurred, stating, “These women become like a plant in the house” and “should [be] force[d] to go out and see how the world is instead of just accepting what [they have]. Cuz this happens a lot. You see girls who go to the university and the second she gets married, she’s married to a guy who has a lot of money, and then she’s fine. She doesn’t need to work. She doesn’t need to have contact.”

In response to inquiry about whether they would or would not pursue employment after obtaining their bachelor’s degrees, young women interviewed cited the importance of obtaining university education as valuable security measure against socio-economic uncertainties. They gave no indication they would discontinue working, after having
tirelessly pursued university education, to become financially dependent on their future husbands. Maha, for example, enjoyed the individual and financial freedom earned through working as a graphic designer and could not imagine being financially dependent. Nadia was thankful her university education enabled her to work during and after her first marriage. She was proud she had been able to help pay off her former husband’s debt (approximately 8000 JOD, or USD 11260) while continuing to cover the everyday costs of rent, transportation, and basic necessities. Two years later, when she became separated from her spouse and then divorced, her university education enabled her to offer private tutoring lessons to supplement the 47 JOD per month (USD 66) she was receiving from her former husband to provide financial support for their young daughter and her elderly mother.100 These young women considered their university education as a tremendous asset toward ensuring their financial independence and security, especially with the rapidly-changing social, economic, and political changes wrought by the recent Arab Spring/Youth Uprisings. Their sentiments had caught me by surprise as previous conversations with young male participants painted a different picture of Jordanian young women as highly-educated but dependent.

Conversations about marriage led to reflections and commentaries about education and its relevance to adulthood, piety, individual and familial success, and

100 There are two kinds of divorces in Jordan—talaq and khula’ (or iftiida’). The first goes through normal legal channels, which would be difficult for women as they must often prove their husbands’ long years of neglect, ill health or impotence, and/or spousal abuse. Since 2001, women are allowed to initiate divorce through khula’, later revised to iftiida’, which foregoes the need to prove reasons for divorce. However, women need to let go of any rights to financial or material compensation, including the second half of their mahr.
citizenship. Young people saw the attainment of higher education as a sign of maturity, piety, civic responsibility, and security. Implicitly, youth conversations about marriage and education touched on the social importance of marriage and the needs and the well-being of young members within the community. In so doing, they added to larger societal debates about good society. The next section delves into the ways gender and social interactions in co-educational universities affect young people’s ideas about romantic and marital relationships, individual freedom, and sexuality, among other topics.

Figure 20: “Cycle of Life” wall art at Circle Dakhiliyya, one of the busiest roundabouts in Amman, Jordan. It depicts what citizens can expect to experience in their lifetime: childhood, education, work, money, infirmity, illness, and death. Marriage and parenthood are conspicuously missing.
Like a kid playing with fire, I felt a tingle of excitement mixed with fear. I moved closer to him, gingerly cautiously, watching my steps and words. The closer I got, the more I felt his warmth, and the more I felt the warmth, the more I craved heat, like a piece of ice longing to evaporate (Zaghmout 40).

I’m a woman and as a female I carry the family’s honour. I am obliged to protect it. But this honour is a fortress that no outsider is trusted to enter. Every male member of the family sees himself as a sentry guard, watching us like hawks, ready to pull us up any time we cross their red lines that dictate how we can and can’t behave (81).

Popular art, music, and literature can serve as important tools for social commentary, resistance, and even dissent. Writers and creators who live and work in countries permeated with rules of censorship often use expressive and visual arts to encourage the audience to reflect and critique moral or cultural failings, debate sensitive
issues, and potentially address these concerns in their own reality. Since 2009, literary works such *When the Wolves Grow Old* (2009), *The Balcony of Abyss* (2014), *The Bride of Amman* (2015), *Season of Nymphs* (2015), and so on, have highlighted young people’s numerous hardships: gender discrimination, limited individual freedom, sexuality, and, especially, the appeal of compromising and unethical practices for those lacking in wealth and *wāṣṭa* in much of the Arab world. I choose to concentrate on *The Bride of Amman* as it gives voice to national and international conversations about youth struggles with individual and sexual freedom, socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, tribalism, and honor crimes (among other topics). It addresses these issues through the themes of local imaginations, fears, and debates about youths’ pursuit of higher education, thus encouraging readers to reflect and critique moral or cultural failings, debate sensitive issues, and potentially address these concerns within their own reality.

Long before I was able to procure the novel *The Bride of Amman* (or ‘Arūs ‘Ammān), I had read or heard discussions and commentaries about the novel. In her blog, Nadia Muhanna wrote, “The form and language of ‘Arūs ‘Ammān is no less controversial than its content. It is made up of a series of monologues and reflections by its main characters: 4 women and a homosexual man… If this sounds daunting, it isn’t” (“Review of ’Arous Amman”). Described as, “a feminist novel par excellence … [that] mirror[s] the social reality of Amman,” (“The Novel, *The Bride of Amman*, Denudes Jordanian Society”), the novel’s author, Fadi Zaghmout, depicted the myriad problems young people face and the paths he imagined they could take to pursue marriage, social
adulthood, and happiness. In an interview with Talal Abdulhadi (2014) for the *OC Magazine*, he said:

Our heavy legacy of social values…is making our lives harder than it should be, as well as the social obsession in marriage and its effect on the lives of youth in Jordan.

I understand that marriage is a means to regulate sexuality, yet and while exaggerated in importance, the institution of marriage in Jordan is pretty limited. We have no civil marriage that recognises inter-religious, non-religious or same sex relationships. Women are expected to be virgins, and preferred to be young, along with so many other silly constraints. It also reinforces patriarchal society where it is expected that the man to [sic] provide a home and cater for all of the wedding expenses and post wedding [sic] daily financial responsibilities (Abdulhadi).

*The Bride of Amman* highlights societal stresses affecting young women who remain unmarried by the age of 30 and the paths they choose to pursue their social adulthood, happiness, and success.

This section focuses on the story of Rana, and its spotlight on youths’ imagined transgressions in co-educational universities. Fictional works of literature offer spaces for writers and artists to comment on contemporary realities, which are carefully searched for by Arab readers who have grown accustomed to the politicization of expressive cultures in the face of censorship (Douglas and Malti-Douglas 5). Beginning

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101 Rana is one of five main characters in the novel. The novel confronts charged topics such as delayed marriage, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, sexual harassment, and interreligious and intergroup marriages experienced by the four females and one male. The primary characters are Leila, an unmarried university graduate, who realizes women’s societal roles remain defined by their ability to attract good marriage and produce children; Salma, her unmarried older sister, signifies how unmarried young women can feel as they experience spinsterhood and social marginalization; Hayat, Leila’s friend, chooses to explore sexual freedom after repeated sexual and emotional abuse took away her innocence; Rana, a conservative Christian, struggles to flee to Europe to avoid communal and tribal punishment after marrying a Muslim; and Ali, a once-impoverished Iraqi refugee, struggles to reconcile his homosexuality and religiosity.
in Part One, Chapter Four, the readers find Rana enrolled at the university, where she meets people from different social, economic, religious, and political backgrounds, and people of the opposite sex. Even though she had previously attended a private school, the exhilaration she feels as she tests the bounds of personal freedom, morality, and sexuality are illustrative of many Jordanian youths’ first experiences interacting with diverse people from outside their familial network. Not long after her enrollment, Rana becomes attracted to a young Muslim named Janty. The character worries any romantic relationship with someone from a different religious background will be short-lived, as cultural norms discourage relationships with individuals not attested by close family and friends. She recognizes that any signs of cultural transgressions—whether through interfaith, sexual or romantic relationships, refusing an arranged marriage, being raped, or being homosexual—can potentially lead to ostracism and, in some cases, death in Jordan as the studies I cite in the footnotes show.\textsuperscript{102} In spite of these potential dangers, Rana refuses to allow societal notions about honor control her “dress code; dictat[e] where, and when, and how [she] can leave the house; or exercis[e] a veto over [her] choice of friends, male or female” (80-81). With the help of her friends, she soon arranges to meet with Janty to pursue romantic (and sexual) relations both inside and outside university grounds. When she becomes pregnant, she decides to pursue marriage,

\textsuperscript{102} Inter-religious or inter-group romance can potentially lead to “honor” crimes. Articles 340 and 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code give certain leniency to male relatives who commit crimes of passion against their female family members suspected of morally transgressive behaviors. A survey of 850 Jordanian teenagers, conducted by researchers at Britain's Cambridge University, reveals a third of the young participants support honor killings (Smith-Spark). See: http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/20/world/meast/jordan-honor-crimes-study/
happiness, and parenthood abroad with Janty, thus putting her familial relationship and security at risk.

I concentrated on the commentaries by Māhir to explore young people’s response to *The Bride of Amman* and Rana’s experiences relating to love, hope, despair, faith, citizenship, cultural identity, and selfhood. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

M: I felt that when the people read the title, you know, *The Bride of Amman*, they [readers] want to read about Amman. It is the first book by a young Jordanian writer. So everyone was talking about it. My sister read it. Another girl I knew wrote about it on her Facebook page and thought it was a good book. And then you told me you got your copy….So I was having high expectations about it. I know it was his first attempt to write the book… [but] I thought the ending of the Christian girl who married the Muslim guy was unrealistic.

Māhir was concerned with how the world might judge the city and its youths based on the content of the novel. He was especially critical of the conclusion of Rana’s star-crossed romance, which he described as, “Like a movie. Peaceful and happy. Like an Egyptian movie, you know?” He explained:

I mean, I know two girls, like one of them, she’s like my best friend and we always discuss this topic. She’s from a neighborhood near Amman, where 99% of the population is Christian. Two years ago, she had a Muslim boyfriend. She was afraid anyone of her relative would know. It’s a…how do I say it? It’s a red light. So I [asked] her, “Why did you break up with him?” She told me, “If I get married to him, not only my family, but the whole area, and the whole Christian family, would not talk to me anymore.” It is not an easy thing. Sometimes they kill the girl. Or they kill the guy. I mean and he [the author] wrote it as a very normal thing and the ending was very peaceful. Maybe sometimes, ok, yeah, but it is very rare to happen…
Māhir quickly launched into a separate narrative about another friend’s failed romance in an effort to show the extreme unlikeliness that an “Egyptian happy ending” could happen to a young Ammani woman who falls in love and expects to marry a member from a different religious community. He mentioned this friend initially thought that she could bring together their families as well. Unfortunately, the couple ended their relationship some months later due to her parents’ determination to marry her to a member from their ethnic and religious community. There was also the strong likelihood of intergroup violence in the name of “honor” between the two communities. He shared both narratives to communicate the religious and cultural considerations involved in youths’ decisions to marry and the practical decisions youth usually end up making for the well-being and happiness of their families and their communities.

The story of Rana exposed societal tensions and sparked conversations regarding inter-gender and inter-ethnic relations. Although Rana and her friends were able to meet in places both inside and outside the university campus, societal norms make it difficult for youth living in Jordan to casually meet and follow their heart on matters relating marriage. Māhir confided he worries about his chances of finding an independent, working, Muslim girl to become his future partner and mother to his children. An Iraqi resident of Amman (“Ahmad”) is concerned prevailing social norms might lead him to marry someone he does not really know—someone who “just wants a guy with money because [she wants to] sit at home afterward,” rather than someone “who has a job and who is smart. Someone I can count on” as a mutual partner in marriage. When asked to
describe the kind of marriage he hopes to establish with his future spouse, he said: “I
don’t expect her to stay at home and raise the kids. I expect us to share responsibilities,
which is not very popular among Jordanian males.” Unfortunately, communal
monitoring and strict cultural norms limit who young people can marry and where young
people can get to know members of the opposite sex before they can confidently
approach the topic of marriage.

Not long after our conversation about Rana’s story, Māhir sent me cartoons of
Abu Mahjoob penned by Emad Hajjaj, relating to popular meanings associated with
universities among the younger generations. In one of the cartoons, the main character,
Abu Mahjoob—described as “the true Jordan family man” by a YouTube subscriber, and
as the quintessential Jordanian man coping with everyday social, economic, and political
concerns—wears his regular dark jacket and necktie along with the traditional Jordanian
kefiyyeh to accompany his son, Mahjoob, for his first day at the university. There, he
walks up to a small group of well-dressed, western-looking female students to introduce
his son as a first-year university student and asks if they could be guides on campus.
Abu Mahjoob says to them, “Greetings, this is Mahjoob, my son, your friend at the
university… [He is a] first year [student] at the Faculty of Literature. Maybe you can
look out for him until he graduates?” Abu Mahjoob ignores the social boundary
separating the haves from the have-nots by introducing his son to two wealthier-looking
young women. In doing so, Abu Mahjoob hopes that it can potentially lead to a closer
(and, perhaps, romantic) relationship, as well as a move up the social ladder for Mahjoob.
Even though this cartoon pokes fun at the role of universities as a sort of dating and marriage mart in contemporary Jordan, it offers insights into the signification of universities as a space for young people to interact with people outside their familial socio-economic network.

![Figure 22: Mahjoob entering the university. The famous Abu Mahjoob introduces his son as a first year student to two young women. Of the individuals depicted, only one couple seems to be studying (Hajjaj).](image)

One of the great benefits of studying popular culture is how such mediums can enable the reader to personally identify with the characters and their environment.
Whether through literature or comic strips, we are drawn to think about the decisions characters make. In the case of *The Bride of Amman*, the novel covers many taboo and sensitive topics surrounding universities as potential sites for transgressive cultures and behaviors. The novel hints at the constant struggle to balance individual and group happiness and prosperity, but, for whatever reasons, offered peaceful resolutions for individualistic pursuits, which belied the social and cultural dynamic involved. The cartoon by Emad Hajjaj also encourages the reader to consider not only the explicit but also the implicit. It forces the readers to reflect on Abu Mahjoob’s attempt to sweep aside social and economic considerations normally involved in personal introductions. However, the harsh reality is offset by the humor of Abu Mahjoob’s use of his position as respectable elder to bypass social boundaries. These touches, together with the depictions of university graduates as westernized and involved in romantic relationships rather than in their studies, draw readers to participate in the national narrative and think about how to address societal imaginations regarding youths’ moral and cultural failings.

**Transgressive Popular Cultures**

Despite greater gender interactions in education facilities and other semi-public venues, statistics show 45% of divorce cases among young people in Jordan take place before consummation (al Emam). Divorce before consummation refers to the period after the marriage contracts are signed but before the wedding and co-habitation takes

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place—meaning, legally, the couple is considered married under Jordanian and Islamic law, but, culturally, they are considered to be dating. Older generations as well as social and academic experts blame the high likelihood for divorce before consummation among young couples on the latter’s impulsiveness and lack of real-life experiences (Jam’iyyat ‘Afāf). The older generations implore the state to step in to help prepare young couples for long-lasting marriages.

Individuals such as Mufid Sarhan, Director of the Jam’iyyat al-‘Afaf al-Khayriyyah, worried about the social effects of higher education on marriage. Sarhan believed more and more young people are stubbornly refusing parental advice regarding potential spouses, preferring instead to make their own choices based on unrealistic notions learned from exposure to dating cultures and practices in coeducational facilities. He said:

Higher education is good. We all want education and we encourage this. Now, as I previously mentioned, when young men and young women study (at a university), they will reach 22-23 years of age. After they complete their studies, they will want to find work, including women. And when she studies, her views toward marriage will change. Maybe in the past, women will accept any men regardless of his education, good looks, good wage, and residence. Now, when young women go to study, she seems to have opinions with regard to her future spouse. She

103 Oft-recited reasons for divorce include bad spousal choice, financial and material interests, incompatibility, and age difference.
104 The services offered by Jam’iyyat l-‘Afaf are known to my young participants. This charitable Islamic organization offers counselling for young men and women about marriage; provides basic material and financial support (i.e. refrigerators, clothing, furniture, home necessities and appliances); and organizes affordable mass weddings. Besides religious organizations, some cultural centers also provide socio-economic aid and services to help its members. My Circassian-Jordanian participant mentioned the services extended by the Circassian community centers, which fix the bride-wealth for Circassian members at 150 JOD for the advanced payment (muqaddam) of the bride-wealth (mahr) and 300 JOD for the guaranteed payment (muakhkhar). They also offer some measures of financial support to young members who marry other Circassians.
will not accept the man that her father will choose for her...[T]his brings about an increase in problems ...[S]ome young women exaggerate in their choices. She may refuse tens [sic] of marriages until she becomes too old and do[sic] not get married. Young men too...

His disapproval reflected the opinions of some Palestinian-Jordanian parents, who felt that increasing gender interaction in higher educational facilities served to normalize what had previously been regarded as transgressive sexual practices and behaviors. They mentioned the trendy attire of many contemporary Jordanian young women who wear tight shirts and skinny jeans—with or without hijāb—when they go to meet young men in cafés, theaters, and malls. Public displays of affection, especially in touristy and upscale neighborhoods such as Rainbow Street and Abdoun, also make it difficult for them to protect the reputation and respectability of their young daughters and sisters and to protect their safety from any potential group or ethnic violence. These are particularly worrying because young people are outside the protection of their parents and their families when on university grounds and other semi-public spaces. Additionally, real or perceived transgressive behaviors that threaten familial or group honor can trigger physical assaults, rape, or murder.105

105 Agence France Presse reported the death of 15 to 20 women from honor crimes each year in Jordan (“Jordan Activists Profile ‘Honor’ Killing Victims”). In March 2014, a cousin-couple argued about the future bride’s perceived involvement with another man, leading to a long argument and her murder. Between April 30 and May 1, 2014, three honor crimes occurred. One woman was killed for converting to Islam by her father and brother. Another was shot by her older brothers and the third was stabbed to death by her brother for real or imagined behaviors that threatened the honor of their families (Whitman). For more information, see: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/honor-killings-jordan-surge.html#ixzz43UGGbIzL.
Older generations implore the state to step in to help prevent moral and cultural dissolution and to save the institution of marriage. A professor at the College of Sharia, in the University of Jordan, Dr. Mahmoud Sartawi, believed the state can do more by requiring couples to complete pre-marriage courses (which would need to be adapted according to the local contexts and the governmental and civil institutions in charge). Through these courses, young people would learn more about their moral rights, societal and marital responsibilities, and common marital hardships before signing the marriage contract (“90,000 Divorce Cases in Jordan in Four Years”). Conversely, Mufid Sarhan believed young people should be taught about marriage beyond the basic information by using supplementary courses in secondary or tertiary education. He lamented, “When I went to give a talk to university students, they asked me about marriage [but] did not know much about it. I asked them something simple: what can women expect from her husband as her rights? Neither the young men nor young women knew.” He continued, “They may not know much about marriage, but they have high expectations. This is a problem. Like an uneducated man who wants to build an airplane. He has great imagination. We call this daydream, whereby you sit and dream. This is a problem.”

His words echoed those of another parent who believed Turkish dramas to be contributing to young people’s unrealistic visions about marriage.106 Ailya’s mother, like many Arab viewers, enjoyed watching TV serials such as Noor (or Gümüş). From what I heard, the series fueled many young women’s dream of successfully “marrying up” into a

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106 Based on data gathered in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook, there was a significant rise in divorce rates from 12,862 to 15,442 between 2008 and 2009.
It depicts how the love and strength of the leading female character, Noor, enable navigation of social and economic pressures to attain individual and familial success. However, older generations (such as the mothers of Yousra, Ailya, and Muna) consider these ideas to be unrealistic and dangerous as they threaten existing national/ethnic cultural norms, social class, and economic sensibilities. They point to the citation of spousal failure and the spike in the national divorce rate among Jordanian and Arab couples after the introduction of Noor as proofs against the success of youths’ increasingly non-traditional marital decisions.

Requiring couples to complete courses or guidance sessions before marriage can be a viable strategy to address generational anxiety and fear about youths’ marital aspirations, while also serving as a means through which young couples can get to know each other. The contents of such courses, or sessions, however, should not be restricted to rote religious instructions pertaining specifically to Islam, but should take into account the needs of communal and religious groups through collaborations with various religious and civic institutions. Together, they could include role-play exercises requiring participants to imagine and formulate responses to key questions related to their beliefs, intentions, and ideals for marriage. Such questions include how do you imagine each other’s social, religious, and financial roles within the marriage? What goals, objectives, and responsibilities do you envision for the family? And for the society? How should
children be raised? Based on the popularity of the matchmaking site, Et3arraf,\textsuperscript{107} which pose similar lines of questioning to ascertain compatibilities of their clients, young people may not be averse to participating in such sessions. Classes such as these would help to calm generational fears as well as give the larger society opportunities to get to know the everyday experiences, needs, sentiments, and desires of young Jordanians. From such reciprocity, they could learn to better understand the underlying motivations, thought processes, practices, struggles, and anxieties surrounding young people’s pursuit of marriage and their social imaginaries while potentially work to re-gain youths’ trust.

These guidance sessions can be a valuable platform for the state to interact with young people and demonstrate its desire to help them attain dignified lives. If the state hopes to promote a more "moderate Islamic ideology that is in line with our national principles," as stated by the religious affairs minister, Haeli Abdul Hafeez Daoud, it would need to demonstrate its real commitment to good governance and public interest (common good) (Laub and Daraghmeh). Greater efforts by the state to promote active involvement of young people in Jordanian society would be significant toward providing a counterbalance to the growing Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) influence—the latter having made significant inroads in poor areas such as Ma’an and Karak by preying upon young people’s frustrations and offering monthly wages for their active

\textsuperscript{107} Et3arraf, an online matchmaker similar to OkCupid or eHarmony, launched by Cedric Maalouf and Rakan Nimer, has capitalized on this lack of social opportunities among young Arabs “to interact and meet [with] more like-minded matches” (Talty). While none of my participants mentioned the site, it seems to be gaining popularity among Jordanians in recent years. Nine months after its launch, Et3arraf became popular in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. See http://techonomy.com/2013/10/online-dating-reaches-middle-east/
involvement in the IS. The contention remains that the state needs to search for alternative ways beyond political participation in the public sphere to first encourage youth cooperation and participation. Marriage counselling courses can help to prepare young couples for whatever material, financial, emotional, and spiritual challenges that may arise in marriage negotiations. At the same time, it can communicate the latter’s interest in the development of the society as a whole and their willingness to collaborate to ensure the attainment of young couples’ pursuit of love, faith, independence, cultural identity, citizenship, and selfhood.

However, the above-mentioned initiative can also be interpreted as pushback among the older generation against young people’s proposal for radical societal change. Peter Gran (1996) argues that the ideal type of family within a society is often supported not only by the older generation but also by government policies in order to promote traditional societal values (66). To place his findings in contemporary contexts, Jordan has long permitted citizenship rights to be inherited only through the father. But in November 2014, it was forced to respond to growing discontent among the Jordanian women population by making legal changes to allow children of Jordanian mothers access to certain governmental services (see further discussion in “Engaging Shabāb”). The government’s failed attempt at placation demonstrates a lack of real division between the public and the private sphere, and between the personal and the political on matters relating to the family. Young people expressed great anger and frustration with the government’s staunch stance against societal change.
When discussing the link between marriage and education, young people consider the educational level of their future spouses as representing social and economic promise. Young men are expected to have comparable (or better) education than their spouse in order to secure well-paying employment. Young women, on the other hand, are expected to attain good education to become well-informed caregiving mothers and educators inside the home. Beyond these expectations, young people feel good education to be necessary for marital compatibility and pursuit of an alternative reality. Through making careful and wise decisions for marriage partners, young Ammanis believe they can eventually lay claim to their rights to live culturally meaningful lives. Despite young people’s efforts to pursue their individual and societal goals, generational fears allude to pushbacks against societal change and their social imaginaries of how state-society relationship should be.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

It is acknowledged that [youth] requires special interventions to ensure a positive transition, and enable them to reach their full potential. The Jordan National Human Development Report (2000) summarized this age period with these words –‘Jordan youth stand at a critical cross-roads in their personal lives, as they navigate the challenging passage from childhood to adulthood. Most of them are making the shift from being recipient of society’s care and services, to becoming contributors to society’s growth and development… In a fast changing world, they are the generation of Jordanians that must make the fastest changes to exploit new opportunities, meet fresh challenges, and vanquish old constraints (The National Youth Strategy 4)

On many occasions during his reign, King Abdullah II has acknowledged youth as the nation’s “greatest asset and hope for the future” and as “our weapon for the future” (3). The king believes the state needs to “release their potential and direct them towards public and national service. Youth potential should be organised in collective frameworks that include all parts of the country and utilise the youths' spare time in activities that will be of use to them and the nation…” (al Hussein). In response to the king’s directives, the Higher Council for Youth and the United Nation’s Development Program (collaboration with United Nations’ Children’s Fund), formulated a “framework for the development of all young Jordanians, irrespective of their social, economic and locational circumstances” (The National Youth Strategy 4). Their collaboration produced the “National Youth Strategy for Jordan: 2005-2009,” which endorsed an action plan to
encourage the development, empowerment, and participation of youth in all levels of Jordanian society. Yet, despite the Higher Council’s declaration that “[youth] requires special interventions to ensure a positive transition, and enable them to reach their full potential,” young people expressed little confidence in their government’s ability to ensure the attainment of marriage, local participation, and dignified lives (1).

Many young people remain dissatisfied with their social, economic, and political circumstances. As Sami expressed, “Even though I do not wish to say that Jordanian society is very bad but it is not good. A not-good society…that functions outside of Islamic governance…The society has become weak….” Mahmoud voiced great distrust and frustration with both local and national governance. He said, “The government does not care about its people…The government leaves everything, then sits and waits only.” Nadia remained incredulous as to why the government has not helped young people respond better to their harsh contemporary conditions. She stated, “It is difficult for me to understand that the government does not recognize the difficulties of marriage… [and] the difficulties of daily life for Jordanians. When the costs go up, the expenses go up, the burdens go up. There is no help.” She continued, “For example, I have been raising my daughter for five years and her father only gives me 47 JOD each month. In actuality, I am the one who is raising my daughter so if I don’t work…then what? …47 JOD is insufficient.” In a featured article about young Jordanians for ISLAMiCommentary, Hafferkamp stated the young Jordanians he interviewed “didn’t seem to think politics could truly change any of their situations” (Hafferkamp 2013). Young men and women
“found fault with the government on issues of economics, organization/structure, censorship, and implementation of laws, corruption, and a lack of efficient, realizable policy” (Hafferkamp 2013).

There remains a lackluster youth turnout at Jordanian national elections. In 2011, statistics showed only 35.5% of 900 young Jordanians who participated in a study conducted by al-Hayat Center for Civil Society Development had taken part in reform activities at the local and/or national levels. The 2013 election, on the other hand, shows higher national turnout. However, many of the young voters were tribal-nationalist Transjordanians, thus, suggesting continuing distrust with the government, politicians, and the political system among the Palestinian-Jordanians (Greenfield). Anita Harris (2014), a political scientist at Monash University, believe popular discussions and debates often overlook the fact that young people no longer believe adulthood and citizenship as being accessible through conventional pathways in the public sphere. In doing so, they have ignored youths’ understanding of the structures of power and resistance, which emerge in response to contemporary socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and conflicting models of respectability, religiosity, and citizenship. When young people feel excluded and believe their issues are not taken seriously, they might politically disengage in the public sphere and negotiate their individual and societal objective through less formal and public methods, thereby bearing great implications for current and future ethnographic and cultural studies.
This dissertation sees marriage as a legitimate and accessible pathway through which young people engage in personal, familial, and national decision making. Marriage is so critical to Jordanians that each couple (along with their families and their communities) is willing to spend an average of 10000-15000 JOD to access adulthood, social status, citizenship, religiosity, and socially acceptable sexual relationships. This is astounding considering the average monthly salary of middle-class young people I spoke with ranged between 300-500 JOD. While most of the wedding costs are traditionally borne by the grooms, this too is changing due to soaring costs of housing, low wages, and high youth unemployment. This combination of high expenses and high unemployment has caused many young people to delay marriage until a more financially stable time.

Because many young people must now wait longer to marry, marriage is regarded not only as the signifier of adulthood, piety, and success. It also serves as a powerful critique of the government’s failure to provide basic needs and ensure the societal and religious participation for all citizens and residents within the community. As I showed in the Chapters 1 and 2, social, economic, geographic, and gender boundaries affect state-citizen/resident and citizen-citizen or resident-resident relations. Chapter 3 demonstrates how the local patronage system of wāṣṭa restricts youths’ access to political participation in the public sphere. This then led to examination of various popular cultural activities and narratives to explore the motivations, thought processes, and strategies involved in youths’ performances of power, resistance, and decision-making. Chapter 4 challenges popular perception of youth as apathetic and disinterested about improving their socio-
economic conditions by highlighting the elements involved in marriage negotiations and, through these, set the groundwork for the kind of state-society relationship and societal changes young people envision. Chapter 5 studies how the pursuit of secondary and higher education—while considered necessary for expanding marriage prospects and for improving social, economic, and employment opportunities—raises anxieties about moral and societal dissolution among the older generation. At the same time, it offers insights into the role education plays in preparing for societal change. By studying conversations with Jordanian youth and examining popular literature, media, arts, and cultural activities, I have attempted to show how Jordanian citizens and residents used (and still use) a combination of strategies and practices to gain access to local participation and secure marriage. The following sections summarize more recent efforts pursued by young people’s additional solutions and strategies about the ways they are mobilizing to enact societal change.

Engaging Shabāb

This is why a lot of people are unhappy about marriage: it’s become about economics. You have to pay this, you have to pay that. Do you know what the poverty line is in Jordan? 14%. So where do we get this money? Parents say we need to save money so we can get good education and get married. But for me, it’s not logical. For 2 hours, you pay 20000-25000 just not to look bad.—an anonymous young Jordanian male

Young people generally believe religion can play a positive role in alleviating the financial burdens and expectations to facilitate marriage and social adulthood. Fieldwork
conversations and observations revealed many young Ammanis to be frustrated with
traditional material and financial extravagance relating to marriage. One of them stated:

As a society, our solution is that the culture doesn’t necessarily have to be this way. For the workers of the younger generation, it doesn’t all have to be about money…We are trying to overcome [marriage obstacles] by making it easier for people, not ignoring them [the customs]. So the solution, truthfully, is in the coming generation. Us. We will make our children aware and our children’s children until we solve this issue. We’ll teach the girl when she’s little and teach the boy when he’s little that when you get married it’s not the money that matters. The important thing is that you respect the person. The problem is that a lot of people don’t respect each other. The problem [is] with the society.

The speaker—let’s call him Hafez—spoke against the long-standing cultural habit of making and upholding high material demands for marriage, which he saw as a sign of societal dissipation. Throughout our conversation, he mentioned the need to disrupt this outdated cultural habit with religious principles standing for equal and respectful treatment of all citizens—including making marriage accessible, treating everyone with equality and respect, and establishing a just society committed to legitimate and competent governance. His words echo similar conversations with shabīb who believe such customs “go against Islam” and can be alleviated by the principles of common good and good society, based on real application of just (Islamic) principles to attain dignified lives for all.

Young people expressed awareness of how political and societal corruption present real and significant challenges for accessing national resources, attaining gainful employment, achieving economic independence, and getting married through individual (legitimate) merit and efforts alone. My young participants pointed to the socio-
economic situations that eventually wear down marginalized characters such as Sundus, Janzír, ‘Azmi, and Bakr Ṭāyil in *When the Wolves Grow Old*. Their worsening moral and societal dissolution serves as reminders as to why young people cannot believe their social imaginaries are irreparably out of reach nor afford to take the quick path to individual and societal change. While they would not resort to violence or terrorism to affect rapid change, my Ammani participants also refuse to become complicit actors for the corrupt Jordanian government.

Hafez believes young people are gradually mobilizing to bring about long-term positive changes rather than remain content with the established status quo. He stated, “There are a lot of people now who, to the contrary, really do understand [the circumstances]. Now there are a lot of respectable people who actually tried to change people’s view… [It] even happened to us. And truly, the matter [of marriage] became really smooth and easy… just two people who got married because they really are right for each other, and there’s nothing with them. Forget all the customs.” His peer, a young Iraqi resident who sometimes referred to himself as “The Legend,” believes better moral and modern education focusing on religious and collective good (rather than individual benefits) remains necessary to discourage extravagance and immoral behaviors. He stated:

We don’t need to pay this… [What we need is] social engineering. We need to raise a new generation that will think better than us. People need to stop thinking about money so much! You have to focus on other things rather than just money. So one of the ways [to do this] is by changing the way people think. You have to be the change that you want to see. You start with yourself… To bring about this change, you need to start with
your family. We have to start with raising good children. Cultivation and education. By changing the education you change the future.

The Legend believes young people need to inculcate specific behaviors and practices to affect the perceived moral dissolution of the Jordanian society, not unlike the determination among women pietists studied by Mahmood (2005) who performed bodily piety and virtuous behavior in an attempt to affect the perceived secularization of the Egyptian society. “Good society,” he contends, must begin with improving the self (“You start with yourself…You have to be the change that you want to see”). It is through embodying good moral behaviors and educating the self that young people can become capable of raising future generations and pass down their social imaginaries, thus laying the foundations for societal change from the ground up. This suggests a commitment to forge a gradual (and, perhaps, more faithful), less confrontational (bloodless) path toward societal change.

Furthermore, the Jordanian state still enjoys some degree of legitimacy among its people as a consequent of the great esteem the general population felt toward the previous King Hussein, now transferred to the current King Abdullah II. Catherine Warrick (2009) suggests that the Jordanian state has been able to maintain its legitimacy due to its ability to “provide a positive justification for authority that creates a bond of duty between its citizens and state” (4). However, said state’s legitimacy appears to be eroding as its policies become increasingly perceived as being “culturally disconnected” from the majority of its population (youth). If the state hopes to stem worsening
dissatisfaction, it will need to close the communication gap with the *shabāb* and create greater cultural opportunities to help achieve their individual and societal goals.

Young people believe the state needs to pay heed to their call for greater educational investment. ERfKE and HERfKE have helped to improve and build on the use of digital technology in public, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. But even ERfKE did not provide equal access to national resources as there was a lack of updated learning materials and overcrowded classrooms the further one moves from the capital city (“Overflowing Classrooms”). An Iraqi resident believes the disparate quality of modern education can be improved by additional professional training and better wages for instructors. Currently, due to the poor quality of accessible public education and the widespread practice of private tutoring, it remains difficult for young people to attain the appropriate educational and professional training to join the competitive job market and transition from childhood to adulthood. As a result, young men are becoming more and more frustrated with their decreasing ability to secure well-paying employment, economic independence, and social adulthood. Young women’s growing appreciation for the economic independence and security that come with the need for their own employment are tempered by their increasing anxieties about how career responsibilities would affect the moral, social, and educational upbringing of future generation. Since good education affects young people’s chances of securing decent employment, independence, adulthood, and socio-political participation, this means that the decision about who to marry and who can properly cultivate the next generation takes on
additional importance in terms of the future direction of the state and society. It is the potential for enacting great changes that is perceived as dangerous and transgressive to the older generation who fear “a fierce assault ... towards the destruction and dismantling of Muslim families and communities” (Jam‘īyyāt al-Afāf).

Beyond political, economic, and educational concerns, it has been suggested that the state should abrogate the stringent 2012 Press and Publications Law and the 2014 Anti-Terrorism Law to shorten the gap between state-society relations. The abrogation of the former law would enable news and online websites greater control over their content, while the abrogation of the latter would enable greater freedom of expression. Maintaining these laws would make it difficult for young people to work in partnership with the government to address communal problems such as corruption, social norms, unemployment and poverty. Without a governing system that encourages collaboration and demonstrates respect for the mutual exchange of ideas and practices, young Jordanians are likely to continue navigating informal relations and working “underground” to enact societal change.

It is also through collaboration and promoting equal access to local and national resources that the Jordanian government can nurture a sense of Jordanian-ness—a shared “group feeling”—built on partnership, trust, and confidence. Too often, young people I met identified themselves based on the social, economic, ethnic, national, and religious identities and the legacies of their families and communities rather than as, “Jordanians.” They proudly proclaimed themselves as, “Palestinians” or “Jordanian-Jordanians”
(meaning from tribal origins) before proceeding to identify themselves as hailing from “Jaffa.” On the one hand, their strong identification with familial affiliation is understandable as “there was no territory, people, or nationalist movement that was designated, or designated itself, as Transjordanian” prior to 1921 (Massad 10). On the other hand, the Hashemite royal family has long attempted to foster a sense of “Jordanian-ness” through laws of citizenship, nationality, and governance. If it is true that the nation, as described by Benedict Anderson (2006), grows from the societal imagination “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,” then the fact that none with whom I had spoken professed Jordanian as their national identity suggests the nation has yet to reach that imagined state (7).

If King Abdullah II is sincere in making “all our citizens feel truly represented” (“Remarks by His Majesty”), my young participants believe all Jordanians should have access to national resources. They feel the state needs to enable children of Jordanian mothers equal access to citizenship. As a result of Law no. 6 of 1954 on nationality, as well its 1987 amendment, children of Jordanian mothers and non-Jordanian fathers cannot inherit their mothers’ citizenship and must pay for social services in Jordan. Without Jordanian citizenship, many of the 360,000 grown children born of Jordanian mothers married to foreign spouses needed to pay as much as one month’s wage (300 JOD) to gain access to limited social and governmental services. Ta’a Marboutah, a documentary directed by Ehab al Khatib (2013), depicts children of Jordanian mothers—many among whom have lived and grown up in Jordan their entire lives—suffering from
various social and legal discriminations as a consequence of their parents’ marriages. Even when legal changes were made in November 2014 to allow these children access to certain social services—such as free high school education, health services in government facilities, exemption from work permit fees, access to employment (as secondary contenders to Jordanian workers), and the ability to purchase land—national discrimination continues (Husseini; al-Fadilat). The Ammani youths I had known place careful consideration on the issue of nationality. Sami and Adel, who were then-involved in the marital process, were choosing to establish Palestinian-Jordanian households. By marrying Palestinian-Jordanian women who could help nurture, protect, and promote their Palestinian-Jordanian and Islamic identities, cultural traditions, and oral history, they were making their personal statements about protecting the continuing presence and interests of the majority (marginalized) Palestinian community.

Despite youths’ initial expressions of “Allah bsahhal” (“God facilitates”), the process of negotiating marriage and adulthood is anything but simple. I was amazed by young people’s willingness to share their narratives of hardship and resilience, revealing the intricacies involved in overcoming harsh socio-economic challenges—unemployment, widespread poverty, high costs of marriage, exorbitant housing costs, high material expectations, and increasing costs of living—to secure marriage. Their narratives described their years-long efforts to achieving the necessary financial and material resources to afford marriage. They touched on their emotional struggles between accepting or refusing familial and communal help—a struggle between
demonstrating independence and weakness—even as they recognized the need for additional help to supplement their own efforts to afford marriage. They communicated their fears that marriage negotiations and agreements could be dissolved due to incompatibility and unexpected changes to their socio-economic conditions. They shared their ideas about how marriage is connected with politics and why they did not seek rapid political change. These findings have secondary implications in understanding why widespread revolutionary movements did not happen in Amman as young people seek more meaningful and impactful change through everyday activities that can re-integrate piety, adulthood, selfhood, citizenship, common good, and good society from below. This dissertation is aimed to further encourage further studies on marriage as a lens to understand undercurrent political tensions, societal debates, and popular responses connected to the policies and the legitimacy of the state.

The Departure

After having studied and lived in Amman for approximately one year, I cannot help but look back to my fieldwork experience. My own experiences with culturally-embedded notions and stereotypes of gender, ethnicity/race, and class limited the range of my qualitative data and constrained access to local communities. They affected how I accessed, engaged, and interpreted the conditions, motivations, performances, and
negotiations of adulthood, citizenship, good governance, social justice, and piety among *shabāb* in Jordan.

The inclusion of Jordanian popular culture within the dissertation draws the readers’ into the concerns the local youth population have about marriage, education, politics, and justice, as well as many other contemporary social and economic issues relevant to their specific temporal period. Popular (or expressive culture) invites readers to “reflect, express, and probably reinforce [societal] attitudes and values” and “compe[l] audiences to want to understand [everyday struggles] because [they] deal[l] in an interesting way with stories and themes that seem important” (Cawelti 64, 69). Such struggles in Amman include high youth unemployment, mounting costs of marriage, limited and unaffordable housing, and increasing costs of living. Popular cultures are especially insightful when dealing with sensitive issues involving the state—such as morality, piety, legitimate governance, Arab and Islamic values—in countries where freedom of speech can be interpreted as speech crimes. In looking back at factual and non-factual narrative elements—representing moments of conversations—it seems the Jordanian society is experiencing increasing ambivalence, disconnect, and pessimism toward the role of tradition and the government’s legitimacy and right to rule. However, despite each obstacle, youths’ continued discussions and negotiations about how to access and affect local and national decision-making demonstrate all hope is not abandoned and young people have not given up in their struggle for inclusion and good society. While these *shabāb* did not mobilize to overthrow the King in their zeal to bring
forth positives changes to the society, their serious efforts to contract marriages and their long-term goals to address existing socio-economic realities demonstrate that youth are participating actors, just not through the preferred formal channels of the state.
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Appendix A: “Baṭal ‘indī șawt” (“Wrecking Ball Parody” in Arabic) by Kashkash

Go outside and clean the car

Mesdames tell you put roz 3a-n-naar

You no listen

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZlI8vvAcaY for Kashkash’s performance of the song.
Go outside and clean the car
Mesdames tell you put *roz 'a-n-naar*
You no listen

Where is the lost tupperwear
Did you find the sock upstairs?
Tell me did you wash your hair

Adidas you no like your boot \[109\]

*Walla* We pay a lot

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\[109\] “Boot” here refers to “shoes.”
جائى من ابصار وين ونحن عينا العين خادمة تقلب مزاج

ابدك خفيفة يا ربت تمسك ليفة أو تطبخ محشي جاج
Appendix B: “I Don’t Have a Voice” (“Baṭal ‘indī šawṭ” translated into English)

You went, you came, you did not vacuum, why are we paying you money?

You saw the spot, you are annoying, the whole house is messy (garbage)

I don’t know where you came from, people have their eyes on us,\(^\text{110}\) a maid hurts (changes) your mood.

I wish you’d hold the sponge or cook chicken mahshi with your light hands

Go outside and clean the car

Mesdames tell you cook the rice on the stove

You no listen

No matter what happens

My voice fades and I say, “Wash quicker!”

Fill the pool?

That’s not how you iron?!

See here, Hi Yusuf, a chance to organize the drawers

\(^{110}\) Based on Zakhravia’s stage performance, the narratrice belongs to a prestigious family.
I don’t know where you came from, people have their eyes on us, a maid hurts (changes) your mood.

I wish you’d hold the sponge or cook chicken *mahshi* with your light hands

Go outside and clean the car

Mesdames tell you put *roz ‘a-n-naar*

You no listen

No matter what happens

My voice change and I say

Where is the lost tupperwear

Did you find the sock upstair?

Tell me did you wash your hair

My voice fades and I say

Walla, I’ve lost my voice

At *Eid*, give us these shoes

Adidas you no like your shoes

We pay a lot *Walla*

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111 *Eid* refers to holidays
Walla, I’ve lost my voice

At *Eid*, give us these shoes

Walla, I don’t want to hear any sound

I don’t know where you came from, people have their eyes on us, a maid hurts (changes) your mood.

I wish you’d hold the sponge or cook chicken *mahshi* with your light hands