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TITLE

**THE LABOUR MARKET CHOICES OF MARRIED WOMEN IN
LOW-INCOME BEIRUT:
STRUCTURES, STRATEGIES, AND SUBJECTIVITIES**

ROUBA ABDUL HADI MHAISSEN

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2015

Centre for Gender Studies
SOAS, University of London

Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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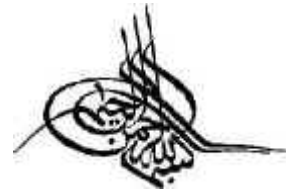
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Abstract

The development literature establishes a correlation between changes in a set of variables and increases in labour force participation by women. The Middle East and the North African (MENA) region have experienced considerable progress in those indicators; however, women's economic participation rates have remained low and relatively stagnant over the last decade. Lebanon, and more specifically Beirut, is a pertinent case study of this paradox. This research uses a theoretical model linking the empowerment literature, household bargaining models, and theories on decision-making, to unpack the choices of married women in low-income Beirut vis-à-vis the labour markets. It employs an intersectional and interdisciplinary methodology, and a mixed qualitative and quantitative method. The quantitative component is a survey of 400 women in Beirut, which attempts to determine general trends and sketches out the profiles of women in the labour markets in Beirut (their backgrounds, household characteristics, labour market profiles, and perceptions). The qualitative constituent is a qualitative account that is based on a study of 80 married, economically active and inactive women from low-income Beirut, scrutinising their decision-making processes with regards to the labour market.

While the empowerment paradigm places the economic activity of women as one of the main pathways to their empowerment and advancement, women's lives, choices and subjectivities in low-income Beirut are much more complex than this theory suggests. Their decision-making is an outcome of a multifaceted web of structural, institutional and legal constraints, as well as of social pressures and expectations. Choices regarding work are intertwined with dynamics surrounding marriage- and a fragile equilibrium in their conjugal lives involving complex intra-household bargaining. It also rests on several factors, such as their definition of work, a cost benefit analysis of the choice to be economically active, and their desires: a continuum between structure and agency. Additionally, the context of low-income Beirut -a patriarchal, connective, relational setting that lacks state services and the adequate valuation of women's contributions- proves to be a disempowering context for women involved in the labour market at times. Finally, many women *chose* to be economically inactive, something that the literature does not engage with fully in its attempts to explain the puzzle of low labour force participation by women in the MENA region.



To *mama* and *baba*:
you gave me the world...

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Note on Transliteration

All transliterations follow the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies guidelines.

Note on Names

The names that I use for my interviewees in this work are not their own, but they have been given other names in order to protect their identities.

Chapter 1

Introduction

How It All Started

Ten years after my parents' decision to stop having children, my mother became 'accidentally' pregnant with a little girl. I was born as a fourth child into a family of adults. When I was seven, my sister started getting marriage proposals, and I already began to become familiar with some of the core questions surrounding marriage. My sister was requested to carefully consider some points before making such a big decision: "Will you have a decent life? Do you know that it's a lifetime commitment? Is his family controlling him, or is he independent?" and the crucial question: "Will he allow you to work outside the house?"

My father, a Syrian brought up in Beirut, considered education a very important element of life. My mother, a Lebanese who was originally from a village in the South, but who was also brought up in the capital, thought differently. Married at a very early age, she did not want to enrol in university, despite my father's constant encouragement. Consequently, she was a 'non-working', full-time housewife and a mother of four. 'Non-working' as used here, is a bit unfair to her, given that she was (and continues to be) in charge of household expenditure and chores, taking us to the doctors, attending all school meetings, buying us clothes, cooking, cleaning, washing, helping us with homework. Of course, she was also ready to accompany my father in the evenings to social receptions, business dinners and parties. Hence, the term 'non-working' will not be used throughout this thesis except when accompanied by 'in the labour market,' and the terms 'active/inactive' that are usually used with reference to the labour market will be replaced by 'economically active/inactive'. My father played a very big role in our lives as a material support system, an intellectual role model and an emotional buffer; but in terms of household duties, all he had to do was put food on the table and kiss us good night.

Across the street lived my childhood friend Lana. My mother and hers used to share a car-pooling system, where Dr. Reem (or *Tante* Reem- Aunt Reem in French, as is commonly used in Beirut), Lana's mother, would drop us off at school in the morning, and

my mother would return us in the afternoon. *Tante* Reem, a mother of two girls, earned her doctorate in Sociology from France while she was pregnant with her first child. She then returned to Lebanon, where she continued to work. Every morning, and after dropping us off at school at 7 am, she would come back home to quickly cook lunch and tidy the house before leaving for the university, where she taught several classes, until 3 p.m. She would then return home in time to set the table, feed Lana and Rana, her two daughters, make sure they started studying under the supervision of her husband, before leaving again for her psychiatry clinic, where she would have one or two appointments. At around 7:30 in the evening, she would bathe her children, put them to bed, and kiss them goodnight. After that, she would spend an hour or two watching the news and discussing household decisions and other matters with her husband, as well as cleaning the house, planning for an evening of marking university essays, and preparing for the next day's classes after her husband went to bed.

The contrast between *Tante* Reem's rushed and 'accomplished' (at least to my eyes, back then) marathon lifestyle and my mother's slower paced routine always had me wondering. Of course, from a very young age, I was amazed by *Tante* Reem's success outside the household. As I grew older, and especially as a teenager, I would compare her to my mother: she, too, would pour the coffee for her husband and entertain him, as he barely shook his head while watching the news. She, too, would be there for her children's school meetings. She, too, was a very devoted parent, exactly like my mother. She had it all, I thought, but with some more wrinkles around her eyes, but little did I know....

My story continues. Being an honours student, and having *Tante* Reem as a role model, I decided I wanted to become a university professor. However, being raised in a conservative house, which placed a high value on family, I also knew marriage was something I definitely wanted. At the age of twenty, I fell in love with a man (my first ever) whom I thought was my lifetime partner. Coming from a traditional family, he wanted to get married straight away. I 'willingly' conceded to his wishes. I put willingly in quotation marks because I always question to what extent my choice was independent from surrounding factors.

However, to cut a long story short, two months after our marriage, and only one year before my graduation, my partner banned me from going to university, although this

was something I made clear was crucial to me from day one. I was faced with a critical life decision: who do I want to be? My mother or *Tante* Reem? And I chose. As a woman, alongside family, I wanted to have my career life, or at least, like my mother, I wanted it to be an option. My family guided me that divorce was the only solution for such a rushed and unpromising marriage. They were very supportive of my decision to break up the relationship. My Bachelor's graduation was a tearful celebration of a victorious Honour in my Economics degree from the American University of Beirut, and a successful *khulu'* after seven months of court proceedings (the *khulu'* is when a wife asks for a divorce and gives up her dowry in exchange for it).

The reason I started this chapter by recounting these highlights of my life is to show that my interest in questions that are central to women's existence started at a very young age. Additionally, my heightened curiosity about the issues of women, work and marriage came following a very tough experience where I was at a crossroads that many women face at different stages of their lives. Mine was at university level and without the additional complication of having children; but other women experience this in different ways: their husbands force them to leave their jobs in many cases, and in others they don't have the support I had to make a similar decision. Sometimes, they simply willingly choose to stop working to care for their children, or decide to go after a belated desire to start a career. In other scenarios, women are obliged to leave home and seek work outside based on economic need.

Every woman might question her decisions, and each woman translates the answers differently, depending on a multitude of factors that are specific to her life. Every woman has a special story, but with shared elements. What elements make each story unique, and what others make it a common struggle? What distinguishes married women in low-income Beirut (the focus of this study, as will be explained in greater detail later) one from another? Do the stories differ according to the sectarian group to which they belong, to their educational background, or to other factors? How independent are women's decision-making processes, and how subscribed are they to the structural elements in their surroundings? How does earning an income change the position of the woman in the household? What shifts the power dynamics in the family? In the context of low-income Beirut, does access to formal work and to income *actually* empower women?

This project does not claim to have all the answers to these questions. However, it aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the struggles that married women in low-income Beirut face. It intends to use an intersectional approach to look at how different factors affect women's decision-making processes vis-à-vis the labour market, but also in choices relating to their marital life, and the dynamics between the two realms: the public and the private. Having started this chapter with my personal motivation for looking at this subject, the rest of the chapter will summarise the research's paradox by providing background information on its context, and presenting a summary of the research questions and methodology, as well as setting up a theoretical space in which the research questions will be answered throughout the next chapters. Finally, it will present an overview of the outline of the thesis.

The Paradox of Female Labour Force Participation in Beirut

The economic development literature establishes a correlation between changes in a set of variables and increases in labour force participation rates. Those variables can be summarised as: increased economic growth rates, declining fertility rates, rising levels of education, as well as increased urbanisation, which are all said to enhance female labour force participation (Barro and Lee, 2001; Euromed, 2010; WB, 2013). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has experienced considerable progress in those indicators, however, female labour force participation rates remain low and have been relatively stagnant over the last decade (WB, 2013). Manifestations of the 'development progress' include substantial increases being reported in average years of schooling, as well as higher literacy rates for women since the 1960s, thus narrowing gender gaps in education (WB, 2004; 2013). Fertility rates in the region decreased from 6.2 births per woman in the 1980s to an average of 3.2 in 2002 (Ibid). However, female labour force participation grew marginally: in 2009, it averaged 26% in the MENA region, well below the averages of Sub-Saharan Africa (49.7%), Latin America (51.7%), and Europe and Central Asia (67.8%) (Insead, 2011).

To avoid inappropriate data comparisons or erroneous correlations, the World Bank calculates the expected female labour force participation rate on the basis of the characteristics of the region (like education, fertility, and others), and concludes that the

current rates are indeed substantially lower than expected from a region that is characterised by a high rate of healthy, educated women in the working-age brackets (2004). The observed rates in the MENA region are 30% lower than the predicted rates. The latter observation is accentuated by increased local and regional investments in the productive and earning capacities of women, as well as health; the returns for which are not captured (WB, 2004; Shafik, 2001).

Women thus comprise 49 % of the population in the MENA region and represent only a quarter of its labour force. The latter average rate differs between countries, and is slightly higher among labour abundant countries (such as the Arab Republic of Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia), than it is in oil rich countries (Algeria, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, for instance) (WB, 2013). For example, Lebanon scored 44% on the Gender Inequality Index in 2011, whereas Tunisia and Saudi Arabia score 29% and 65% respectively. Yet, female labour force participation rates for these three countries in 2009 were 22% for Lebanon, 26% for Tunisia and 21% for Saudi Arabia (Insead, 2011).

This research will look at Lebanon and, more specifically, at the capital, Beirut, as a case study of this paradox, especially within labour abundant countries. Despite it having having commonalities with many 'global cities' (to be explored in later sections, Sassen, 2005), Beirut and Lebanon more generally have some characteristics that make them

unique in the case of female labour force participation. Lebanon is highly urbanised (87% urban) (CIA, 2010), and has witnessed periods of high economic growth (9% being the lowest GDP growth for non-war years, reported in 2009) (WB, 2011). Moreover, the age at first marriage, the rates of never married women, and divorce rates are increasing, both in Lebanon and in Beirut. Lebanese women's average fertility rate was 1.78 in 2010, lower than all other Arab countries, and comparable to developed nations (Ibid). Additionally, while women may be discriminated against in practice, most articles in the labour law (especially those pertaining to equality of pay, minimum wage rates and ownership rights) treat citizens of both genders equally¹ (Charafeddine, 2009). Finally, Lebanese women excel in the field of education. In the past couple of decades, illiteracy among women in Lebanon has decreased from 40.6% to 7.5%, and women continue to score higher than their male counterparts in education at all levels (MoSAa, 2007). For instance, 54.3% of the population with a higher education are women (Ibid). Hence, all the determinants favouring women labour force participation are present, but no significant rise has yet been reported on that front (WB, 2013).

In fact, Lebanese women's current economic activity rate, as reported by the government statistics agency, the Central Administration for Statistics (MoSA, 2009),

¹ This notion will be expanded upon in later chapters.

remains stagnant and at a low level. In 2009, only 22.3% of Lebanese females (aged fifteen and above) were economically active, just slightly superior to the 19.2% reported in 1995. The capital, Beirut, which houses 17.4% of the active female population, reported a higher average of 32.7% in 2007, which is still considered to be a low return on investment given that spending on education and health is said to enhance female labour force participation (MoSAb, 2007; Badre and Yaacoub, 2011).

The above facts relating to low female labour force participation rates in Lebanon probe two different hypotheses: it might be argued that the national statistics underestimate the numbers of women who are actively engaged in the labour markets, due to issues pertaining to survey methodology, informal markets and definitions of work. Additionally, the data provided by national statistics is outdated, and no separate data on Beirut is available. This raises questions about whether or not more women are working, but this information is not captured by the national statistics. The second aspect relates to the possible obstacles that may be obstructing women in labour market participation.

While assessing the national data is beyond the capacity of this project, this research surveys 400 women through a household survey in Beirut, aiming to see if it is possible that women are, in fact, working, but that their work eludes the data gathering efforts. If so, this survey also provides trends in their activity patterns, household characteristics, and the labour market profiles of surveyed women. It also examines their attitudes and opinions about work, gender roles and marriage, among other issues. The survey's population is women aged 21 and above. The choice of this age group, as well as more details about the survey methodology and findings, will be outlined in future chapters. Generally, however, data collected from the survey will be used descriptively to provide background information for each chapter, given the lack of data that is available on Beirut.

While the survey covers women above the age of 21, the main research questions address married women in low-income Beirut who are between the ages of 21 and 60. The choice of this category will also be explained in more detail in the methodology section of the next chapter. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews with 80 married women (and ten husbands) belonging to diverse sectarian groups (Shi'a, Sunni and Christians of different sects) through a purposive sampling jointly done with a snow ball technique, as well as focus groups, informal chats, and participant observation. This research endeavour

aims to go deeper than an examination of the obstacles and incentives to work that are determined by the survey, by investigating women's perceptions of causes of their participation choices, and a recognition of the tensions relating to their decision-making processes. Further, this research takes a step back and questions the very basic assumption of much of women empowerment thinking, asking the question: do women in low-income Beirut *really* want to work? Is it an active desire, or are they pushed into work because of poverty? What factors influence their decisions? Are there structural, institutional, and legal constraints, or societal pressures and expectations? Additionally, how do women in this research's sample define 'work'? What are the dynamics between the motivations and impediments? How does work (or its lack) challenge or facilitate women's conjugal lives? Does earning an income affect the position of women inside the household? What about gender roles? What shapes spending patterns in those households, and how do they differ if the wife is earning an income? Finally, is earning an income through work empowering women in their domestic spheres in this specific context?

Throughout the thesis, each chapter will contain its thematic literature review at the outset, in which the research's questions will unfold. Before that, however, the next sections will position the whole thesis within the wider theoretical debate of empowerment, as well as building a theoretical framework in which women's motivations and decision-making processes will be scrutinised. The next section will begin these discussions.

Key Notions and Definitions

Development as Human Development

While the previous section started by overviewing some of the assumptions with regards to female participation in the labour markets through the 'development' paradigm, it is important to first start by defining the concept of development and highlight which aspect of it will be used throughout the thesis. 'Development' as a notion is vaguely used in both literature and practice. It tends to refer to a set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of social progress rather than something precise. The origin of the terms the way it is used today dates back to President Truman in his 1949 Inaugural Address, when the term started to spread even without a precise definition being attributed to it. The word usage carried

with it a positive connotation (Hayter, 2005). Hence, the term became a performative word (i.e. performing by doing), and it stopped being a social construct (Ibid). During the Cold War, the term was used by both parties alike, to promote their values in the countries of the Third World. After two decades of 'development' led by the UN, add-on words started to precede the term such as 'human,' 'social,' and 'sustainable,' making it a term 'so vague to allow different, often incompatible interpretations' (South Centre, 2002, p.15).

Hayter (2005) further argues for a definition that is more nuanced than the original one; one which moves beyond the positive connotations attached to the usage of the term 'development' and which recognizes not only the successes but also the failures of equating the term development with economic development, one which recognizes that beneath those policies, 'the essence of 'development' is the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations in order to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by means of market exchange, to effective demand (p.23).' This, the author argues, applies to industrialization, land, the education system, but also labour, but also with regard to social relations, whereby human effort became a commodity that has taken over services that were previously freely exchanged within the family in the name of 'development.' It is under this light that assumptions on female labour force participation will be scrutinized.

Much like 'empowerment,' indicators to measure 'development' vary from measurements of national wealth, to measurements of wellbeing and of freedoms. In the United Nations documents, 'human development' is often measured by a number of indicators (life expectancy, adult literacy, access to education, people's average income), covering all aspects of individual well-being.

However-many definitions exist, when referring to 'development,' this thesis suggests 'human development' as defined by Amartya Sen in 1998 in his 'Human Capabilities' approach, which was then adopted and expanded by Nussabaum (2000), Alkire (1999), Robeyns (2003), among others. This approach looks at the concept of human development from a choice lens, defining it as an increase in people's choices and ability to lead lives that they deem as valuable, beyond merely economic growth. Rather than focusing on material additions that will make someone's life a better one, this approach to development puts decision-making at the centre-stage of development priorities. Among

those are the right to choice in education, healthy life, access to resources, and communal life. This thesis will approach development using this definition, as it relates to the theoretical framework putting decision-making processes of women at the centre of the research, and assessing whether their participation in labour markets indeed ‘empowers’ them by giving them additional choices. Here, it is important to understand what is meant by ‘empowerment’ and how it will be used as a lens to examine the research questions central to this thesis.

The Origins of the Term ‘Empowerment’

The origin of the term ‘empowerment’ can be traced to the protestant reformation in Europe and was subsequently crucial to several movements of social justice (Gaventa, 2002). In the mid-1980s, the term ‘women empowerment’ emerged as a tool to speak about more politically transformational struggles not only against patriarchy, but also against inequalities based on race, ethnicity, and class (Ibid). The term was then adopted and contextualized by feminists in the Third World, notably in Latin America, South Asia and other regions, and used in various areas of education, worker rights, among other before it became exclusively known for women issues. This historical definition is important to remember the meanings that the concept carried with it when comparing it to how it is currently used by many scholars as will be discussed in this section.

In the 1990s, the term ‘empowerment’ made its way to the ‘development’ lexicon and more particularly in the context of women and gender equality, peaking in 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where it was adopted thereafter for a gendered approach. Although in all its definitions the concept of ‘power’ was central to the word ‘empowerment’ as the next section will explore, Batliwala (2010) argues that in many cases, and referring to the Indian example as a case study, the ‘once powerful idea and practice of women’s empowerment degenerated into a set of largely apolitical, technocratic and narrow interventions that create nothing like the radical transformation envisaged by early women’s movement leaders –and how it was brought to serve neoliberal economic ends (p.114).’ The reference to neoliberalism in this quote is crucial and will be explored in this thesis in relation to its effects on the labour markets in Beirut and on female labour force participation more particularly.

On Defining Empowerment

Today, the word empowerment is used widely in development discourse to signify a process of transforming gender power relation, through enhancing women's awareness and building their capacity (DAC, 1998). The definition of empowerment is closely linked to a transformation of power relation in society and across individuals and structures: power to, power within, and power with. It is closely linked to the ability to make choices, to contest norms, and to change what choices are made available. Arguing for the empowerment of women using intrinsic arguments has been difficult especially in policy circles and international organizations. Quantifying empowerment and claiming its instrumental value has made it more desirable in terms of policy objectives (Rowlands, 1996; Oxaal, 1997; Johnson, 1992; Wieringa, 1994). However, the claim that empowerment can be measured has been heavily disputed (Kabeer, 1999).

Empowerment is the power or the ability to have choices, whereby choice implies alternatives, differentiating between first order choices (strategic life choices), and second order choices which do not shape one's life in a drastic or life changing way. Empowerment in this sense is the ability of people to make life choices after those choices have been denied to them.

The exercise of choice is related to resources (material and non), which enhance the ability to make a choice. Choice, however, is not only linked to the availability of resources, but is also an outcome of the culture and an internalization of behaviours and attitudes by women in which they discriminate against other women and themselves. The conditions of choice (real alternatives, absence of alternatives or punishingly high cost), as well as the type of choices (strategic life choices or mundane choices), and whether or not the choices destabilize or reproduce social inequalities all matter in the conceptualisation of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999).

However, more meaningful, real and sustainable levels of empowerment can only be reached depending on whether or not change encompasses not only the individual level, but also the structural level. This makes it crucial to look at choice in the light of the patriarchal structures, as well as the societal and cultural expectations, for instance, of women's availability to render domestic work, as well as reproductive and sexual services,

all of which will be critically examined throughout the thesis. The next section will examine measurement of empowerment and what indicators have been used in the literature to assess its success, and highlight aspects that will be relevant to the discussion of empirical material throughout the thesis.

On Measuring Empowerment

Measuring empowerment has triggered a wide debate and the indicators that best encapsulate the change in empowerment and its sustainability have been contested. One approach to measure empowerment has been the UNDP's Gender Empowerment Index, which looks at women's political representation as well as the percentages of women who have attained managerial posts, among other indicators. Other types of measure assess women's ability to earn cash and how this translate in her decision-making processes inside the household, what type of decisions she has control over, and her independence in making choices (Batliwala, 1993). What is often not captured in such measures is the wider social structural and political aspects hence why the theoretical framework used for this thesis will use the concept of empowerment as a lens to examine decision-making processes of women, starting with the individual as the central decision-maker, going on to the family, and then to the wider society, incorporating the institutions and structures as important considerations.

The rest of the section is based on Kabeer's (1999) work in examining and evaluating measurements of empowerment. According to her work, the use of 'achievements' to measure empowerment is problematic due to the way in which the concept of choice is central to the definition of power. In some situations where choice did not directly contribute to the over-all well-being of the individual in question, this has triggered a debate on how women may have made that choice themselves. In the empowerment literature, this has often generated the explanation that women are accepting their positionality, or internalizing their position or their inequality. This has also suggested that in certain societies, for it to be accepted, this inequality is not seen as 'unjust.'

There are several principles through which empowerment has been measured, one of the first and most straightforward is that of 'resource.' Resources, or access to resources, however widely they have been used, carry the pitfall that those are measures of potential

rather than measures of actualized choice according to Kabeer (1999). Choice is not only linked to resources but is linked to a number of other elements affecting the ability to realise this choice (the example of access to land is a case in point: Boserup, 1970; Mukhopadhyay, 1998). This means that a simple access or ability to access resources is not enough to measure empowerment without differentiating between control over resources, access to resources and decision-making (Sathar and Kazi, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1997; Kishor, 1997).

The second way empowerment is often measured in the literature is through agency, especially that related to decision-making agency (Lukes, 1974; McElroy, 1992). Those indicators are household decisions, children-related decisions, household expenditure, purchases, the ability to work outside the home, the number of children to have, among other (Kishar, 1997; Jejeebhoy, 1997; Kritz, Makinwa and Gurak, 1997; Becker, 1997; Razavi, 1992; Sathar and Kazi, 1997). However, not all of these measures are equally convincing because they don't all have the same consequences on women's lives. For instance, a lot of women's decision making is related to certain areas of the domestic, areas which are culturally accepted for women to dominate (Kabeer, 1999). Another nuance to pay attention to is the difference between the control over the decision versus the implementation of it. For instance, controlling whether or not the child can go to public or private school and leaving the choice of the school to the woman, among other examples (Ibid). In this situation, the women have the illusion of choice, whereas in reality, they are only choosing the modality of the implementation of the decision.

A third way to measure empowerment is through measuring achievements. Kabeer (1999) warns once again about the indicators chosen to measure empowering achievements. She differentiates, from the existing literature between direct evidence of empowerment, sources of empowerment, and setting indicators. Direct sources of empowerment include elements of roles and decision makings, equality indicators in marriage, and financial autonomy. Those are usually the most widely used when drawing a direct link between material achievements (such as participation in the labour market, central to this thesis) and empowerment. Sources of empowerment include participation in the modern sector (such as asset owned, female education, and whether or not the woman was working prior to marriage). The final one is 'setting' indicators, defined by the family structure, the marital

advantage, and the type of marriage the woman is in; i.e. relating more to the institutional and structural elements.

Kabeer advances the fact that indirect sources are far more reaching in capturing empowerment. An increase in choice for elements already assigned in women's sphere is not per se an increase in empowerment but rather more efficiency in the pre-assigned roles of women within that sphere, or what she calls 'women's greater efficacy as agents within prescribed gender roles (1999, p. 451).' What she then proposes is a theoretical understanding of empowerment that brings together a triangulation of resources, agency and achievements, as 'the three dimensions are indivisible in determining the meaning of an indicator and hence its validity as a measure of empowerment (p.452).' This is the lens that will be used and developed through the theoretical framework to follow and throughout the thesis when looking at whether a certain decision is indeed empowering to the woman from her own perspective.

While it is important to look at individual agency, it is equally important to look at the structures within which that agency unfolds, the cultural values, the public and private arenas, and the wider context (Gita Sen, 1993; Kabeer, 1997; Rowlands, 1997). For instance, the social context can play a big role in justifying the subordination of women and their internalization of their own values, for instance their acceptance of their prescribed gender roles, and their availability to conduct household chores. In a study on Bangladesh, six indicators are used to measure women empowerment like a woman's sense of self and vision of the future, her mobility and visibility, her economic security, her status and decision-making power within the household, and her ability to interact effectively in public, as well as her participation in nonfamily groups (Schuler and Hashemi, 1993). While this study's results are interesting in terms of measuring direct achievements, they leave behind important structural elements that might have influenced the ability of women to make and realize their choices.

Another example in examining women empowerment in Uganda starts by defining empowerment as acquiring power over material resources. However, that study shows how the contextual and structural factors are crucial in examining the effects of 'empowering' choices on women's lives. In this specific context, for instance, the state underwent a state of civil strife affecting the socio-economic situation of the country and hence women's

struggles of autonomy and empowerment more generally (Boyd, 1989). A study conducted by Jesani (1990) confirms these findings: measuring empowerment through certain resources and achievements (work, access to land, access to cash) in itself is not merely enough.

In a framework developed by Batliwala in 1993, she summarizes the points that this section tries to make very well:

the transformatory empowerment could *not* be achieved by tackling any one of these elements of social power –even at that early stage, its architects were clear that there was no ‘one-shot’ magic-bullet route to women’s empowerment, such as providing women with access to credit, enhanced incomes, or land titles. The framework stressed that the ideological and institutional change dimensions were critical to sustaining empowerment and real social transformation (in Batliwala 2010, p. 115).

The next sections will use this broader lens to look at empowerment by examining the decision-making processes of women starting from the individual, building up to the societal and structural.

How Powerful is Empowerment?

As the previous section examined, the debate around women’s empowerment was initiated in the realm of grassroots activism and was brought into the agenda of gender and development by feminist researchers (Sen and Grown, 1987; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Agarwal, 1994). This was done in the hope of shedding light on the inequalities in the power relations between men and women that are obstructing women from engaging in decision-making and, more widely, from participation in development processes. The earlier, most simple definition of empowerment summarised it in three aspects: empowerment as ‘the power within,’ referring to women’s subjectivities and consciousness; ‘the power to,’ the ability of women to participate more in societies if given the resources, as well as ‘the power with,’ in other words, the ability and importance of acting collectively (Kabeer, 2012, p.6). These contributions in conceptualising empowerment stressed the importance of realising the differences between women in diverse contexts, beyond the commonalities that link women in order to achieve strategic goals (Molyneux, 1985).

From these initial contributions many other trials to conceptualise empowerment have arisen, all of which have in common the notion that empowerment is first and foremost the ability to make choices. Adding to the debate around the agency of women to decide, is the later recognition that agency operates within larger structures that either enable or obstruct women's advancement and power (Malhotra et. al, 2002). In later stages, and following the adoption of the notion of empowerment by big international bodies and development organisations, the economic component was added to the debate.

This economic component found its way into international conferences, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the World Bank's agendas, and was a key element in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Different definitions were adopted, some of which were purely economic (WB, 2005), stressing the importance of gender equality and empowerment for growth and prosperity, and others encompassed elements of women's well-being and of eliminating inequality, not only in labour markets, but more broadly (Kabeer, 2012). The third of the eight MDGs, for instance, 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' is, in fact, stressed for its intrinsic values. It was argued that the paths to achieving this goal were closing the education gap at all levels, increasing women's share in waged employment and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, among other facets. Achieving this goal through these paths, it was contended, will lead to better development outcomes and prosperity. However, despite the unanimity over the importance of this goal, the effectiveness of the main paths proposed to achieve it remained contested (Kabeer, 2005, pp. 13-24).

The links between women's empowerment, development and prosperity were adopted by most actors in the development arena: instances can be found in the speeches and writings of the Former World Bank president, James Wolfenson, who argued that education and ensuring women's presence in labour markets are catalysts for development, leading to decreases in children's and women's mortality, higher productivity, increases in women's decision-making, as well as faster economic growth (WB, 2001; 2005). These associations between development and women's empowerment were bi-directional: economic developments (through targeting poverty, enhancing economic growth, among other things) that can drive down inequality between men and women. On the other hand, it is also argued that achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women is a pre-

requisite to other developmental goals, notably economic ones (Duflo, 2012; UN, 2005; WB 2001; WB, 2005).

Hence, women's participation in labour markets and their access to income were increasingly positioned as being of the main pathways to their empowerment when measured through the resources approach reviewed in the previous section. Pearson (2009, p.117) summarises this point, and asks important questions that present an umbrella for this research:

What is it that we are seeking in terms of women's engagement with paid work and employment? There are two strands which we need to consider. The first is what I have termed 'The Engelsian myth.' This is the view that women's empowerment, or emancipation as it used to be called, lies in their incorporation into the paid workforce; the position that reflects Joan Robinson's oft repeated observation that the only thing worse than being exploited by capital is not being exploited by capital.

Pearson (2009) notes that, within socialist feminist tradition and the trade unions, women's working conditions (such as equal pay, promotion, and others) were always a point of concern and struggle. Among feminist economists, there was an additional focus on intra-household dynamics, spending, and decision-making, paving the way for the attention that is needed for women's unrecognised contributions in both paid and unpaid labour.

Pearson's quote summarises the direction of most research surrounding women's work, but adding to her point is the importance of recognising our responsibility, as feminist researchers, to go beyond merely theorising about women's work, by constantly assessing through empirical research the extent to which the theories advancing women's right have been adopted, and how are they perceived on the ground by women themselves. It is indeed important to theoretically assess what the conditions surrounding women's access to paid work are, and which of these lead to their empowerment, in the form of an increased say in their decision-making, a better lifestyle, and more freedom.

However, assessing whether these theories coincide with reality is also important, not merely as a 'case-study' exercise to be added to the theory. This should be done through a deep examination of the advancement made in women's lived realities in different times and contexts, and, more importantly, what *more* can be done, and how can

our research effectively contribute to it? This task should not be left to international organisations and policy-making bodies who often manipulate data to advance their own interests, using women's issues as a Joker card, a box to be ticked. Nor should it be confined only to 'Monitoring and Evaluation' programmes that development workers perform to assess their projects. Development, activism, and academia should not be separated.

Undeniably, there has been much debate about ivory tower academics, and the tension between their writings and academia. Several scholars have discussed the various ways in which academia has become isolated from grassroots and radical activism and development and has been corporatised (Maxey, 1999; Dreher et. al, 2013; Soley, 1995; Anyon, 2005). However, there has been little writing on this in the context of the Middle East, notwithstanding the fact that the Arab world used to thrive on intellectual activism a few decades ago (and still does!).

My father recounts to me how, when he was in his early twenties, policy makers and politicians in Syria and Lebanon feared university students most, because, they can mobilise hundreds of thousands into the streets within hours. Through my work, I am hoping to join the many voices in academia that approach research from this vantage point, coupling their desires for change with their attempts to advance theoretical understandings of lived realities. I also hope to present a grounded case study of women's stories, perceptions and desires surrounding work, and to unpack their contribution in order to evaluate the claims that the development literature makes: that working in the labour market is a major pathway for women's empowerment.

While there is a proliferation of literature with critical theoretical studies that assesses whether access to employment and cash constitutes a path for empowerment, there has been little empirical evidence that this *automatically* challenges women's subordination (Pearson, 2009). Case studies become even scarcer when it comes to Lebanon, where there has not yet been related literature. This research aims to fill this void through an intersectional approach, and a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods that will be further explored in future sections. Although this thesis by no means claims to provide the final answers to these questions, it will take the reader into a space where the women who were involved in this research will act out their life decisions. The pages of this

manuscript will be a ‘lens’ through which the dynamics surrounding their choices will be examined and assessed against the claims of the empowerment paradigm.

Pearson’s question at the beginning of the quotation above (2009), raises another important point that requires further empirical research in the case of Beirut: it is not enough to only ask what *we* are seeking in terms of women’s employment, but what are women *themselves* seeking? What are their stated incentives, and how can we as feminist researchers unpack these incentives in the light of current changes in the macro-, meso- and micro-levels? How can we go beyond the implications of their work for the global economy (macro), for the national employment (meso-) level, or for their own lives within the household (micro level)? The question then becomes not only whether work in the labour markets is empowering women; not only what it is that motivates women to work in the first place, but also if their choices really reflect their inner desires (agency), or are they dictated by circumstances (structure), or are they, indeed, a mix of both.

The majority of the literature on women’s work assumes that being in the labour markets is the wanted outcome, but wanted by whom, and for what purposes? Is it the desired outcome for women themselves, in the context of Beirut? As feminist researchers, we should not only question what is keeping women from participating: what are the structural, societal, market-related obstructions that hinder their access to work and their choices surrounding it, but also take one step back and ask: do women in this study *really* want to work? This question is not only addressed to women who are not in the labour markets, but is extended to employed women and those seeking employment.

The answer to such a question needs the recognition of the tensions between structure and agency in women’s decision-making processes, the interaction of different vantage points -the macro- (globalisation, consumerism, capitalism, etc.), the meso- (cultural context, national laws governing labour market practices), and the micro- (women’s desires, their education and upbringing)- the private, and the public, and the interplaying of class, race, age, and other factors are considered by using an intersectional approach.

Finally, while feminist research has moved away from essentialist positions for women, it is equally important in the context of an increasingly globalised world to continue to show the networks of commonalities between women’s struggles everywhere.

The ability to do so will further the point made earlier, moving this research from a context-based case study to the development of substantial tools and instances that will allow us to better strategise on women's rights. In light of this discussion and of the research questions presented above, the next sections will establish a conceptual framework for the study.

'I iron, I have been ironing for 27 years ...'

On the lower part of Rmeil, a predominantly Christian neighbourhood in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, it is almost impossible to find a place to park. Streets are small, cars are parked on the pavements, and a very few empty pieces of land are rented by individuals who use them as parking spaces in exchange for two dollars per three hours, like elsewhere in Beirut. Yolla – who will be more formally introduced as a gatekeeper for this research in the next chapter- points me to a space with big Phalangist Party flags (Kata'b Party). The Phalangist Party is a right wing political party that is predominantly for Maronite Christians. For such a party, known to be anti-Palestinian, with an ideology that Lebanon is of Phoenician identity rather than Arab (read Muslim) identity, the sight of a veiled woman driving a four by four car entering the party's parking lot is a bit unsettling.

The parking lot's guard, wearing a white T-shirt over which a big cross falls from his necklace, starts to wave angrily for me to get my car outside the parking lot as he makes his way towards me. Yolla, next to me, is cursing him, "[foul language] you mother [foul language] you piece of [foul language]... See, this is why Lebanon will never become a country. Sectarianism and hatred, open the window Rouba. *Wla* Jean [You Stupid Jean], it's me Yolla, Yolla!" At the sight of Yolla, Jean relaxes and helps me park. We walk along a small street, to arrive at a laundry shop, in which a short woman –one of Yolla's old family friends- is moving hastily between the back of the shop and its front, wearing a jeans mini-skirt and a beige revealing T-shirt, her hair- grey and black- falling on her wrinkled face.

Rita is a 47 year old Orthodox Christian, who was married to her cousin -6 years younger than she is- at the age of 24. Rita considers love to be an essential part of her life: love should be the main pillar in any relationship, otherwise it is impossible to accept your partner's faults. Rita is the mother of four daughters: her eldest (21 years old) is a university student, followed by a school dropout looking for a job (15 years old), a girl at

school (7 years old) and a deceased daughter. Marie, her second daughter, decided that school was not for her. Rita agrees, "... not everyone is born for education. Life is like the animal kingdom, each person has his or her own role. Marie's role is to work, not to study."

Rita and her husband run a laundry shop that they have been renting near their home for the past 27 years, "I iron full-time," she says. Rita speaks of herself as being a very ambitious woman when she was in her early twenties. Today, she has realised that life is larger than she is. She is barely able to make ends meet. She is tired, very tired:

Work is important because it fills your time, and because boredom leads to bad things. You need to work to live, and you need to continue working until you are in your grave. I have been working since I was 15 years old, first as a shop keeper, then as an ironing lady. Our opening times are from 8 till 8, I love my work, otherwise I wouldn't survive the long working hours. I started to work because I wanted to get married, I had to buy the furniture for the house, buy my needs, then buy my baby's needs, the milk, the clothes, all this. Today, I have to pay for my daughter's tuition, her outfits, and the food on the table. So, in one way or another, it is still the same. I had to buy the refrigerator, the carpet, the food. 20 years later, the refrigerator needs to be fixed, the carpet is rotten, and food still needs to be provided. Most women these days work; they work 3 shifts, the kids, the home and work. Despite this, they don't get any recognition. Because everything that matters for the man is sex, and that his sexual desires are met. He does not care about anything else. Tell him we don't have food, he doesn't care; but don't tell him I am tired from work and can't have sex with you tonight. This is why time and again, he has asked me to stop working, but I never listened. He doesn't care about poverty, but I do. Even your children, when they grow up they will tell you that you left them behind in nurseries to work. As if you work for your own pleasure. If my husband could afford everything- like the 3 thousand dollars school tuition of this little one- then I would stop work and sit at home. Instead of waking up at 5 am to clean, of course, I would sit. Instead of cooking while ironing, of course, I would sit. Instead of teaching my kids while I work, of course, I would sit. I would sit and do one job, not three.

Rita's statement highlights the importance of problematising the assumption that women have to work in the labour market, and sheds light on the rationale behind some women's choice to engage in formal work. It is also important because it underlines important themes that will come up at different stages of this thesis: the tensions between

work and marriage, the gender roles within the household, the increasingly market-oriented economy, consumerism, the lack of state services, among other themes.

While future chapters will set out the context of the study, which is crucial to understanding my respondents' statements, my methodology and methods, as well as a more formal introduction to the respondents, Rita's story will accompany us throughout this section as I attempt to set up a theoretical framework within which future discussions of respondents' decision-making processes will be situated.

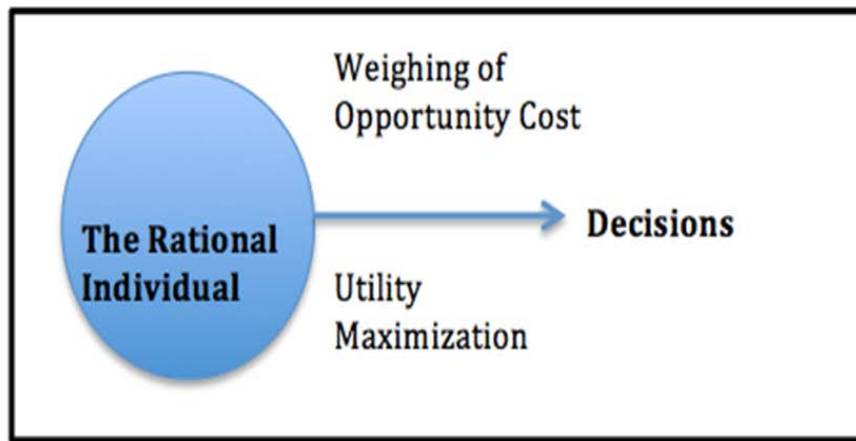
Understanding Women's Decision-Making Processes

The most straightforward way to think about Rita's decision-making is to start building on her as the decision maker, and to gradually develop a larger interconnected structure as a site in which she comes to define selfhood, to make decisions, and to act. Attached to these decisions and actions are different sets of constraints and incentives, for instance: the natal and conjugal household, the state, the legal system and the labour market.

From Individuals to Households

To reiterate, this research is interested in understanding the decision-making of married women, in low-income Beirut, in relation to their participation in the labour market, as well as questioning the implications of such a choice on their lives, independence, and their say in household bargaining. In order to do this, this section will build on an earlier theory of decision-making: rational choice theory, using the individual as the ultimate decision maker. For the sake of this discussion, the individual will be Rita.

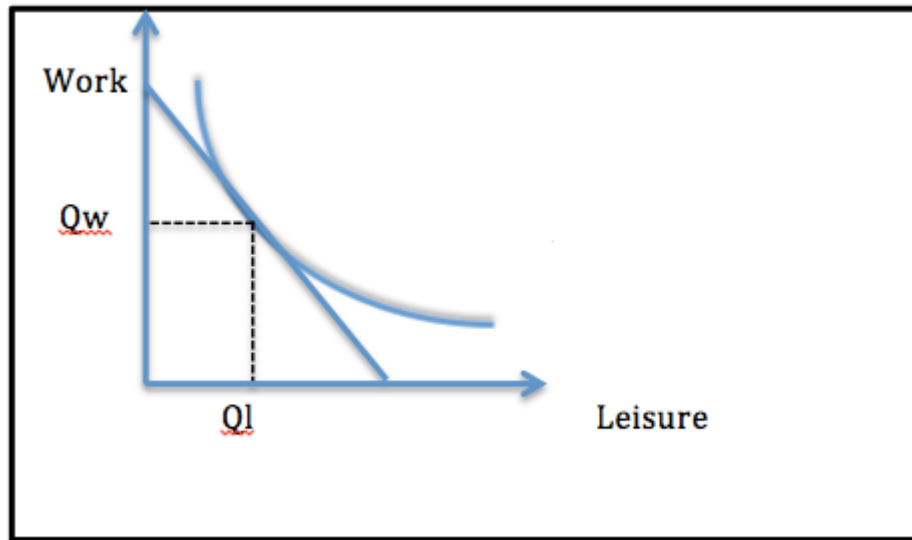
Figure 1 Decision-Making through the Lens of Rational Choice Theory



Source: Compiled by Author

In this strand, social and economic behaviour are explained by the opportunity cost and the level of utility that the individual derives from her choices (Figure 1). As Rational Choice theory posits, assuming perfect information, cognitive mastery, a set of resources and restrictions, and treating preferences as exogenous, the individual is a rational being boosting her satisfaction and happiness (Sen, 2008). Choice is thus merely an outcome of a utility maximising equation in which time is dedicated to and divided between work and leisure. Figure 2 shows an indifference curve, with different combinations of work and leisure yielding the same level of utility for Rita. The proportion of each depends on which will have the highest yield of satisfaction for the individual. Rita, hence, at fifteen years old, had in fact decided that between work and boredom, she preferred work. While this theory allows the prediction of individual decisions, its assumptions (taking tastes as being exogenous, information as perfectly flowing, and other) are unrealistic, and remain impractical in explaining why women make the choices they do (Hodgson, 2012). It is very simplistic to assume that Rita's decision-making came as an outcome of a simple choice between two options.

Figure 2 Utility: Maximising the Combinations of Work and Leisure



Source: Compiled by Author

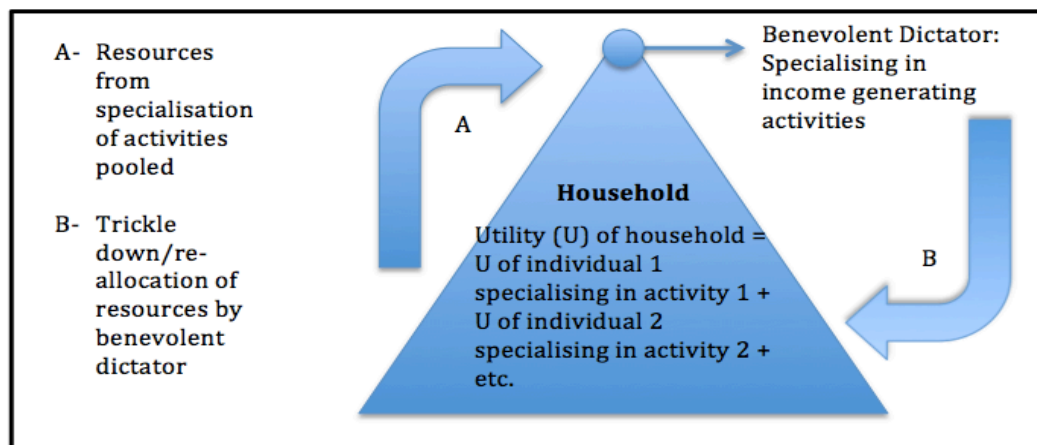
It is on that initial model of Neo-Classic Economic Theory that Becker (1981) appended his theoretical strand, 'New Household Economics'. This theory goes beyond the individual to advance households as units of decision-making. The word 'Households' is used here to connote a "bundle of relationships in a society through which its primary productive activities are organised, recognising that these frequently involve principles of kinship and residence" (Kabeer, 1994, p. 114). Households are, however, treated by this theory as being homogenous units. Becker posits that household members specialise in different activities that are based on their competitive advantage. Women's intra-household activities, for instance, are seen as a way to maximise efficiencies within the domestic realm, whereas men specialise in income generating activities. This theory departs from the principles of rational choice, trade theory, and the aggregation of individuals' utilities within the household. Finally, it argues that resources are then pooled by the head of the family, or the 'benevolent dictator,' and are re-allocated to family members in a Pareto efficient way (Figure 3).

If this theory were to be applied to Rita's case, then Rita's life would be as a stay at home mother, caring for her children. The benevolent dictator, in fact, is not very far from what Rita described her husband as:

In Christianity, like in Islam, the husband is considered to be the head of the family. It is said, Jesus is the head of the Church in the same way that the man is the head of the family. This is why, had it been possible, I would be relaxed at home and would leave all leadership to him. But whether he likes it or not, I work better than him, I budget better than him, and, as an oriental man, he doesn't like it very much, but accepts it.

Ideally, then, in a perfect world and assuming the interests of people collide, Becker's explanation of decision-making in the household model would work. In fact, his explanation applies to some aspects of decision-making for many of the women I have interviewed. It also speaks to the household division of labour that continues to be gendered even in households where women contribute to household spending, as will be shown in future chapters. However, as it stands, this theory is not enough to explain the full process of my respondents' choices.

Figure 3 Beckerian View of the Household



Source: Compiled by Author

This is due to several shortcomings in the Beckerian model, the first stemming from its problematic assumptions, such as the aggregation of individual utility into a single welfare function, assuming an altruistic division of resources, as well as the 'internal

harmony of interests' (Kabeer, 1994, 2000). As shown in Rita's case, this theory does not apply, as her husband does not excel more than her at work, nor does she think it is possible that she be fully and solely committed to household work.

Furthermore, while this theory introduces domestic work as a third possibility for time allocation, it overlooks tensions, negotiations, and differentials in interests when distributing resources and responsibilities between the individuals within the household. In the case of Rita, she is the one doing all the household work without tensions, but, as will be discussed later on in the chapter, this is a key point of disagreement among husbands and wives, especially when it comes to economically active women. Finally, preference is still as problematic in the Beckerian view as it was in earlier theories, since it is not taken as an endogenous factor in decision-making. Hence, while the addition of households as units of analysis is beneficial, the decisions of women, in this case, will merely reflect what the 'household head', or husband, thinks to be their areas of strength or comparative advantage. Domestic labour is what they do best and hence their choice, say, for a lack of participation in the labour markets, is predicted. In this sense, there is an implicit contract between the family head and the woman, in which producing and managing income is traded for domestic and care activities.

Therefore, the adoption of the Beckerian household as a unit of analysis in this theoretical framework -given the centrality of these institutions in the production and perpetuation of biological and social relations- is insufficient. While he acknowledged the shifting boundaries of these dynamic institutions, and the manifestations of decisions made in households over those in the public realm, implicit contracts that occur in- and outside the household should be recognised. Power dynamics, as well as bargains previously concealed in his unitary view of the household, should be more closely scrutinised if we are to take households as units of analysis. The next section will thus utilise theories that build on Becker's introduction of the household into the theoretical framework, to incorporate additional aspects that are crucial to our understanding of the choices of women within them. However, the overview of this theory is important as a logical step towards bridging the individual with the household as a unit of analysis.

Well-Being Perceptions and Input Valuations

Earlier studies on women decision-making processes, both in the Marxist and neo-liberal traditions, assumed the household to be a ‘black-box’ ruled by the husband, or benevolent dictator (Folbre, 1986). However, later literature challenged this by re-conceptualising intra-household bargaining through a capacity to portray negotiation dynamics within the household, which is usually concealed in other theories (Hirdman, 1991; Kandyoti, 1988; Pateman, 1988; Whitehead, 1981; Agarwal, 1994; Sen, 1991; Folbre, 1986; Kabeer, 1994; Sen, 1999).

The starting point for the discussion of intra-household dynamics is the work of Sen (1999), in which he contends that perceptions of well-being and valuations of inputs play a big role in an individual’s decisions, as well as the internalisation of their position within the household. He contends that women - instead of bargaining and negotiating changes in the contract governing household life- come to enact the scripts as they are. He adds that the woman’s capacity to bargain within the household depends greatly on her ‘fall-back position,’ in other words her well-being if this ‘contract’ fails to be enacted. Women, he continues, mostly agree to contracts because of their disadvantaged position within the household.

For instance, in the case of Rita, her bargaining ability in decision-making and choices comes from the fact that she is an equal wage earner in the household. When her husband asked her to quit work at their laundry shop and stay at home, Rita was able to refuse because his fall-back position is very weak (he cannot manage the job on his own; he is dependent on her support too), and hers is strong (she can manage to survive without him through working). Additionally, Rita strongly values her inputs in the house, which influences the way she views her positionality in the household, which, in turn, influences her decision-making, whether in terms of participating in the labour market or something else. In many other cases, which will be discussed in the next sections, the fall-back positions of women differ given many factors (their educational levels, whether they come from a higher social class than their husband, whether they own land, etc.) and so do their subjective views of their inputs and their say in the decision-making, all of which greatly affect their bargaining –or the lack there of- inside the household.

Another dimension that is proposed by Sen (1999), and conversely to rational economic thinking, is one which argues that women may, at times, act contrary to their best advantage. He states: “there is much evidence in history that acute inequalities often survive precisely by making allies out of the deprived. The underdog comes to accept the legitimacy of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice (Ibid, p.7).” Sen relates this to women’s perceptions of their inputs (in terms of household work, income, etc.), and their valuation of their wellbeing within the kinship system. However, I believe that while perceptions and valuations may constitute one factor in women’s decision-making, treating them as key devaluates women’s agency and their ability to negotiate and make choices. The situation inside households, and the positionality of women as well as their ability to make decisions, are always more complex and nuanced than just the acceptance of the status quo and of being an ‘underdog.’

I will later show that, even by choosing not to fight, there is a sort of agency for the women that is being enacted. To Rita, as with many other women (of course, in different degrees and ways), no matter how unjust the situation in which they live is, there is always room in their lives to fight daily battles, winning sometimes, and losing at others. The next section provides another explanation of intra-household family dynamics, giving more space for these nuances to surface in the discussion.

Escaping High Opportunity Costs

While Sen (1999) explains the inertia of the household’s status quo as an internalisation of subordination, it can alternatively be viewed as an active decision on the part of women not to shake an intra-household equilibrium that they have long strived to attain. In fact, Kandiyoti (1988) defends this view in her *Bargaining with Patriarchy*, in which she argues that within the realms of the household, bargains are sometimes willingly given up if they come at a high opportunity cost. Women, thus, instead of fighting to change their position, may choose to hold onto the lifetime investments that they have made, in their sons and husbands, for instance, whom they have come to deem their most valuable resources. Decisions, such as deciding not to work outside the household, might simply be because the empowering potential in such a decision comes at a high cost. As Kandiyoti puts it:

...despite the obstacles that classic patriarchy puts in women's way, which may far outweigh any actual economic and emotional security, women often resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives. (1988, p.282)

Hence, while the terms of the contract are sometimes non-negotiable, this theory revives women's rational agency by allowing space for leeways in the contracts in which women can strategise for different *mise-en-scènes* of the script, within the limits of what is culturally conceivable. While this does not apply directly to Rita's labour market decision-making, it speaks to many economically inactive respondents' choice to stay in the household.

Over time, Kandiyoti posits, the decision to stick to an old normative way of doing things starts to shape women's gendered subjectivities and the ways they have come to define themselves and their desires. All this occurs in a larger structural social order, and with multiple interferences in this process of the construction of the self from early in life. This also greatly varies according to context, which marks this research's importance in looking at how this theory is applied in the context of Beirut: the sets of principles guiding the society, the expected gendered performances of men, the way traditions influence actions, all have a big role in shaping the respondents' perceptions, their definitions of their wellbeing, as well as the ways in which they make choices. As Kabeer argues:

Such identities are acquired very early in life and influence the individuals' experiences of affection and intimacy, their understanding of their own sexuality and emotional needs, and their expectations and obligations in relation to others. At the same time, however, individual identities and the preferences they generate are not simply frozen in childhood: they evolve over the course of the person's lifetime, reflecting their social positioning, their individual experiences and their changing circumstances. Furthermore, the human capacity for purposeful deliberations can be brought to bear on questions of identity and preferences as much as it can on questions of buying and selling. (2000, p. 21-22)

Different societies experience these influences to different degrees, and the ability of the individual to be detached from expectations, as well as to evolve, is very different according to class, religious background, upbringing, age and education. This is why this project will incorporate the concept of intersectionality (to which I will return in

forthcoming chapters) as a lens through which these dynamics will be examined. Additionally, while this section has added more nuances to the notion of the ‘household’ on its own, it is important to now look at its interaction with the wider society in which respondents live.

Relational Individuals and Connective Patriarchy

Looking at Rita’s decision-making process in the light of this thus departs from her choices being solely her own (the individual), moving to the Beckerian view of the household, in which Rita’s husband has a comparative advantage in work outside the household. According to this view, thus, Rita is not doing what is most advantageous for the family by working for cash. Another element adding to the intra-household dynamics is the acknowledgment of the role of input valuations and perceptions, as well as how weighing the opportunity costs influences women’s decision-making in the household. Women’s choices, however, are not only a product of the interactions of people who reside together in the same unit, like Rita, her husband and two daughters, and the valuing of their respective inputs, but they are also influenced by a larger structure in which decisions are the outcomes of an extended family networks. Using Agarwal’s definition (1997, p.39), households are:

... commensal and residential units, and/or units of joint property ownership, production, consumption, and investment, or they can constitute some intersection of these dimensions. They also vary in membership composition from units of single persons, to those of parents and children, to those with additional relatives: siblings, grandparents, and so on.

This, then, points to the risk of adopting one conceptualisation of the household, which does not acknowledge the variability element: households may vary in size, structure, function, and composition. The rules and principles guiding the actions of members of the household, but also their relation to one another can differ greatly according to context, and depending on the way that society, more broadly, is organised. While ‘household’ and ‘family’ are terms not to be conflated, this research will use as a unit of analysis a conceptualisation of the household that is adapted to the context of the research and will call it a ‘virtual extended household’ combining the two. In other words,

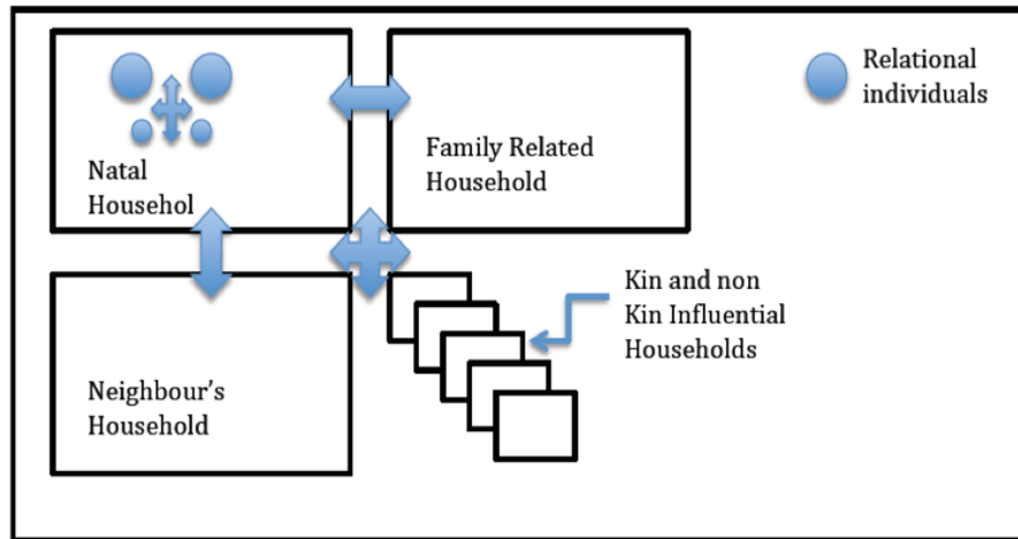
the ‘household’ that is questioned in this research is a ‘virtual unit’ of interconnected nuclear households (more often than not blood related, but sometimes involving neighbours’ and friends’ households). This ‘household’ is extended, not in the traditional definition of extended relatives living together under the same roof, but in the sense of family members and friends interacting regularly, sharing material and non-material ties that bear effects for individual decision-making.

This sub-section aims to make the concept of a ‘virtual extended household’ clearer, as well as linking it to the theoretical concept of ‘patriarchal connectivity’ which was coined by Joseph (1996). Moving away from agent-centred and unitary views of households, as well as some aspects of intra-household bargaining, this sub-section will also introduce a larger strand of literature, which looks at motivations in social behaviour and how they translate into negotiations within the household structure, but also at those with supra-household groups and networks.

Let us go back in this conceptual framework to the individual- a woman living in her natal family’s household. Typically, she would be residing with a father, mother, and siblings. In contexts where extended family members still live together, she might also be living with junior and older men and women; more often than not they are blood related to her. Realistically, each of those members will be tied to each other through nets of responsibilities and expectations, and will differ from one another in their preferences and interests. Hence, previous models that aggregate utility functions within the households are replaced by those in which all of the above are added as factors in contracts that govern family lives.

Additionally, the woman in this case would also be interacting with kin who don’t physically live with her, but who are still part of her ‘virtual household,’ such as distant aunts, uncles and cousins. Moreover, in a communal society, neighbours and family friends are all part and parcel of this ‘virtual extended household (Figure 4).’ For instance, in the case of Rita, her parents helped her greatly in raising the children, and her sister-in-law still helps her with the studies of her girls, otherwise she wouldn’t be able to work. In that sense, the presence of this network of the ‘virtual extended household’ that provides services for the other will surely influence Rita’s decision-making in her daily life and choices, notably in societies that do not benefit from state services.

Figure 4 Virtual Extended Households



Source: Compiled by Author

The lens through which this research will examine the relationships between respondents and the members of their ‘virtual extended households’ is Joseph’s definition of ‘patriarchal connectivity,’ shaping the boundaries of the individual and her relationships more generally (1993). While Joseph’s theory was essentially made to describe families in a specific setting (following her fieldwork in an urban working class area in Greater Beirut, consisting of Arab inhabitants, Lebanese and Palestinian, among others, and of different sectarian group belongings), her findings can be interesting in examining decision-making within the ‘virtual extended household’ in the specific case of this research.

This theory departs from a critique of Chodorow’s use of the concept of relationality as a mainly feminine trait acquired by women who continuously see themselves as extensions of their mothers, opposed to the masculine individuals who form themselves as separate beings. Joseph posits that relationality and patriarchy interplay both for feminine and masculine selves alike, but are organised differently according to age and hierarchy. Hence, relationality and patriarchy are experienced differently by men and women, senior and junior, but nevertheless in a reciprocal manner. She coins the concept of ‘patriarchal connectivity’ that manifests itself in a connective selfhood in which “a person’s

boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel a part of significant others [...] and expect intimate others to read each other's minds, answer for each other, anticipate each other's needs, shape their likes and dislikes in accordance with each other (Joseph, 1996, p.467).”

These nets of relationality are at times empowering, and at others subordinating, depending on your position in the age and gender hierarchy. For instance, “older sisters [...] saw younger brothers as extensions of themselves and then came to see themselves as extensions of their younger brothers when the boys came of age (Joseph, 1996, p.467).” This view has several implications for women's decision-making processes and their lives within the household. When a woman operates within a closely-knit family network of relational individuals, her decisions will relate, to a certain extent, to her position within the household. Moreover, the opinions and wellbeing of other members, like her father, mother, older brother, or even aunt (given our extended definition of ‘household’), will play a role in her choices. This adds complexity to the way we should study and understand decision-making.

As previously discussed, Sen (1999) has linked the ability of women to argue to their fall-back position, leaving them to accept their disadvantaged position within the household. However, in societies that operate under ‘connective patriarchy,’ links with the natal family, as well as with other kin and non-kin households, are not disrupted by marriage. Women continue to occupy a certain position as an ‘extension of’ many of their family members. This strong relational family system may greatly strengthen their fall-back position, giving women an exit strategy if the ‘contract’ does not unfold in the way they planned it to. Moreover, Joseph's theory disproves Sen's view by affirming that men and women alike are on an equal footing in this relational, patriarchal connective household system, and this is based on their age status within the hierarchy.

The scripts according to which a woman operates will thus become more complicated due to their responsibilities towards others, the expectations from others, and the desires and preferences of the self, but also of others. The individual thus begins to juggle with several ‘implicit contracts’ between many relational individuals, and many nuclear households, and changing the clause in one contract will (positively or negatively) affect others. Maintaining an equilibrium between preferences and obligations hence

becomes harder. This theory will prove beneficial as a lens through which to examine the individual and her relationships to other kin and non-kin individuals, and to larger structures in the society.

Furthermore, while Kandiyoti (1988) posits that women's acceptance of a normative order starts to shape their subjectivities in the relational patriarchal setting, this formation is also of a communal flavour, and is reinforced for men and women alike by a "connectivity [that supports] the production of selves who invited, required, and initiated involvement with others in the shaping of the selves of women and men alike (Joseph, 1996, p. 468)."

Women's desires –used in this discussion to mean an emotion representing a yearning, a longing, a wishing for, both erotic and non-erotic, as well as their wants, decisions, and perceptions of self in a patriarchal connectivity setting, are argued to be "constantly reconsolidating, re-configuring in relation –a notion of subjectivity that is always in motion, always in relation (Joseph, 2012, p.16-17)." This dynamic aspect is, however, contingent on what is culturally conceivable, but also on what is structurally possible. For Rita, for instance, her decision-making is linked to her rights and responsibilities towards her natal family, her neighbours' perceptions, her husband's preferences, her rational calculations; but also, all of the above change over time according to factors that are external to the 'virtual extended household,' thus making the outcomes of her decisions difficult to predict. If this is the case of one individual, imagine the millions of outcomes for women in a specific setting (let alone for women generally) who operate within 'virtual extended households' that are also relationally connected to one another, and to wider structures.

Hence, this discussion remains incomplete if it leaves out structural and social impediments to women's construction of selfhood, their decisions, and their opportunities. The legal system, the state, the labour market, religious institutions, and the greater patriarchal system, present sets of factors that must be accounted for when looking at intra-household negotiation processes. The next sub-section will discuss the latter factors in more detail.

Structural Factors in Household Bargaining

The previous sub-section moved farther away from the individual utility maximising model into the more relational, by arguing Joseph's point that a collective aspect plays a role in the process of decision-making and of locating one's wellbeing in relation to that of others. To understand intra-household dynamics, even in the most relational settings, however, it is essential to look at the larger structures in which these relationships are circumscribed.

Structural parameters have been incorporated in discussions of household behaviour as determinants of the individual's negotiation position, especially in Nash's cooperation/bargaining models. These are also termed Extra-household Environmental Parameters (EEP) by McElroy (1990), and such factors were referred to as the shifters of the 'threat points' of each person's position (or the maximal level of their utility derived outside the household, similar to Sen's 'fall back' position). Studying women's decision-making processes by considering parameters such as structural constraints, would be incomplete. Agarwal (1997) presents a rich discussion of these factors, from social norms and perceptions which set limits over what is or is not debatable, to the support of the state, among others. She calls for research to go beyond the household and to look at the situations of women in the market, the community and the state as a stepping stone to understanding their decision-making and their bargaining positions within the household.

For instance, women's presence (and their ability to bargain) in labour markets, relates in great part to the norms and practices of the market place. Moreover, women's desires and choices are influenced by the existence (or non-presence) of a communal support system, be they through feminist groups, religious communities, local non-governmental actors or family support, and state services. As Agarwal puts it, the household, the market, the state and the community "may be seen as interactive, each with the others, embodying pulls and pressures which may, at specific junctures, either converge (reinforcing each other) or move in contradictory direction (providing spaces for countervailing resistances) (1997, p. 34)."

In this sense, it is not only women's negotiations within the household that are influenced by those EEP, but one can extend the bargaining abilities of women in structures that are outside the household. Women may challenge market discrimination, legal

practices, and other facets within the limits that these patriarchal structures impose upon them. During Rita's interview, she mentioned that working at ironing- a job that is usually male dominated- she was bullied by her customers for the first few years: "it is very uncommon for a woman like me to be working all day in ironing! They used to tell me, you're a woman who irons? How can that be? [...] Other men asked me to make sure my husband irons their costume, as they hand it over to me over the counter. For them, it is impossible for a woman to iron well."

Throughout the years, she continues, her customers learned to love her and respect her work. The customer's reactions played a role in Rita's decision-making processes, making her think of quitting her job at times, but Rita has equally challenged this structural constraint by standing up to discrimination, customs, and traditions in the society in which she lives. Growing up with Rita as their mother, her three daughters will have a different mind-set about what jobs are acceptable for women. They will then tell other girls of their age in another neighbourhood. This thesis abounds with other similar examples of the interplay between women's choices, the influences of their direct family, but also of the networks within and beyond their 'virtual extended household.'

The implications of such an interplay are increased when analysed within the framework of 'patriarchal connectivity.' This is especially true in settings where, as posited by Joseph, relationality is justified outside the arena of the household through the use of idiomatic kinship to non-family members, as well as to other modalities of connectivity between different social institutions, thus furthering expectations and obligations across these different realms, "perceived as continuous with, rather than disruptive of domestic boundaries and life (1997, p. 79)." In relational societies the boundaries between the public and the private should thus also be treated as being fluid.

Let us consider, for instance, the state as one where the EEP affects women's decision-making and positionality in- and outside the household. In patriarchal societies with no welfare system, the state usually has a strong breadwinning character, which is manifested by low levels of female labour market participation due to the scant provision of social services, such as child care, paid leave, etc., (Lewis, 1992). The lack of such services renders the family the main support system for women, making them, as argued above, hold onto intra-household lifetime investments in their families that they deem to be their

most valuable resource and their ultimate security (Moghadam, 2003; Kandiyoti, 1988; Chant, 2000). The absence of the state and/or its discrimination against women make work and marriage two important and possibly competing paths to economic security.

Hence, what the state has to offer constitutes an obstacle or a reinforcement of a women's bargaining position in the household, and of her decisions more generally. In specific contexts, such as that of this study, nepotism, family members working in state institutions, coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability and a relational character between the members of the society who are of the same ethnicity, village, or who live in the same street, furthers relationality beyond the private sphere. This is apparent in the example given at the beginning of the chapter, when the guard of the parking lot did not want me to park my car— as I was a veiled women in a Christian neighbourhood— until Yolla told him that her brothers are members of the party that he associates himself with. This is only one example of many others that will come up in the next chapters.

Contracts as an Instance of EEP

Since this study focuses on married women, it is important to look at contracts as important instances of structural factors that must be considered when looking at women's decision-making processes. Such arrangements often make way for the existence and replication of the inherent discrimination against women, and, if anything, present an obstacle to their decision-making processes. In the most basic instance, the 'social contract' founded by political thinkers, like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, governing modern day states, which supposedly entitle each 'individual', regardless of gender, to certain rights in exchange for certain responsibilities, obstructs rather than furthers women's freedoms and rights.

Pateman (1988) argues that it is precisely such 'fraternal' contracts that provide the basis of modern patriarchy. Women, she posits, continue to be subordinated based on their biological differences, making this arrangement a counter-force to women's freedom. Whether as citizens, family members, or co-workers, women are often not treated as an equal party in the 'social contract' but, rather, as an unequal side in a 'sexual contract.' This can be shown in the cases of Rita and of other Lebanese women where, for instance, had she married a non-Lebanese man; she could not have given her daughter Lebanese nationality. In addition, informal and more apparent discrimination in the labour market

regulations and state laws are practised on women in Lebanon (this will be thoroughly discussed in later chapters). Such inequalities in the ‘social contract’ that governs society are considered to pressure women, decreasing their fall-back positions and bargaining powers, and constituting important structural impediments to their decision-making.

Another example of a contractual arrangement that can, at times, play a role in the women’s labour market (but also on other) decisions is the marriage contract. The latter has been discussed in structuralist Marxist thought, along with labour market inequalities, as manifestations of women’s subordination. This paradigm explains these inequalities as results of restricting women to the private domain and out of productive labour. Engels (1884), for instance, contends that the supremacy of men in marriage is but a consequence of his economic supremacy. Marriage is thus another form of class subordination in which the husband “is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat (1884, p.105).” Like Engels, Pateman (1988) acknowledges marriage to be an unequal contractual relationship in which a woman enters a ‘slave/master’ relationship with her husband.

While the above views treat the wife as a subordinate party in the contract, on the other end of the spectrum stands Becker (1973), who treats marriage like any other ‘rational’ or economic decision. A woman and a man, both rational agents, choose their best potential partner subject to constraints (such as wealth and education, etc.). Deciding whether to marry, stay single, or to be divorced is based on whether or not the new arrangement will increase both persons’ utilities, leaving them both better off, that is. Such a view faces the same criticisms as rational choice theory for its fallacious assumptions about preferences and perfect information.

A theoretical middle ground, again, would be to recognise both agency and structure in women’s decisions when it comes to marriage contracts. Whitehead (1981) acknowledges ‘conjugal contracts,’ according to which the husband and wife distribute incomes, services, and labour within the household, given a certain power differential between them. However, such a contractual lens can be applied beyond logistic decisions, and can extend to the decision-making processes of women, such as determining whether to enter a marriage in the first place. In the words of Hoodfar:

In practice, at the outset of marriage, a bride and a groom together with their families generally negotiate agreements that enhance their position and their bargaining power within the marriage and

the household. In addition to emotional and social factors, economic considerations are of prime importance in the choice of a marriage partner and in the stipulation of the conditions of a marriage contract, since the material wellbeing of individuals –particularly women and children- is closely tied to the economic situation of the households. (1996, p. 262)

While Hoodfar's (1996) quotation related to marriage in Egypt, it can hold in many patriarchal connective settings where such contracts are interwoven with nets of obligations and expectations in relation to the natal family. The latter acts both as a blessing and as an impediment to women's decisions to marry. On one hand, the fluid, relational boundaries of the self, make autonomy in the choice of a partner, or independence in the conjugal home, a distant hope for women. On the other, knowing that she is always an extension of her natal family, relying on them for emotional and material support, a woman can delay marriage until a very 'appealing' contract is negotiated, and can break the contract when it ceases to be beneficial to her, knowing that she can always go back to her 'virtual extended household' for sustenance.

Patriarchal connectivity, bargaining models, along with contractual theories can hence prove beneficial as a framework within which to analyse women's decisions, as well as the way they construct their selfhood both in- and outside the boundaries of the household. The formation of these implicit social contracts governing women's lives are an interplay of a complex web of rights and obligations, of choices and constraints, of complicity and strategic bargaining. In her book *The Power to Choose*, Kabeer sums up these strands of literature that embody debates between structural and agent-centred approaches to decision-making, into what she calls a theoretical middle ground, where:

... the agency of individuals can be recognised without losing sight of the constraining structures within which they exercise their agency. [... Such a framework provides a valuable] view of the relationship between structure and agency as one of duality, of mutual interdependence, rather of dichotomy. [...] The idea of the duality of structure and agency opens up a far richer act of possibilities for the analysis of social change than permitted by approaches, which give analytical primacy to either structure or agency (2000, p. 47-48).

Other instances of EEPs - defined and discussed as they emerge in the next chapters- can be the capitalist system, state services, and the gender norms governing society, among others. All in all, what this chapter has tried to achieve is the creation of a framework within which women's answers, choices, and desires can be read as a layer of several factors that interplay in their lives and daily choices.

The remaining chapters will use this framework as a magnifying glass through which the decisions of women in low-income Beirut will be scrutinised. It attempts to map out which implicit contracts, negotiations, and structural impediments govern their lives and their decisions to participate in the labour force. Throughout this thesis, some of these theoretical claims will be illustrated in the stories of the women I have interviewed, and other aspects will not feature as being important. The fieldwork findings will replicate, build upon, challenge and, at times, diverge from the theoretical underpinnings of this framework. Local specificities of low-income Beirut, and the personal stories of women, will demonstrate that even the most complex of theories is not wide enough –at times- to contain the strength, courage, vulnerability, and voices of women.

Thesis Outline

This Chapter started by my outlining of my motivation for undertaking this research endeavour, from a personal perspective. It then considered the research questions, and built a theoretical model to link the empowerment literature, household bargaining models, and theories on decision-making in order to unpack the choices of married women in low-income Beirut vis-à-vis the labour markets.

The second chapter of this thesis provides the necessary background to this study through contextualising the research question in the setting of Beirut, and laying the empirical foundations of this research's background vis-à-vis the Lebanon, but also the broader MENA region.

The third chapter focuses on the research design, and provides an overview of the study's methodology and some important ethical considerations. It looks at feminist research methodologies and explains the adoption of an interdisciplinary and intersectional method, as well as a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. It also overviews the methodology that has been adopted for the survey conducted for the purposes of this

research, as well as the process of gathering primary qualitative data through describing the qualitative setting and introducing the research's gatekeepers.

Chapters Four to Six constitute the main analytical chapters that rely predominantly on primary data (both qualitative and quantitative). Each chapter begins with a review of the relevant thematic literature, identifying gaps, or highlighting trends that will either be confirmed or put into question in the chapter. It then provides an overview of the survey for this research's main findings, before delving into the qualitative material, which enriches the quantitative trends or patterns established.

Chapter Four starts by sketching out the characteristics of economically active and inactive women, and also scrutinising married women in low-income Beirut's valuation of work, work-related decisions, and their impediments/incentives to participating in the labour market.

Chapter Five delves into household negotiation patterns, looking at intra-household economies of spending. It examines women's spending choices and strategies within the context of the household, and the larger structures governing such bargains: consumerism, the lack of state services, and the legal framework, among others. It identifies who is generally the breadwinner, and who in the couple makes the primary spending decisions, linking these to the choices for women's participation in the labour market.

Chapter Six links the labour market decisions of women and their marriage-related choices, and examines how those differ among women who earn an income and those who don't. It starts with an assessment of the standing of the institution of marriage in Lebanon, marriage patterns, as well as the perception of marriage generally among the respondents. Through an examination of the implicit contracts that occur within marriage, the chapter examines women's perceptions of their positionality within the household, and how this affects their work-related choices.

Chapter Seven constitutes the overall conclusion, synthesising the findings of each chapter, bringing together the key messages and showing how they contribute to existing literature and debates. Finally, it provides recommendations for further research and policy that are needed.

Chapter 2

Studying Gender in Beirut

Writing about a city in which you were born and brought up is not an easy task: too much proximity and too much distance. You find yourself knowing too much about it, and too little at the same time. To write about a city in which you grew up is to peel off its layers, carefully stripping it away from the shields that were used to protect an image you wanted to believe. It is like standing in front of a nude truth: one that you thought you knew.

To write about Beirut based on what I already know was not enough. I needed to cite and reference, read and summarise what others have said, perhaps more eloquently than me, about my own city. At SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies), I take the stairs to Level B in the library and stand there, carefully staring at the books on shelves 50-52. The titles of the books sadden, rather than surprise me. The titles in the majority hover around Lebanon's civil war. This category is followed by books on Hizbullah, a Lebanese Shi'ite armed group with strong links to Iran: a contested group that is viewed by a portion of the Lebanese population as being 'armed resistance' to Israel, and by others as being a 'militia group.'

Indeed, seventeen years of civil war mark the modern history of my country, and the childhood of my sister and two brothers, but thankfully not mine. My sister, for instance, was born prematurely in the early 1970s at the Maternité Française Hospital, where my mother had to leave her in an incubator, on her own, for two months. The hospital was located in Al-Mathaf, then a front line area between the two fighting halves of Beirut, the Muslim East and the Christian West. Upon picking my sister up, my parents exchanged the amount due to the hospital with gunmen, who then delivered my sister to them, since they could not cross from one side of Beirut to the other.

My elder siblings had thus to go to school in East Beirut with no friends from West Beirut. My family, like any other in the city at the time, would spend their nights in the shelter with neighbours, eating pre-cooked food and trying to distract the children from the sounds of bombings and sniping. My parent's house was in Rawsheh, renowned as a Sunni area. My grandparent's house, on the other hand, was in Al Shayah, a front line area

controlled by Shi'a and the opposition Christian fighters' checkpoints. While my father travelled back and forth from Syria for work, despite the danger, my mother could not even cross to her parents' neighbourhood to seek support in raising her – at the time- three children. She was thus a 'single mother', who had to drive and work in the house and negotiate access with gunmen, as was the case with many women who took on diverse responsibilities that challenged existing gender norms during the war.

A city that has undergone so much is hard to write about without first clarifying the basic elements of setting and context. This is what the rest of this chapter will attempt to do. It will situate Beirut vis-à-vis Lebanon, the MENA region, and the broader global context. It will look at labour market structures, women's participation in them, as well as at gender norms and relations. Personal anecdotes will accompany an empirical background, using secondary sources of data, as well as my research survey's main outcomes, in order to sketch out the similarities, convergences and differences in the research findings. Finally, this chapter will set the ground for the remaining chapters by framing the research questions in relation to the existing empirical literature so as to highlight gaps.

Of Similarity and Difference

Neoliberalism as a Connecting Principle

In its most basic definition, neoliberalism is 'a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey, p.2, 2005).' Neoliberalism came as a reassertion of the fundamental beliefs of the liberal political economy of 19th century Britain and the US, and as a response to the crisis in the 'Keynesian Welfare State' (Clarke, 2005), and spread across many countries of the developing world. Its manifestations were seen from the rolling back and privatization of the state, to a freer market economy, deregulation, a reconstruction of new city landscapes,

free trade agreements, the opening up to global markets and market based society nurturing individual freedom (Hayek, 1979).

In Beirut post-civil war, as will be discussed throughout the next sections, the neoliberal project was championed by PM Hariri whereby the country saw a complete neoliberal reconstruction of the state, as Harvey (2005) would call it. The manifestations of neoliberalism in the society made consumerism a vital economic need, converting the 'citizen' into a consumer (Munck, 2005). As Polanyi (2001) would argue, 'instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system (p. 60).' The transformation of Beirut was no different than that of many other cities, not a fully fulfilling the definition of a 'global city' such as London, or Tokyo (Sassen, 2005), but definitely one that has regional significance and enjoying to the global networks.

Beirut, a Regional 'Global City'

The next sections will explore Beirut as a context for this study. It will look at the characteristics that makes it different, and how those influence the culture, institutions, and structures within which women make choices. However, in a world of globalization, Beirut is also interconnected and bears many features of a 'global city.' A global city is one that houses world-renowned cultural institutions, that has a prominent skyline, and that serves as a major media hub. It is a city that is linked globally and that bears resemblance to many other cities where neoliberalism and globalisation have affected the very nature of it.

The features of the global cities are not only the fact that they are connected to a trans-national network and market for global capital, but also this has helped the formation of new trans-local communities and identities (Sassen, 2005). This translates in new forms of 'citizenship' as discussed in the previous section, but also new household strategies that adopt to new forms of labour, of immigration, of consumerism. Global capital, accompanied with an increased informalisation of jobs, and the competition from other labour (in the case of Lebanon, migrant domestic worker, and Syrian refugees as an instance) have new implications on labour market decisions and family relations. All of this points to questions of inequality and power both in the society, in labour markets, and in the household, in this new city scape which will be explored throughout the thesis.

Seventeen Years

Before the civil war, Beirut was known as the ‘Switzerland of the Middle East:’ beautiful mountains, and a great coastal area; clubs and pubs, mosques and churches; elegant women and smart business men. People from all around the Arab world, but also other parts of the world, came to enjoy not only the city, but the country’s charm. Beirut is the capital of Lebanon, a small country, bordered by Palestine to the South, Syria to the North and East, and the Mediterranean Sea to the West. In 1943, Lebanon won its independence from its French colonisers, who left behind a strong language legacy, an administrative model, a political structure, and a civil legal system in all matters except the personal status code - an arrangement that remains until this very day, in which different religious courts rule according to the sectarian group to which each citizen belongs.

One of war’s multiple effects is a skewed demographic reality: for the Lebanese, this has resulted in there being 4.5 million citizens and a diaspora of 16 million. The country’s population is scattered across 5 governorates: Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon, the Beqaa, and South Lebanon/Nabatiyeh. Mount Lebanon is the most populated of the governorates, followed by North Lebanon, then Beirut. The capital’s estimated population is 2 million inhabitants (MoSA, 2007a). The city, and the country as a whole, relies mainly on the tertiary sector for its economy (or the services sectors, such as tourism, entertainment, media, and banking), with weak industrial and agricultural sectors, making human resources its most crucial capital.

The civil war’s causes are contentious in Lebanon’s history. Some Lebanese citizens call it a proxy war of others on Lebanese soil, stressing the regional axis (Israel-Palestine, Syria-Palestine, Syria-Iran, Iraq), others highlight the militarisation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as being a trigger that has pushed the system to breaking point, and many speak of the sustainability of arming factions on the ground as the cause for its prolongation (Badran, 2009). Regardless of its origins, the civil war left behind a strong phantom that still haunts many aspects of daily life in the country in general, but mostly in Beirut. From bullet-scarred buildings, to the continual usages of *al-sharkya* and *al-gharbya*, literal translations of the Eastern and Western sides of the capital, which is still divided in the thoughts of many, despite over 25 years since the end of the civil war. If one adds to

this the cyclical outbreaks of violence, everything in the country remains a vivid reminder of wartime. The war ended with the signing of the Ta'if Agreement (or the National Consensus Agreement) in 1989 – one year after my birth – which announced the ‘symbolic’ end of Syrian presence in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2007). Officially, it was not until much later (in 2005) that Syria effectively left Lebanese soil.

Additionally, the consensus set the ground for a confessional parliamentary democracy, ensuring a somewhat fair representation of the 18 minority sectarian groups in Lebanon that was based on a fragile equilibrium of forces: a Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, a Shi'a Muslim Deputy Prime Minister, and an Eastern Orthodox Deputy Speaker of Parliament. The post-war era -- extending from 1991 to 2005 -- was one of relative stability, where the country was undergoing reconstruction and the economy was standing back on its feet. This was only the calm before the storm: the late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination in 2005, and the official termination of the Syrian presence on Lebanese soil, announced a new period of instability. A wave of bombs and war-like scenes that led to deaths and agitation followed. Haugbolle argues that:

... the end of postwar Lebanon in 2005 confirmed the tale that the history of modern Lebanon seems to fall in periods of around fifteen years. The years 1943, 1958, 1975, 1990 and 2005, each mark political upheavals of epochal importance: independence, short civil war, long civil war, peace and the end of Syrian hegemony. (2010, pp.3-4)

This brief overview of the history of modern Lebanon shows that political instability has been one of the few stable things in Lebanon, affecting social dynamics, the economy, state institutions, as well as every other aspect of daily life. Fawaz (2009) argues that the elements discussed in the previous section make Lebanon a very distinctive country. Firstly, the social composition, bringing together 18 different sectarian groups, compromises a mosaic of Middle Eastern differences. While this factor plays a role in prolonging the sectarian civil role, it also renders Lebanon diverse in its culture and traditions. This element is important in that it makes the results of this study instrumental in analysing most of the sectarian groups that inhabit the Middle East. It also pushes the research to question whether a lens that is focused on a particular sect would be useful in explaining some of the trends that the data will highlight.

A second factor from Fawaz's list (2009), that is important as a background for this research, is a geography that brings together sea and mountain, ideal for tourism. 'In Lebanon, you can swim and ski within one hour,' is a sentence that is often used to attract tourists. In recent years, due to the failure of the state to provide services to its citizens, activists and youth on social media have generally started using it ironically: 'In Lebanon, there is no electricity. But who needs electricity when you can swim and ski in the same day.' When a bombing happens, viral tweets may include this sentence as a hash tag, too. However, the importance of these geographical features is to highlight the tertiary sector as one of the main pillars of the Lebanese economy. The services sector –commerce, tourism and finance- occupied 61% of the Growth Domestic Product (GDP) in 1994, and 72% in 2004 (Raphaeli, 2009).

In fact, and despite of it all, the Lebanese economy has proven to be resilient to shocks. It has continued to show signs of revival throughout the period post- the assassination of Rafik Hariri in 2005, despite the very high cost of the 2006 war against Israel (around US\$3,612,000², Ibid). The biggest drain on the Lebanese economy and on the state's debt, which equally affect the citizens' daily lives, is the electricity sector, which occupies a big portion of the state budget, causing continuous citizen complaints (Ibid).

² Lebanon's two official currencies are Lebanese Pounds (LBP) and US Dollars (\$)

Socio-Economic Hybridity

Traboulsi (2007) further argues that the two main features distinguishing Lebanon from other Arab countries are its large Christian population, and its historical exposition to the west. In his words:

[The two features] combined effect largely accounts for the main themes around which Lebanon's modern history is articulated: 1) a political system based on the institutionalization of religious sects ('sectarianism'); 2) an extroverted liberal economic system based on the service sector; and 3) a problematic relationship with its regional setting. (Traboulsi, 2007, p.8)

Practical instances of these distinctive aspects of the Lebanese setting are clear in the everyday lives of citizens. Take, for example, the interplay of these factors, which is clear in the spoken languages of the country. While Lebanon's official language is Arabic (spoken with a Lebanese dialect), French, English and Armenian are also widely spoken. Growing up in Beirut, I studied for the French Baccalaureate in one of Lebanon's most renowned schools. My classmates – the majority of whom were Christian- spoke better French than Arabic. French was even the main language used in their homes, a typical tendency among Christians of the upper income classes in Lebanon. Many of them do not feel any belonging to an Arab identity. A debate that is still raised today among them is on whether their roots are Arab or Phoenician (Kaufman, 2004). This impact of French colonisation was reinforced by clashes with Israel, leaving Christians and Sunnis as advantaged communities, whereas Shi'a communities -always the indirect targets of wars and clashes against Israel - remain disadvantaged. On the other hand, civil war pushed many Lebanese (mostly from the Shi'a communities) to emigrate to Africa to work in mining and other industries, strengthening French as a spoken language among Lebanese.

The balance of power amongst the sectarian groups, however, is political in nature. In other words, it fluctuates according to political happenings. Clearly, the French mandate has advantaged Christian communities in Lebanon. This is apparent in their schools, their churches, and their villages, which even today remain much more institutionalised and structured. On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire, Saudi Arabian and Syrian presence in Lebanon had strengthened the hand of the Sunni citizens. As mentioned above, this has, for

a long time, left the Shia disadvantaged, especially those who inhabit the South, which is vulnerable to Israeli attacks.

However, this balance of power has changed considerably in the last ten years, especially after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which, to many Sunnis, constituted the assassination of the ‘Sunni project’ in Lebanon. This was accompanied by the rise of Hezbollah as a main player in Lebanese politics, gaining much power on the ground from Iran and Syria, especially after clashes in May, 2007, when Hezbollah tried to take over Beirut. All of the above factors contribute significantly to the make-up of society and to our understanding of social norms, and how they affect labour market patterns that are discussed in future sections.

Li Beirut [To Beirut]

Li Beirut [To Beirut]
A greeting from my heart to Beirut
kisses to the sea and to the houses
to a rock, which is like an old sailor’s face
She is made from the people’s soul ... from wine
She is from his sweat...a bread and Jasmins
So how does her taste become? A taste of fire and smoke
Beirut has a glory of ashes
My city has turned out her lamp
By a child’s blood, who was over her hand

She's shut her door, and become alone in the sky
Alone with the night
You are mine, you are mine
Ah! Hug me you are mine
You are my flag, tomorrow's stone
And a travel's waves
My people's wounds have flourished
And mothers tears
You are mine, you are mine
Ah! Hug me
-Song by Fairuz³

One cannot remember Beirut without remembering this song by Fairuz, a Lebanese singer and a legend in the Arab world. Fairuz's songs animate every Lebanese morning. In the cafés, in public transport, or on the balconies of homes in small streets, you hear her voice talking about love, deception, and war. Her songs are simple and complex at the same time, just like Beirut. Despite growing up in this city, and being hypnotised by its charm, pulled away by its sectarian tendencies, having lived its memories through oral history; I still struggle to understand Beirut's extremes, simple daily routines mixed with complex backgrounds. When you walk the streets of Beirut, you notice billboards of women wearing bikinis that are juxtaposed with others that celebrate the birth of the prophet. Across the sea Corniche, short buildings with traditional architecture stand modestly next to tall 'Botoxed'

³ <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/Li-Beirut-Li-Beirut.html#ixzz3INkLyQWz>

skyscrapers. In Beirut, you run the risk of a motorcyclist stealing your purse, and an equal chance of finding ten people chasing him, helping you to get up, calling the police, and making sure to take you into their homes for a cup of coffee as you calm down.

Beirut, pre-civil war, was a city where neighbourhoods welcomed inhabitants belonging to different sectarian groups. My parents' house in the 1980s was in Koraytem, now a predominantly Sunni neighbourhood. The name of this area invokes the Hariri family, which owns a big house in its main street. Back in the 1980s, however, the neighbourhood catered for many other sects. My parents' neighbour, Sarah, was a member of one of the last Jewish families of Lebanon. Their other neighbour, Tante Henritte, was Christian. Except for a few cosmopolitan or mixed areas, like Hamra Street, or Al Basta, where part of my fieldwork was conducted, Beirut today hosts groups of inhabitants from mainly homogenous sectarian groups according to the area, a result of its division along sectarian lines during the war. For instance, it is common nowadays to associate the Southern suburb of Beirut to Shi'a citizens, the Ashrafieh area to Christians, and the Tarik El-Jdideh neighbourhood to Sunnis. This is despite having a small number of original inhabitants from different sects in each area: those who did not leave their homes looking for a more welcoming neighbourhood as most others did.

Today, as part of the neoliberal reconstruction project of Beirut, most districts in the city – like the Down Town, as an example, now filled with expensive restaurants- have lost their centrality and public aspects, rendering the city a decentralised and privatised city. On the other hand, the Hamra area is an instance of a neighbourhood that has kept its authenticity and its 'public aspect' in many different ways. Students, professionals, and citizens across all age groups, classes, and sectarian groups find Hamra the place to be, buzzing with cafes, theatres, and bookshops, both old and new, cheap and more expensive (Seidman, 2012). Other neighbourhoods fall across the spectrum of being more 'traditional' or more 'modern,' judging by the landscape of the areas, their shops, and the age groups that inhabit them.

Another element of contradiction in Beirut, as Seidman (2014, p.14) argues, is the degree to which some differences are tolerated, while many others are not. If by tolerance we mean circulating freely in public places, then, yes, Beirut is a welcoming place - but only to certain types of tourists. Many areas impose curfews, for instance, on the refugees

who inhabit them. In the city, individuals who don't fit the heteronormative prototype (LGBTQ) are not openly accepted, although those communities have managed to carve out their spaces within the city- more so in Beirut than anywhere else in the region. Similarly, some 'foreigners' are in an ambiguous category of tolerance, with no equal treatment or access to rights. If you are a 'privileged' category of foreigner, i.e., not a migrant worker, but, say, an American working at AUB, or an expat working for an international organisation, then you have very different rights and access to resources than if you are, let's say, Sri Lankan.

Similarly, following the *Naqba* in 1948, many Palestinian families, today accounting for almost 800,000 individuals, moved to Lebanon and started inhabiting refugee camps, without a decent standard of living (Haddad, 2004). Until present, Palestinians in Lebanon still lack the most basic rights. Only very recently were Palestinians in Lebanon permitted to take on jobs as, for instance, engineers and doctors. Their children, however, are not entitled to a nationality. In addition to Palestinians, since 2011, Beirut houses hundreds of thousands of Syrians (more than 2 million in total in the whole of Lebanon), as well as Kurds fleeing from Syria and Iraq, Filipinos, Sri Lankans, Africans, and other nationalities.

Despite activism from collectives like the Anti-Racism Movement, and others, racism is still very much embedded in everyday life in Beirut, where men and women of other races are generally treated as inferior, or as workers in underpaid jobs (Jureidini, 2006). This happens across classes but it is accentuated most among the upper income classes, which usually display a more condescending attitude towards other ethnic groups. I was once registered in a gym in Beirut that is frequented by middle and upper class citizens, mostly Lebanese. The gym was in *Jnah*, an area in Beirut with new buildings and shopping centres, bordering central Beirut from the north and the suburbs from the south. This gym had to close its doors for a month after a scandal.

A woman who was registered at the gym was waiting for her turn on the treadmill. After noticing that the person on the treadmill was black - and assuming all black women in Lebanon are 'help'- the Lebanese woman started shouting and asking the women on the treadmill to 'step down' and to 'go back to her work', because customers need to use the treadmill, not 'maids.'

The black lady then stepped down from the treadmill and calmly informed the Lebanese woman that she was, in fact, not the gym's cleaner, rather, she was the wife of an Ambassador in Lebanon. Whether or not that woman was a house help, of course, there is nothing that justifies this incident. However, foreigners from the low-income classes could not have stood up for themselves, and would have had to live with daily racism. As this short anecdote proves, while Lebanon has gone a long way in terms of education, architectural reconstruction, attracting tourism, etc., and while the diversity in sectarian group belonging and races is even more striking and accentuated in cities like Beirut, certain stereotypes remain. Today, to complicate the picture even further, the presence of Syrian refugees has added a new category of migrants discriminated against both legally, and socially, and who are perceived by the Lebanese population to be competing for the same jobs.

Beirut not only discriminates against foreigners, but also against Lebanese across classes, sects, and those who don't abide to heteronormative sexuality. Let us take class as a category for discrimination. The history of Lebanon, which has left some sectarian groups at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* others, still plays a role in the hierarchy of power today. An interplay of class with other identities further complicates the picture. In the words of Deeb and Harb:

Class mobility is limited by ideas about sect, politics, and religiosity, in a hierarchy in which Shi'i Muslims rank below Sunni Muslims and Christians, the Hizbollah-led March 8 political coalition ranks below the Hariri-led March 14 one, and visible Muslim religiosity ranks below Christian religiosity, and non-religiosity. (2013, pp.210-211)

Contested City Spaces

As previous sections have hinted, during the war years, Muslim East Beirut was as unfamiliar to the inhabitants of Christian West Beirut, as the West was to the inhabitants of the East. In 1991, these areas became accessible again, and a new notion of a unified Beirut started to form. Despite this, elements of the war continued to exist in the landscape of the city, but also in the memory of its inhabitants (Sawalha, 2010). The process of reconstructing post-war Beirut was mainly carried by investors (the biggest of whom is

Solidere), governmental institutions and developers. These constituted the hegemonic agents who redefined the meaning of the urban places of the city, hiding the voices of less powerful citizens and owners of spaces, and further contributing to the unequal aspect of Beirut (Ibid). Like history, the political arena, and everything else in the city, space is contested and “in post-war Beirut, the competition over urban places and spaces played a crucial role in shaping social and political relations in the city (Sawalha, 2010, p.46).”

In the years after the war, there are fewer places for the Middle Class to exist, since this social class has begun to shrink, and to gradually disappear. The real estate bubble led apartment prices to become very high, with investors focusing mainly on very high-end construction. So, if you are not a Saudi client, or a Lebanese working in the Gulf, or a very wealthy citizen, there is no way for you to afford an apartment in central Beirut. It became an impossible task for young couples, for instance, to buy a middle-sized apartment for less than US\$400,000, when prices rocket to around US\$3,500 per square metre for an apartment, in places like Ain-Mraysee or Ramlet Al-Bayda (Debie and Pieter, 2003). This all points to increased inequalities and a new shaping of the city that is similar to what a lot of cities in the region are experiencing.

Financial status is only one of the determinants of the new urban distributions of citizens across the city. Billboards, religious signs, and flags also advertise neighbourhoods in Beirut as predominantly belonging to a certain sectarian group that is generally represented by a political party (Haugbolle, 2010). The influx of Shi’a into Beirut from the South started in the 1950s and 1960s, and they especially inhabit the southern suburbs of the city. In later years, and as the power of Shi’a started to increase, they started inhabiting apartments in areas that were predominantly homogenously Sunni in nature. This is always mentioned by the Sunni citizens of Beirut, and it is common to hear them say, ‘they occupied’ Beirut, in reference to Shi’a inhabitants of formerly predominantly Sunni areas. This confessional, political and social order protects the culture of sectarianism in the city.

Finally, the lack of a social acceptance of otherness is also apparent when it comes to homosexuality, which, in many ways, remains a taboo subject in public spaces in Beirut, especially among the older generations. An instance can be found in a book entitled *Bareed Mista’jil* (Anon, 2009), which was the product of conversations and interviews with one hundred and fifty homosexual women in Beirut, telling stories of their sexuality. The

introduction of the book correctly summarises the condition of Lebanon -which also applies to Beirut:

In Lebanon, many varying factors play into the formation of an Arab identity. Religion, sect, family, community, geography, political affiliation, ethnicity, and social class – all being inherited factors -- play big roles in defining who we are as Lebanese. Sexual orientation is not a socially accepted factor, and it becomes a struggle to define oneself as a lesbian or bisexual while holding on to the other different identities that one deems important. (2009, p.3)

Beirut, hence, is a city of extremes: both popular and élitist, both tolerant and closed, both welcoming and unequal. The past section has served as a background to Lebanon generally, and to Beirut, in particular: and as an introduction to many themes that will be further developed throughout the research. The next section will place Lebanon in the larger context of the MENA region in terms of gender equality generally, and, more specifically, it will focus on the standing of Lebanon and of Beirut in terms of participation in the female labour force.

Lebanon in the Context of the MENA Region

As mentioned in the introduction, the main incentive for this research was the paradox behind low female labour force participation in the labour market in Beirut, despite growth in other indicators of progress, according to modernisation theory and the development paradigm. *The World Development Report 2013: Opening Doors: Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa*, sketches the same puzzle regarding gender equality indicators in the MENA region (WB, 2013). Several countries made significant advances in quite a few of the development markers, such as health and education, but still lag behind in female participation, both in the political and the economic arenas. While the report from the previous year stresses the importance of addressing this issue to justify the position of gender equality as being ‘smart economics’ (WB, 2012), this report adds a discussion about the intrinsic importance of gender equality to the instrumental one- as a matter of human rights, first and foremost, and, secondly, of development. What both these reports fail to address, however, are the motivations behind women’s decision-making, as well as any hint about the possibility that there might, in fact, be nothing ‘wrong’ with the women

interviewed, except that they simply might not want to work. This research aims to address these elements that are often omitted from development reports, and quantitative research on gender equality in the region.

In the Middle East, women have typically been employed in the public sector, and while jobs in this sector are increasing in number, they are fiscally unsustainable, especially in countries that lack natural resources and count mainly on human capital, like Lebanon, as the report outlines (WB, 2013, pp. 5-12). In the private sector, women face obstacles of mobility, legal loopholes in the system, issues around safety, as well as discrimination in relation to perceptions that work against them.

For instance, while Lebanon ratified the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 (with certain reservations that mainly pertained to nationality issues), it seems ironic that international bodies are pressuring Arab countries to ratify this convention while the United States has still not ratified it, under the claim that the US Constitution already provides legal protection for women. Regardless of whether all CEDAW ratifications have been adopted, the extent to which these laws are imposed by above through international conventions that do not stem from local organic change in gender norms that will enhance the status of women in society as a whole, and in the labour markets in particular, is questionable.

An Overview of the Labour Market in Lebanon

The seventeen-year civil war has had dramatic impacts on the Lebanese economic infrastructure, which continues to suffer until this very date. The Lebanese economy is based on a free-market economic model and a laissez-faire commercial tradition. The state welcomes private investment and has only direct ownership of infrastructure and utilities (Abou Jaoude, 2015). Lebanese labour market is characterised by an informal economy, a high influx of foreign labour, and a large brain drain. The youth population finds it difficult to find appropriate jobs (WB, 2012). The Lebanese economy is highly based on the private sector constituting around 85% of its national expenditure (MoF, 2013), with small and medium size enterprises accounting for the majority of businesses in Lebanon (90%). In the public sector, only 30,000 of the 110,000 employees benefit from social benefits, after

the government has stopped its civil service recruitment scheme in 1996, as part of the wider neoliberal project discussed in the sections above. All other employees in the public service work on a daily rate (Abou Jaoude, 2015).

The informal sector is largely invisible according to the World Bank (2011), and workers in it lack social insurance, benefits or regulations. Since 2009, the Lebanese economy has seen a reduction in growth due to political and security factors, as well as the influence of Syrian refugees, having negative impacts on foreign investment, tourism, as well as a strain on the local economy and the ability of the government to deliver services to its citizens (WB, 2012). In 2012, growth was 2.5% and decreased to 1.5% in 2013 due to the above (IMF, 2014).

In sum, the Lebanese labour market suffers from structural problems. Those problems are caused by ‘the absence of four major components that regulate and enhance its activity an economic policy that stimulates the productive sectors; a social protection policy that protects the Lebanese labour force, an education policy that matches economic activities, and an employment policy (Abu Jaoude, 2015, p.17).’ All the above factors will be discussed in more lengths in the coming sections, especially in reference to their implications on female labour force participation.

Women in the Lebanese Labour Market

Over the past decades, Lebanon -- as part of a general wave in the Middle East -- has experienced structural changes that have altered its demographic and social standing. Increased urbanisation, fluctuations in the global economy that have affected the organisation of the labour force, as well as transformations in family arrangements, have had consequences that have been reported to different degrees in most countries in the MENA region (Osman et al, 2005). Family structure was shifting as an increasing number of young men and women were reaching the expected marriage age (Ibid). More particularly, Lebanon stands at an advanced stage of its demographic transition (please refer to Table 1), women constitute half of the society (Table 1, row 7) and the country reports a distinctly low population growth rate if compared to other MENA countries (Table 1, row 4), as well as higher female life expectancy rates as compared to that of males (Table 1, rows 1 and 2) (MoSA 2008; WB, 2004).

Lebanon stands as a clear instance of the paradox of a low female labour force participation rate in the MENA region, according to government statistics. The case of this country is particularly interesting, given its pioneering position on development – it is classified as being 8th among Arab countries on its average level of human development (UNDP, 2006) -- as well as the reputation its women are said to hold as being highly socially, culturally and economically emancipated within these societies (Euromed, 2010). While an investigation of the evolution of the labour markets in the region generally is important, notably from a gender perspective (Karshenas and Moghadem, 2001), it is not feasible to conduct such a study in an in-depth way for the region as a whole. Lebanon can thus pave the way for further studies, especially in labour-abundant countries in the MENA region that can learn a lot from a study centered on Lebanon.

Table 1 Comparative Rates of Development Indicators in the MENA Region

	Indicator	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Tunisia	MENA	Year
1	Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	74.9	74.7	74.6	76.7	74.4	2010
2	Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	71	71.9	70.2	72.6	70.7	2010
3	Total Fertility Rates	2.5	3.8	1.8	2	3.2	2010, MENA (2001)
4	Population Growth Rate	1.75	2.21	0.73	1.04	-	2010
5	Literacy rate, adult female (% of females aged 15 and above)	57.8	88.9	85.9	70.9	-	Eg. (2006) Jor. And Leb. (2007) Tu. (2008)
6	Literacy rate, adult male (% of males aged 15 and above)	74.6	95.49	93.4	86.4	-	Eg. (2006) Jor. And Leb. (2007) Tu. (2008)
7	Population, female (% of total)	49.8	48.5	51.2	50	48.7	2010
8	Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population)	57.6	70.77	47.2	43.74	55.5	2010

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, World Bank Data [online] accessed on 10th August, 2015.

As part of the demographic changes, the country as a whole is witnessing a rise in rates of women who have never married (Table 2, computed by dividing the number of single women per age group – not including the divorced, or widowed, but persons who

were never officially married, by the total number of individuals within that age group, multiplied by a hundred). The rise in the rates of persons who have never married occurs across all age groups and for both genders between 1970 and 2007 (UNDP, 2009). This is an indication of the structural changes in the institution of marriage that will be explored in more depth in following chapters, and is linked to women's presence in the labour markets.

Table 2 Rates of Lebanese Who Have Never Married, per Age Group (1970-2007)

Age	15-19		20-24		25-29		30-34		35-39		40-44		45-49		50-54		55-59		60-64	
Sex	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1970	87	99	50	88	25	55	14	25	10	15	8	8	7	6	7	6	6	7	7	5
1997	94	100	74	95	49	73	30	42	21	20	14	10	10	6	7	4	6	3	5	2
2004	95	100	73	95	50	73	30	42	21	21	17	10	12	7	10	4	8	4	7	2
2007	97	100	81	97	52	80	33	47	24	27	22	13	16	8	11	6	11	5	8	5

Source: Adapted from UNDP, 2009

The rates of never married women, as defined above, are high in both national and regional standards. For instance, for the age group [20-24], only 12% of Libyan women, 15% of Tunisian women, and 43% of neighbouring Syrian women had never married in 2005 (Osman et al, 2005). In contrast, this averages to 80.7% in Lebanon (MoSA, 2007b). Moreover, only 1-4% of women aged [15-19] were married, and the percentage of women who had never married, who were between 35 and 39, ranged from 15-21% (Osman et al, 2005).

In Beirut, these numbers are more accentuated. In 2007, 61% of women between ages [25-29] have never married, and 84% of men in that same category had also never

been married (Table 3). While there is no direct explanation for this in the literature, the high number of single women in Beirut is likely to affect women's participation rates in the labour markets. This also points to the changing value that women place on the institution of marriage, or at other possible structural explanations that will be discussed in next chapters.

Table 3 Rates of Those Who Have Never Married in Beirut (2007)

Age Group	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+
Women	98.3	77.4	60.7	37.5	27.4	21.1	14	10.2	8	14.3	5.5
Men	100	97.8	83.8	40.1	22.9	18	14.3	6.2	2.9	9.8	5.5

Source: Adapted from MoSA, 2007b

Another noticeable demographic trend is the marriage age, which has been pushed forward in the last twenty years. In particular, the average age at first marriage for Lebanese women reached 29 in 2007 (against 23 years in the 1970s). As to men, this average was 29 years in the 1970s, and 33 in 2007 (MoSA, 2007b). This average is the same for men in Beirut, but is higher for women, reaching 30 years in 2007 (Ibid). Women in Lebanon are thus marrying at older ages, and fewer women per year are getting married. This can be linked to the fact that men are also not ready to get married at lower ages, and it may point to increasing material demands surrounding marriage, or to changing aspirations among youth, all of which will be discussed in following chapters.

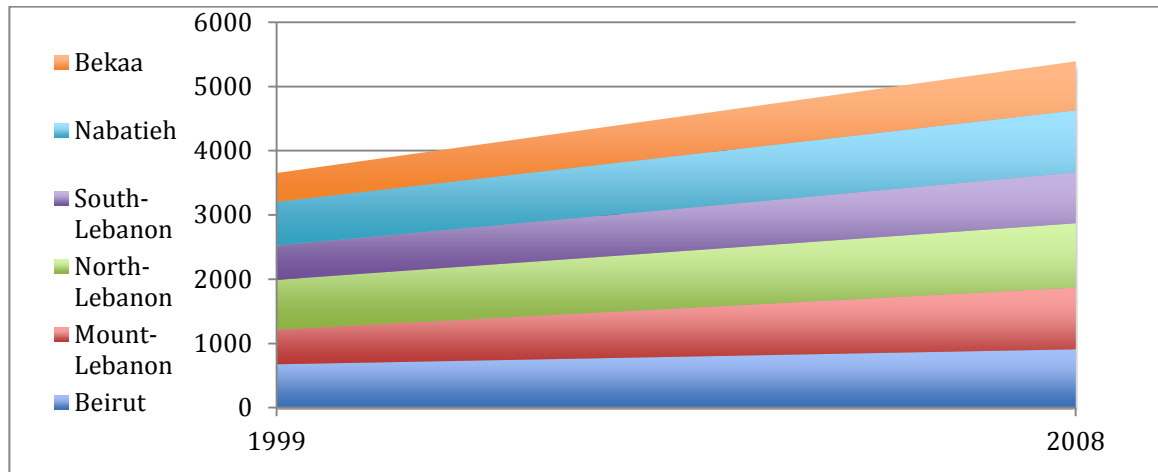
Table 4 Total Marriages across Governorates (1999-2008)

	Beirut	Mount-Lebanon	North-Lebanon	South-Lebanon	Nabatieh	Bekaa	TOTAL
1999	4433	6827	7240	4146	4350	5677	32673
2006	4117	6150	7785	4345	4334	2347	29078
2007	4056	6905	7929	5131	5359	6416	35796
2008	4541	7042	8721	4914	5474	6901	37593

Source: Adapted from MoSA, 2009

While overall marriage rates are marked by slight increases (except for the low in 2006, which marks the war with Israel), or fluctuations around the same figures across governorates (Table 4), this phenomenon is counterbalanced by increases in divorce rates across governorates (Figure 5). This is particularly true in Beirut, which witnesses a 35% increase in cases of divorce in a span of 9 years. Coupled with high rates of women who have never married and higher ages at first marriage, this indicates that the institution of marriage is undergoing structural changes in Lebanon. This research will attempt to explain these patterns. Those changes in marital arrangements should be also kept in mind given their importance in women's decisions for engagement in the labour markets, which will be demonstrated in later sections.

Figure 5 Total Divorces across Governorates (1999-2008)



Source: Adapted from, MoSA, 2009

As to the status of the labour force in Lebanon, the inactive population⁴ constitutes of more than half of the population (Figure 6). While 73% of those who are employed in Lebanon are covered by insurance (mainly state insurance, called the National Social

⁴ It is important, here, to note the difference between the unemployed and the economically inactive population, i.e., those who are not seeking any employment. These constitute nearly half of the population above fifteen years of age. Those inactive persons who are under 30 are mainly enrolled in education, whereas with those above 30 who declare themselves to be inactive, this is either because they are economically satisfied, or simply because they are unable to work.

Security Fund, or NSSF, which is paid by their employer),⁵ the inactive population does not benefit from any type of state health services. This raises questions, important questions, on the incentives that are pushing women into the labour markets, if the opportunity cost of going outside the household is not outweighed by its benefits. This research will explore this hypothesis, amongst others.

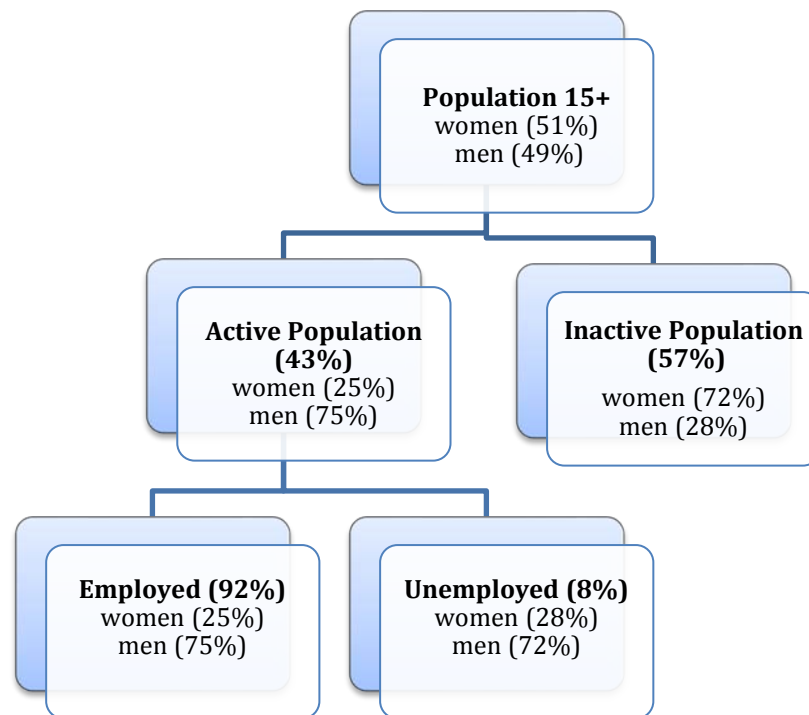
As previously mentioned, the female labour force participation rates of Lebanese women are low. Unemployment rates of Lebanese men and women, as per the ILO definition: ‘those between 15 and 64 years; were not working during the reference period that is the week before the survey; but were actively seeking and available to take up work,’ reached up to 6% at the national level in 2009, with only a one point differential between genders (Badre and Yaacoub, 2011). In Beirut, this rate was 8%, with the same gender differential (Ibid). Additionally, surveys report that women who would be available to work if a position was offered to them are less likely to look for a job (Ibid)⁶.

⁵ This insurance was either provided by their own employment or that of someone from their household. 61% of respondents stated that their current employment paid for their health insurance while 12% still benefit from previous employment’s insurance.

⁶ It is important to note that this figure under values the number of unemployed because the question in the survey may actually capture ‘work’ categories such as those working for one hour a week, and consider them to be working, rather than unemployed. The same applies to informal work. It also may differ from survey to survey according to how the term ‘work’ is defined. However, the point about the two per cent differential between the unemployment of men versus that of women still holds true across surveys and definitions.

The majority of unemployed women, constituting 25% of the active population, have a university degree (44%) (Ibid). Unemployed women, moreover, are, in the majority, single (85%), and are mainly under 30 years of age (Ibid). Furthermore, while 66% of emigrants list unemployment as their main reason for leaving the country, this reason is more commonly given by men than women (Ibid).

Figure 6 The Status of the Lebanese Labour Force (2009)



Source: Adapted from Badre and Yaacoub, 2011

In 2009, more than 40% of women were employed in the services sector, which dominates with 75% of the GDP in Lebanon (Badre and Yaacoub, 2011). In that sector, 90% of the employees in banking are women. On the other hand, 25% of employees in industry are women (Ibid). Most of this data is available at the national level, but not at the level of Beirut. Additionally, this data points to the puzzle of the low labour market participation rates of women, which will be explored throughout this research.

Research Questions

The section above has provided an overview of the economic, social and demographic indicators that relate to Lebanese women's position in society. In sum, Lebanese women are part of a society that is at an advanced stage of its demographic transition, which is characterised, among other factors, by its low population growth rate, low fertility, and high female life expectancy. This is accompanied by changes in the marital patterns of the society, whereby there is a rise in rates of women who have never married, increased age at first marriage, as well as an increase in divorce rates.

Economically, half of the Lebanese population is inactive, with no health insurance. As to the active population, 27% remain uninsured. Unemployed women are as many as 10% of the population, the majority are without a university degree, and the majority are single. Women constitute more than 70% of the inactive population, and only less than a quarter of the employed population. Employed women work mainly in services as monthly paid employees.

All the above raise many questions with regard to women in the labour market, which this research will attempt to explore through a number of research questions. First of all, and concentrating on married working women from the low-income classes, this study will investigate the factors leading women in this study to work: is it household poverty, or is it an active desire on their part to work? What distinguishes, in this category, between those women who choose to work, and those who are forced to do so? What types of jobs does each group undertake?

Secondly, it is likely that many women, as the statistics suggest, are not working. What are the main reasons for the absence of married women from the labour markets? What strategies do those women use to survive if they are both uninsured and economically inactive? How do economically inactive women define their priorities and well-being? How do other factors, such as educational levels and their belonging to a sectarian group create different barriers to women's activity? Finally, I will explore what lies behind the patterns of women's participation in labour markets, distinguishing between active choices on their part, structural constraints relating to the wider economy, and constraints that are imposed by dominant family members.

The Survey: An Overview

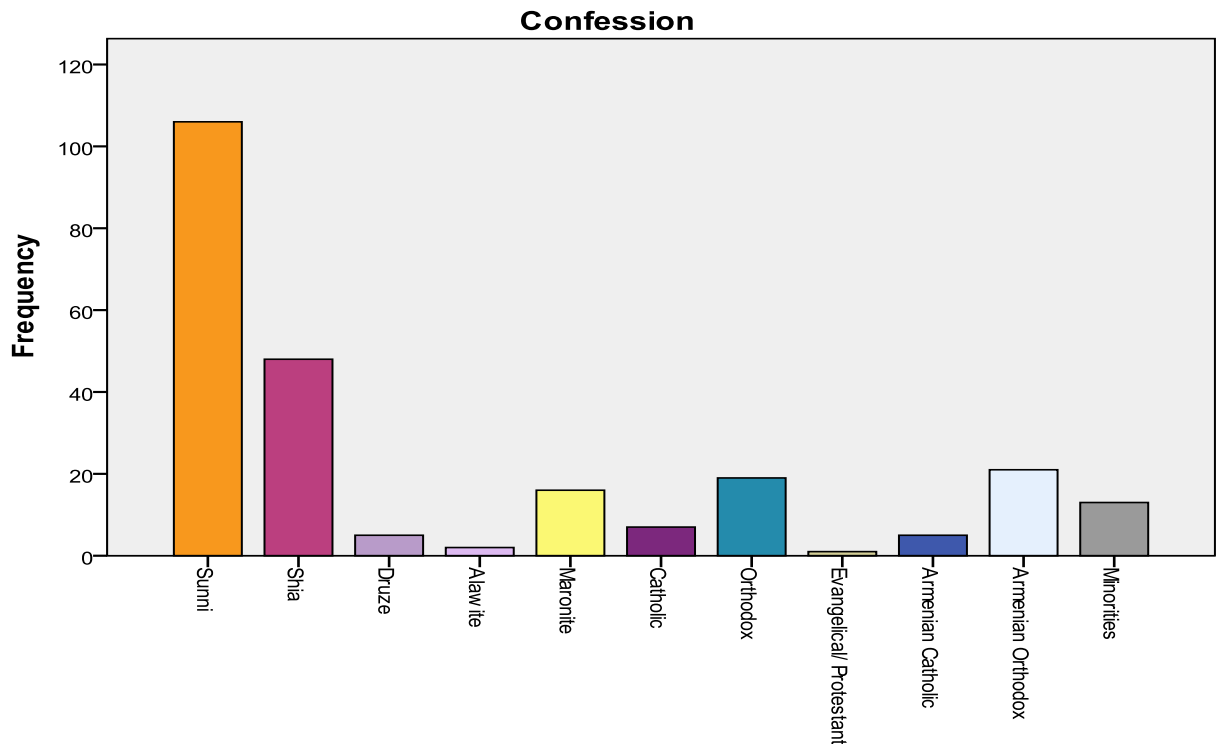
While the previous section provided an empirical background taken from secondary literary sources, this section will present the main results of the survey that was performed for this research, which targeted women in Beirut who were over the age of 21 years old.⁷ The aim of this survey (as detailed in the introduction) is to provide the general characteristics of the household through the women questioned, by covering indicators such as the income level of the household, the income of the respondent, their educational level, marital status, etc.. Secondly, it will sketch the labour market profiles of the women surveyed, as well as other social variables (access to health care, relation to family). Finally, it examines the respondents' attitudes and opinions on various issues pertaining to work and gender. This section will present an overview of the main results of the survey, and a detailed analysis of the data will follow progressively in each chapter according to themes.

The survey was conducted, using a representative sampling framework, with 400 respondents, and thus its results can be used to speak about women in Beirut who are over

⁷ This study did not include migrant domestic workers, and migrant women, who constitute a proportion of the women living in Beirut but who will have different motivations and lifestyles that cannot be analysed for this study. Their roles and contributions in society will be looked at throughout the chapters.

the age of 21 years (a detailed methodology of the survey will follow in the next chapter). Among the respondents, the distribution according to sect was the following: 45% of survey respondents were Sunni, 15.8% were Shia, 1% were Druze. This is in line with the fact that Beirut has always been known to give room mostly to Sunni Muslim inhabitants. From this result, I took the decision not to interview Druze respondents in my second-phase qualitative interviews. Among survey respondents, 7.5% belonged to minorities, while the remaining 30.9% were Christian respondents. Those belonging to sectarian groups were controlled for in the choice of my qualitative sample of respondents.

Figure 7 Survey Respondents According to Sectarian Group Belonging (2013)



Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The second main finding from my survey is the distribution of respondents by marital status. The largest category of survey respondents were married women, who constitute around 55.5% of the women in Beirut who are over the age of 21 years, while single (or never married) women constituted only 39.3% of survey respondents, the others

were either divorced or widowed. This has also helped me in deciding to narrow down the topic of my research to married women. In this category, a lot of the decision making is more complex and is linked to family decision making, to the number of children, etc., all of which factors influence women's decisions to drop out of the labour markets. In future chapters, the relationship between the marital status of women and their labour market decisions will be further explored through examining the statistical distribution of working and non-working women in relation to their marital status and the number of children that they have, as well as the more in-depth dynamics that are faced by married women and explored through the qualitative interviews.

In terms of the general distribution of respondents per employment status, it is clear that the national statistics have not truly reflected the nature of the labour force in Beirut in the age group targeted by this research's survey. This can either be related to the methodology of the last survey, conducted in 2007, which was immediately after the July war, when many citizens were living in unstable conditions, or through differentiations in the ways the questions are asked in the survey, perhaps through hiding a lot of the informal jobs that women take. In this survey, I made sure that the questions were clearly explained to the respondent, so that no type of economic activity, that is, income generating – formal or informal, employee or self-employed, etc., was hidden.

The survey showed that, among women aged 21 years and above in Beirut, 60.5% are actually active in the labour markets. However, the results of this project's stand, which is in line with the 2013 MENA World Bank Development Report, which argues that: "in consultations held across the Region to prepare the report, women affirmed their desire to work and highlighted the lack of job opportunities, reiterating the constraints posed by the legal and regulatory framework and conservative social norms (WB, 2013, p.4)." The rate of inactivity, i.e., women who are suffering from the discouraged worker effect, who are not seeking jobs, and who are not employed, amounts to only 39.5%. In majority, women within this category are married women.

Among active women, 10.8% are unemployed, meaning they are not currently, working but they are actively seeking a job. Full-time employment actually represents the majority of women in the survey, with 42.5% of women in full-time jobs. Active women are, in the majority, single, especially those in full time employment. Married women

occupy the highest category in relation to part time employment, constituting 7% of active women. Statistically, 0.3% of the women who were surveyed are retired. These numbers stand as a paradox if compared with the very low participation rates that are reported in the national statistics (see previous sections).

In fact, the labour force participation rates and statistics throughout the world tend to undervalue the real numbers of working women, due to informal employment that is hidden. The ILO (2008) reports a series of factors that continue to enhance informal employment in Lebanon, which continues to employ 57% of women. According to the ILO, "... there are no real incentives for entrepreneurs to register an establishment: owners are not entitled to social protection, taxes and administrative fees are high and corruption is rife throughout the process (ESCWA, 2009, p.14)." All of this – which will be discussed in more depth in later chapters-, renders informal employment a choice for women, but also puts a lot of women in the category of the discouraged worker.

Of those who have previously or currently worked for pay, 54% of women work in the private sector and 46% in the public sector. As the structure of the Lebanese economy caters for 90% of working women in the services sector, 6% in Industry and 2% each in agriculture and construction. This is in line with the statistics on gender distribution by economic sector in the years 1998-2008, showing that female economic activity in the service sector was highest in the Middle East (at an average of 50%) (ESWCA, 2009).

The survey demonstrates that the majority of working women fall into the 21-31 years old age group. This is the category of women who are generally as yet unmarried, or they have a small number of children. Finally, working women tend to be educated, as 35% of them have at least entered high school, 23% hold a baccalaureate degree, and 17% have earned their Bachelor's Degree. In a country where wars and instability are prevalent, 45% of women said that they would migrate for work if they had the chance.

To Follow

The main point that this chapter has tried to make is that, as the reports predict, the participation in the formal labour markets of women surveyed in Beirut, as published in national statistics, is indeed low, but not as low as national data reports. Although this survey cannot make generalisations about the status of women's economic activity in

Lebanon, it does indeed prove that the surveyed women's presence in the labour markets in Beirut has increased considerably since the last national statistics were published in 2007. The women surveyed in Beirut who were above the age of 21 years are, in the majority, economically active, although a percentage of this work may be informal, vulnerable employment, and unemployment.

Subsequent chapters will delve into themes relating to economically active and inactive women in low-income Beirut, with the aim of answering the research questions posed above. Additionally, the data presented above will be analysed using intersectionality theory, to assess how each variable affects women's decisions to be active or inactive in the labour markets. Women's status in the economy, their sector of employment, their negotiation patterns inside the household, their spending habits, and their thoughts on work will be looked at through the prisms of the women's educational level, marital status, sectarian group belonging, and their class.

Chapter 3

Interrelations and Intersections:

Methodologies and Methods

During the months in which I was undergoing the fierce battle of a divorce in court, all I needed was some personal space in which to mourn what I thought was my lifetime's investment in a partner. However, in Beirut, personal space boundaries are fluid, constantly crossed by both those close to one and strangers. Add to this the idea that I was in what people rightfully deemed to be a 'vulnerable' state. This meant that I was constantly offered support by family, friends, neighbours, and everyone who heard about my divorce. On the positive side, this meant that day after day, people would offer to recount to me the personal problems in their marriages, in an effort to show me that no one is happy. Listening to these stories of infidelity, marital fights, material struggles, divorces, unhappy marriages, I could trace similar elements that were reproduced in every story. However, what seemed more striking to me were the differences in each anecdote. When my friends asked me whether I would ever venture to get married again after hearing all these stories, I would say: yes, definitely. For each story was different, each women had different priorities, different preferences, desires, and characteristics that made her experience different from mine.

This is why, when I started my endeavour to research the decision making of married women in low-income Beirut, especially their choices relating to their participation in the labour market, but also the manifestations of these decisions on their marital relations, household spending patterns, as well as the negotiation dynamics inside the household, I wanted to ensure that I had adequate analytical and conceptual frameworks with which to capture those differences, but also to help me to identify common ground from which to further grasp women's common struggles.

The first aim of my research is to try to explain the puzzle introduced in the last chapter, by asking if women in Beirut are indeed -- as national statistics and regional reports outline -- inactive, as a majority, in the labour markets. While this research does not claim to assess data at the national level, it surveys a population of 400 women aged 21 and

above, in Beirut, and looks at their participation patterns, among other variables (which are further explained in this chapter). This data is useful in every chapter to set the empirical background to each theme, especially for Beirut, where quantitative data is scarce. The second aspect of my research involved taking a step back and questioning not only why women are not participating in the labour market, but whether women wanted to do so in the first place. What factors, beyond their agency (structural, societal, cultural, etc.), affect their decision making processes? Additionally, in the specific context of Beirut, how much does the claim that work in the labour markets empowers women hold true? In order to do so, a methodology that allows the capturing of those nuances and complexities, yet ensures the possibility of drawing a common thread from respondents' lived realities so as to answer the research's questions, was needed.

This research thus adopts a feminist research methodology that combines interdisciplinarity and intersectionality, and deploys a mixed methods approach to achieve the aims of this research. This chapter starts by overviewing the methodological framework, moves onto detailing the methods used throughout the project, and closes with a section on ethical considerations.

Simplicity and Complexity: Feminist Methodologies

A methodological framework, in simple terms, is a set of principles that guide the research practice, and that justify the preference of certain methods over others. Harding defines methodology as the “theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (1986, p.2), whereas methods are the different techniques with which data is gathered, ranging from surveys to interviews, and shaped by methodology. Methodology can also be defined as “a coherent set of ideas about the philosophy methods and data that underline the research process and the production of knowledge (Mc Call, 2005, p.1774).”

Being a woman who is writing about women for women, makes my research project potentially a feminist one (Harding, 1986). From a methodological perspective, feminist research encourages an in-depth engagement with women in order to understand the meaning that they themselves attach to aspects and practices of their lives, as well the values that they place on phenomena (Wise, 1987). However, the researcher is not only a rapporteur. Feminist methodologies acknowledge the power differentials between

researchers and the researched, and they aim, through an acknowledgement of these dynamics and of researchers' positionalities, to remove those imbalances (Brayton, 1997).

Many agree that women are better equipped to do feminist research, making it a research area that is almost exclusively championed by women, and that is considered a 'woman only space' in which women assign meaning and power to phenomena pertaining to their lives (Evans, 1990; Harding, 1986; Kremer, 1990; Mies, 1983). On the other hand, feminist research welcomes the inclusion of men as subjects of study to provide a more wholesome picture about the oppression of women (Wise, 1987). Additionally, feminist research is concerned with values, and should analyse women's lives with the aim of encouraging social change (MacPherson, 1983). This should not happen in isolation from the research subjects, as the research should be made accessible to the women who have taken part in it (Ibid).

Over time, feminist research underwent great transformations. In 1861, Harriet Jacobs wrote a testimony about slavery, in which she calls for the solidarity of women across races, classes, and geography. Sometime later, in 1929, Virginia Woolf spoke about female writers and intellectuals, being one, and the inequalities they face in society given the power differential with men. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote the famous book *The Second Sex*, in which she outlined women's oppression, and set the ground for second wave feminism. It was through those writers, among others, that feminist struggles and insights began to take shape, challenging positions of privilege and questioning exclusions (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Earlier works focused more on the commonality of women's struggles but, across the years, feminist research underwent drastic changes in which the importance of underlining differences in experiences across gender, race, and ethnicity was increasingly acknowledged. These changes were brought about by 'Third Wave Feminism' in the 1990s, in which the category 'woman,' as an essentialised, universal category, was questioned.

More recently, and especially in the 21st century, the implications of globalisation has added a layer of complexity to feminist research, as it was now essential to study the global implications of imperialism, colonialism, national identity, and capitalism, among other areas, and to relate them to the local realities of women (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Hence, today, doing feminist research in an international setting pushes researchers to make new conceptualisations, using a diversity of disciplines. The feminist narrative is more nuanced

with the rise of strands within feminism such as the postmodern turn, postcolonial feminism, transnational feminism, that all add layers of complexity in looking at the woman question, taking into consideration the additional axes of inequalities and differences in women's lived experiences and histories.

In fact, much of feminist scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature, seeking to deconstruct the hierarchies of power in order to understand the unequal gender dynamics in societies, using toolkits borrowed from several disciplines, but also claiming no single methodological path or way to feminist research (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist methodologies emerge from the importance of promoting an interaction, rather than from one-way communication within the research (Klein, 1983; Armstrong et. al, 2012).

The Quest for Interdisciplinarity

Disciplines are defined as “stable communities within which researchers concentrate their experience into a particular worldview (Bruce et.al, 2004, p.464).” Crossing boundaries of discipline has increasingly gained ground as an important tool to gain new insights on problems. Interdisciplinarity should not be understood as merely the sum of two disciplines, but rather as a synthesis of different disciplinary approaches (Petts et.al, 2008). This interrelation between disciplines is clear in feminist scholarship, which has, from the outset, developed within and across disciplines, nourished by contributions from many areas of study. The main criticism of interdisciplinary work is the possible sacrificing of depth for diversity. However, this project aims to look at women's participation in the labour market using economics, development and gender studies as lenses through which to look at women's choices. This is rooted in the belief that economics alone has failed to account for the full experiences of women in labour markets (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Many feminists have argued that, in fact, women's positions within societies are not a natural phenomenon, but are due to social, political and economic products (Harding, 1991), that breed myths about family, work, and stereotypes about women that need to be unpacked using those very same disciplines (Pascall, 1997). While not all research requires interdisciplinarity, this particular quest will be enriched by combining economists' explanations for women's lack of activity in labour markets, with theories from gender and development that theorise about women's negotiation dynamics and decision-making

processes inside the household. Interdisciplinary thus solves the risk of looking at the research through one lens at the macro level of the conceptual framework. However, at the micro level, it becomes important to examine and question the categories that specific disciplines use and to find a framework that takes into account the need to look at each category from multiple axes. This is why intersectionality will be brought into the discussion.

Paths and Axes in Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality is a feminist sociological theory that was first devised by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989, in which she critiques focus on a single-axis framework that marginalises the experiences of black women in feminist theory and in anti-racist politics that ignore the interactions between race and gender. Injustice and social inequality, she argues, should be analysed by examining the interaction of the many axes of identity such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion, among others. In other words, forms of oppression and disadvantage interrelate, and interact with one another (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, an analysis of patriarchy that is rooted in white understandings cannot understand the experiences of ‘black women,’ a category breeding inequalities larger than the sum of racism and sexism.

In fact, a wider view of intersectionality speaks to many feminist scholars’ concerns, such as Eurocentricism, essentialism, and others, in concepts and categories of research endeavours (Harding, 1986; Medaglia, 2000; Mohanty, 1991; Collins, 1998; Acker, 2000). Kandyoti (1999), for instance, speaks of the slippery slope on which some Western feminists could fall, by generalising concepts without taking into account ethnocentrism, even in the construct that is used for analysis and inquiry, such as, for example, the concept of patriarchy as it is defined by the West. Mohanty (2003), Spivak (1994) and Bordo (1990), among others, call for some sort of ‘strategic essentialism’ in which heterogeneity is recognised, but in which similarity in struggles is underlined in order to create a common solidarity.

This is exactly why intersectionality is beneficial to this particular study. In being careful about the interactions of multiple identities, and in recognising the differences in categories across cultures, it becomes much safer to speak about a category in which

married women in low-income Beirut, despite their differences, share their struggles and injustices. On the other hand, and more importantly, it recognises that, even within the same broader group, each woman is at a different 'intersection' or 'crossroads' in her path away from injustice, and this breeds a very different experience and variations in choices.

Intersectionality, through encouraging the analyses of multiple axes of oppression in feminist theory and in social sciences more generally (McCall, 2005; Roth, 2004), will thus allow us to better understand that this research's respondents are discriminated against through structural and societal practices that are different than those of women from different classes in Beirut. Additionally, since oppression, in that sense, unifies multiple categories into one intersection (Lepinard, 2014), it will allow us to understand how these experiences will shape respondents' subjectivities and perceptions as a collectivity, as well as in their decision-making processes, in ways that are different from those of other women who may experience one of those injustices only.

This framework is thus beneficial in conceptualising the subjectivities of the women who have kindly participated in this research, in framing their experiences, feelings and identities, at the intersection of multiple axes of oppression that are specific to low-income Beirut, as a setting. In this particular context where many laws are not in favor of women, and where systems of patriarchy are institutionalised into rigid gender norms and household division of labour, women experience decision-making in a way that is different to other contexts.

In this sense, using intersectionality theory to look at categories along with interdisciplinarity will allow analysis of those phenomena from diverse areas of social science and will be very beneficial in analysing the applicability of the claims that the entry of women into labour markets will empower them and leave them better off, and the underlying assumption that most women want to work in labour markets, and that their absence is nothing other than a manifestation of the obstacles obstructing them from entering the workforce. This framework will allow us to take into consideration the diverse dominations and disadvantages that married women in low-income Beirut face, as a category that is separate from those experienced by other women from other classes, from structural (economic theories), societal (gender theories on gender roles), and personal (gender and development theories on negotiation patterns) perspectives.

Within this analysis, intersectionality theory will allow the differentiation between women belonging to different sectarian groups that will challenge stereotypes of experiences that are attributed to Muslim Arab women, as opposed to Christian Arab women, for instance. Inequalities in oppressive categories that emerge from actors, institutions, practices, norms, and laws in low-income Beirut will be connected to one another using this theory. All the above will figure in more detail in forthcoming chapters.

Additionally, as Crenshaw's main contribution is to question the over-stabilisation of discrete groups and categories, this theory will allow us to question and study the multiple identities that simultaneously constitute the women who have participated in this research and how this affects their lives and struggles (Armstrong et. al, 2012). There are three different approaches to intersectionality: an intra-categorical approach (focusing on social groups at the neglected points of intersections who experience very complex experiences); an anti-categorical approach (one that deconstructs analytical categories, to avoid essentialisation through encouraging fluidity), and an inter-categorical one (which utilises existing categories to look at inequalities) (McCall, 2005, pp. 1773-1774).

McCall critiques the first category for not capturing the larger societal structures, as well as the second for its impracticality in analysis. He encourages the use of the third approach, which overcomes those two shortcomings in intersectionality theory. This research will use this last approach, utilising already existing categories, but questioning their boundaries and their intersections. While this section has given an overview in the methodology, the next section will explain this research's methods, inspired by the conceptual and analytical framework, above.

Mixing and Matching Methods: Numbers and Anecdotes

Following from a feminist methodology that calls for interdisciplinarity and intersectionality as conceptual frameworks for this study, this section will explain the methods employed to answer this research's questions, which emerge from the discussion, above. Methods are the most appropriate tools, techniques, and processes for a specific research project (Webb, 1993). This means that there is no method that is above another, but rather there are ones that are more adequate for certain endeavours than others. This research will employ a mixed methods approach, which is also called multi-strategy

research (Layder, 1993), that is committed to showing, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the strength of an intersectional approach when it comes to making sense of complex matrixes of oppression.

The logic behind using triangulation in methods is that one method can be used to cross-check the results of another, or to improve and enhance the quality of the empirical data, making it richer. Using more than one, single way to measure the concept adds rigour to the data, and is mutually reinforcing (Hughes, 1997). Qualitative data provides a guide to quantitative data, in that it helps to generate hypotheses, as well as aids in the choice of the variables of a phenomenon to be tested through a better knowledge of the context. On the other hand, quantitative research facilitates qualitative research, since it sets the ground for interviews by providing adequate information about the situation, as well as filling gaps that are otherwise not filled through participant observation or other methods.

Finally, qualitative research enriches quantitative data, adding stories to established trends. Interviews and qualitative methods, help to take into account detailed aspects that are otherwise hidden behind numbers (Bryman, 2001). Questionnaires are easily replicable, unlike interviews where each one takes a different form according to the respondent, the setting, and other variables that can affect the data generated (McNeill, 1990). However, as Bryman has argued (2001), quantification suppresses the voices of respondents, and places them in pre-determined categories. Particularly when constructed around averages, these categories may also further conceal the experiences of marginalised groups (Ibid).

Following from the discussion, above, this research employed mixed methods in the form of three stages all conducted in the year 2013: 'qualitative-quantitative-qualitative', so as to overcome the pitfalls of each method by complementing it through the use of another. The first is a qualitative step, through focus groups, interviews, and participant observation with women from multiple backgrounds, which helped to set the survey's questions and narrow down the sample of female respondents for the bulk of the qualitative work. The second is the quantitative phase through surveys. The third is a return to qualitative methods, in order to provide the bulk of the data that answers the research questions. The methods are outlined below.

Testing the Waters: Qualitative Method, Phase I.

As discussed in the methodology section, intersectionality, as a way of research, permits the study of the “relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formation (Mc Call, 2005, p.1771).” The complexity of intersectionality stems from interrogating the boundaries between categories, while maintaining a critical stance towards them and their formation. Many feminist scholars believe that this type of research allows individuals and social groups to break free from a certain imposed hegemonic order, to include more complex and inclusive ways of looking at the subject (Ibid). While it is impossible to escape the use of categories altogether, this research encourages the acknowledgement of power dynamics, thus enabling us to use the categories more strategically. However, in order to delve into a deeper discussion of categories, one of the initial purposes of the research was to narrow down the respondent pool to a specific category of women from a certain background, i.e., to focus on a certain class, marital status, age, neighbourhood or membership of a sectarian group. Once established, this project will then seek to delineate the borders of these categories in order to deconstruct the unequal practices that govern them, or the normative assumptions that are attached to each category, through intersectionality theory, in the hope of generating a better understanding of both the research subjects and their lives.

This research was initially concerned with women in Beirut. This includes respondents from upper, middle and low-income classes, both married and unmarried, working and non-working in the labour market. Due to time and capacity limitations, and in order to generate better conclusions, the concerns of my supervisory committee about the scope of my research rightfully pushed me to re-consider my interview sample. In order to narrow down my respondent base, but also to better design my surveys, I conducted several focus groups, informal chats, as well as individual pilot test interviews, with women from different social classes and marital statuses. Those encounters resulted in interesting discoveries that are beyond the purposes of this section, but I will list the information that is instrumental to explaining how I narrowed down my interview respondents to those in this particular group. The way in which those conversations shaped my survey questions will be discussed in the relative section later on in this chapter.

In one focus group with seven unmarried upper-income class women, which was conducted in 'Urbanista', a café in Gemmayzeh, a street in Ashrafieh that is known for its cool cafés and restaurants during the day, and its hipster/chic pubs and clubs during the night, I noted the motivations of single women about marriage and work. With little difference between Christian and Muslim respondents, the opinions of these women about work reflected a need for financial independence and self-realisation. For instance, Yasmine, one of those women, is in her mid-twenties and works as a graphic designer in a firm. At one point in our conversation, she mentioned how her salary is US\$1500 per month, not enough to cover the price of the Louis-Vuitton bag she was carrying, and the very expensive brand of jeans and Burberry top that she was wearing, not to mention the diamond bracelets, etc.

When I asked her why, then, she was working, she said that she was doing so in order to feel that she was a proactive member of the community, but also because her colleagues are 'very cool' and they enjoy their time together. Her family still supports her financially to maintain her expensive lifestyle. In terms of not yet being married, Yasmine said she had not yet met the guy of her dreams, who is as educated, and as intelligent, as she is, but who could also maintain the lifestyle she enjoys at her parents' house: "I don't know if we are growing up, or if our friends from school are marrying at a younger age, but everyone is getting engaged now. As to me, I really value my freedom." Most women in this focus group agreed with Yasmine's rationale, that marriage should be a really good 'deal' in order for them to give up their independence.

From the same upper-income background, I conducted another focus group among married women, mainly 'femmes de salon,' or those women who are known to have a very active life, with brunches and lunches, dinners and tea parties, making an appearance with a totally different look each time. I gained access to them through my mother's friend at the gym, who invited me to a brunch [*sobhya*] at her house in Ain Al-Mrayseh, a posh area facing the sea. While some of the perfectly dressed women, mostly in their forties, were also wearing brands from head to toe, they were involved in civil society, or in social organisations, but none of them was employed full-time at the time of my focus group.

Most of them agreed that running a family was a full-time job, and that it is unnecessary to 'exhaust yourself with work,' especially when your husband is providing

you with all the financial support that is needed. Instead, they unanimously agreed that you can make better use of your time by helping out in charitable work. While I was filling up my water cup in the kitchen, Wadad, a Lebanese woman who runs the house of the hostess (and whose tasks are different from the two Philippino helpers that she manages) told me: “you would be mistaken to think those women do charity for charitable purposes. I am not God, therefore I cannot question their motives. But knowing them, I know why they do it. They do it to show others that they have. They do it to feel alive, to wear their new dresses, to impress their husband’s work partners.” I was impressed by Wadad’s courage in uncovering her views to me so honestly. However, what she was saying was not new. I myself grew up in this society, and I knew exactly what she was talking about.

Only one of the women at this brunch remembered the time when she was working, and she expressed a longing for the days when she worked as a flight attendant before meeting her husband. For fear of being judged, she automatically said, “‘alhamdella’ (Thank God), I don’t need to work anymore,” highlighting the difficulty of working full time in the labour market and maintaining a certain social presence, since work coincided with most parents’ meetings at school, brunches, and social happenings. Ironically enough, all of them noted pushing their daughters into employment (according to the house manager, Wadad, this was also done because it is now ‘in fashion’ for your daughter to work, as this seems to take up a big chunk of their conversations, to find out where each woman’s daughters –and sons, of course- are working, and whether it is more prestigious if compared to the work of others). However, most of them agreed that this work was only until they (the daughters) found a suitable husband (or until their first child was born), when they would then follow in their footsteps into a much more comfortable lifestyle.

My findings following chats with women from low-income settings, like Amna, a waitress at a coffee shop in Hamra Street, were very different. Amna was working part time, and studying part time. Her income was split between helping her parents with household expenditure, paying for her education, and supporting her fiancée with their apartment loan. Amna described work as a necessity, rather than as self-realisation. Despite this, Amna was also dressed in very high-end clothes, and it was clear that she put a lot of effort into the way she looked. Although it is probable that what she was wearing were not the ‘real brands,’ but a famous copy, this still shows that she was trying to seem as though

she were wearing brands. This made me question the concept of 'need' and to incorporate it as a core element in my questions, both in the survey and in the interviews that I later conducted. Similar to Amna's experience was that of the married low/middle-income working mothers that I interviewed at a brunch. During one of my flights into Beirut, I met two sisters on the plane, Hanan and Haneen, both of whom referred to themselves as 'middle-income working women.'

After a conversation on the plane about the subject of my Ph.D., I was invited to a Saturday afternoon at their house, along with their married friends, who were mostly working mothers. The latter noted the importance of working to help their husbands pay for their house, tuition, loans, as well as 'extras', like travel and outings. While they complained about the tiring aspects of their lifestyles, they agreed on the importance of having two incomes per household to meet the high demands of life today. These demands also included 'luxuries' that they deemed to be essential for their social standing.

The stories I heard in all of those encounters were so rich and complex. Complementing them were insights I had after my meeting with Farah, a Lebanese activist in her twenties who was working closely with economically active women's rights in the unions in Lebanon. During our meeting, Farah mentioned that many women that she met through the union, are working both in- and outside the household. Some of them had, in fact, to leave their job because of the increasing cost of leaving the household, when they could no longer finance day care for their babies. Others were juggling many part-time jobs in the informal market in order to help to provide for their families. The stories I heard from her, as well as from my participation in many sit-ins and strikes by the unions, especially the teacher's unions, were fascinating.

Many of the organisers were women, who also participated in very high numbers in these strikes. I had the chance to sit with them, discuss, chat, and even sing songs that they created for the union strikes. I was introduced to their struggles and their concerns about a salary that can no longer cover their basic needs, let alone other 'needs' that are now also considered to be necessary in a city like Beirut, which is increasingly consumerist in character. At the time, it became very clear to me that the research would mainly cover married women respondents from the low/middle income classes in Beirut. As explained in the previous chapter, since the middle-income class is shrinking in size, I will now

aggregate low-income and middle-income respondents' social class into one category, which I have termed 'low- income Beirut.'

This realisation by no means understates the interesting stories that I heard from working and non-working women in the labour markets who came from upper-income backgrounds. However, the motivations of women from the low-income classes seemed more appealing for me to unpack. What obstructs a woman 'in need' from working, and would a women now 'forced by need' still be working if she did not have to? Between those two simplified options lies a continuum of motivations and barriers in women's decision making processes that were so interesting to deconstruct, especially by using intersectionality theory as a lens through which this category of women is viewed at an intersection of multiple sites of oppression.

In addition, I participated in workshops, round-tables and conferences (at the American University of Beirut, at the Lebanese American University, as well as at the Carnegie Melon Institute, and Nasawiya, a Lebanese feminist collective) to discuss aspects of women's lives that are related to their empowerment, their presence in the political sphere, their rights to nationality, as well as the launch of the Gender Focused World Bank Development Report. I met with many activists and people working in NGOs, in the private sector, as well as in the public sector, all of whom greatly informed the way I framed my questions, as well as the ways in which I conducted my study. Details on the study will follow in the next section, where I discuss the quantitative aspects of my research.

Identifying Trends: The Survey

There are many arguments that can be made for the use of secondary data instead of the collection of primary data. Dale et. al (1988) outlines the benefits of secondary data analysis in that it firstly saves cost and time; it usually ensures that high quality data is used, as most of the data collection is done by professional researchers in governments or data producing entities, and that it gives the opportunity for longitudinal studies, as well as for sub-groups' analysis, due to the bigger data sets that are usually available as compared to those data sets collected by students and young researchers. Additionally, using secondary data leaves more time for the researcher to analyse, and re-analyse data, rather

than spending most of his/her energy collecting it, with little time left for analysis (Bryman, 2001).

The above are legitimate concerns that were raised, first and foremost by my supervisors, who questioned my motives for collecting first hand quantitative data. Beyond my supervisory committee, I will never forget a colleague and a Professor of Economics at one of Lebanon's universities, who said to me bluntly, "if there is one piece of advice I could give you, it is: don't write your PhD about Lebanon. Your abilities as a research student should be used to theorise, not to gather data. Choose a country that has proper national data, not like Lebanon." At the beginning of one of the papers written by my undergraduate supervisor, Jad Chaaban, about labour markets in Lebanon, it similarly stated:

Problematic data: Lebanon's last official census dates back to 1932 and its last labour market survey to 1970. Labour market indicators are obtained from two official household surveys conducted in the last 10 years, and a few private sector (university and private research centers) surveys. (Chaaban, 2010, p.1)

The official household surveys that are indicated above were carried out by the Centre Administration for Statistics (CAS) in 2004 and 2009 (MoSA, 2004; 2009). The first of those surveys has a coherent methodology, however, it is over ten years old. The second (2009) is based on data collected immediately after the Lebanese War in July, 2006, with the aim of testing the effects of the war on the living conditions of Lebanese families. This poses methodological concerns over the sample used, since it was done after the war when a fair proportion of Lebanese citizens were either internally displaced, had left Lebanon temporarily or permanently, or were suffering from the economic implications of the war.

Based on this data from the two surveys, or from the Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey (MICS), Badre and Yaacoub (2011) wrote a paper analysing labour market trends in Lebanon. As to the World Bank, data produced on Lebanon is from 1990 to 2002, and a big proportion of it is estimated based on regressions, or is derived from other variables. In a multiple email exchange with them, as well as with CAS, they both clearly indicated to me that there was no data available for me to use for Beirut, nor do they have more recent data on Lebanon. About women in labour markets, there is a study published by the Institute of

Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW, 1998), which was done over 11 months from March, 1996-March, 1997, that covers some aspects of labour market presence that are based on data that was not made publically available.

In sum, when I came to attempting to give a background to my study, describing the context of Beirut, and what participation rates are; what the main obstacles to labour force participation among women in Beirut, are, among others, there was no data I could use. The data available was very broad and general, as shown in the last empirical chapter. It then became clear to me that a survey would be important in order to set a descriptive empirical background for Beirut. While this survey does not claim to assess or question claims made by the national data, it will provide rigorous data for women in Beirut who are above the age of 21 years (my choice of age group is explained, below). It is very important in that it sketches out the profiles of women in Beirut, their educational backgrounds, marital status, labour force patterns, perceptions *vis-à-vis* gender issues, and household characteristics, thus responding to the lack of recent primary data on this issue in Beirut.

On the other hand, gathering primary statistics is very helpful in countering the pitfalls of secondary data, for instance, the lack of the researcher's familiarity with secondary data (not understanding variable choices), the complexity of dealing with large scale data, and the lack of control over the quality of the data (Bryman, 2001). Additionally, gathering your own data for a research project helps the researcher to design questions that are tailored to the question the project is attempting to answer. Surveys also allow the researcher to obtain a large amount of data in statistical form from a large audience in a relatively short time (McNeill, 1990, p.19). While the data for this project will only be used descriptively, it will provide a rigid and accurate background about the labour market status of a representative sub-set of women in Beirut who are of a certain age, which will then be enriched by qualitative interviews, and this is one of the main strengths of the combined methods.

Survey Subjects

The population of interest in the survey was women in Beirut above the age of 21 years. The choice of Beirut, rather than other cities, reflects both personal interest and elements of generalisability. The personal aspect of choosing Beirut will be discussed in more depth in

the next section (qualitative methodology), but it relates directly to my desire to write and research about my city. Whereas the second reason that I chose women in Beirut is that the capital presents a rich mixture of memberships of different sectarian groups that are representative of the larger population in Lebanon. Additionally, this will inform other studies in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), as it will allow for comparisons in findings. While certain elements of the surveyed women's experiences will be generalisable, the intersectionality theory lens will also allow me to look at how those different categories interact so as to create new forms of injustice and oppression that are particular to those specific groups. For instance, how does the experience of a married low-income Shi'a woman who is working in the public sector differ from that of one working in the private sector? What if it's a married low-income economically inactive Shi'a woman? How would her decision-making processes be different? Secondly, the importance of studying Beirut, in particular, is the fact that non-participation rates in labour markets are more striking in the capital than in, say, villages or less 'exposed' cities where such a trend is more understandable. In other words, as Beirut is the capital of Lebanon, and its most developed city, scoring highest in development indicators (as shown in the last chapter), the lack of female activity in the labour market strikes me as being most puzzling.

In terms of age group, the choice of the age bracket, 21 years and above, also serves its purpose. While the ILO defines the working age population as individuals above the age of 15 years old, those in the age bracket between 15 and 24 years in Lebanon are, in the majority, inactive due either to being in education, or about to enter the labour market (MoSA, 2007). Additionally, these numbers are even more remarkable for women. In the age group 15-19 years, 81% of women are in schooling, and 41% of women in Lebanon between 20 and 24 years old are still in education (MoSA, 2007). Additionally, according to national data, only 5.8% of Lebanese women aged 15-19 years, and 29.8% of women between 20-24 years were active in the labour markets in 2007 (Ibid). While these statistics refer to Lebanon (the same statistics in relation to Beirut are not published), the numbers show that women between 15 and 21 years of age (the age when most women graduate from university) will still be inactive in the labour markets.

Survey Design

In terms of design, the survey had a total of 40 questions and was divided into 8 sections. The first section was about the demographic information of the respondent (qs. 1-9), the second concerned their household register (i.e. the demographic information of those who lives in the household) and household structure (q. 10-16). Following this there were four sections on labour market status and patterns which were divided into questions that were to be answered, respectively, by economically inactive women (who were not employed and not actively looking for employment, as per the ILO definition that was established in a previous section), unemployed women, employed women, and previously employed women (qs. 17-30). The next section discussed women's definitions and perceptions of work (qs. 31-33), and the last section surveyed women's gendered perceptions and decision-making patterns (qs. 34-39). A full copy of the survey questionnaire is available in the appendix at the end of the thesis.

All the questions were very specific, and so easy to codify. Only one question, which asked women how they defined 'work', was open-ended (Appendix). Answers were aggregated into different thematic groups, and they are analysed in subsequent chapters on the basis of the different categories of respondents. The first block of survey questions was about the respondent's demographic information. The creation of these categories was informed by the theory of intersectionality, and changed on the basis of axes of oppression (e.g., education), class, social status (married/unmarried), incorporation into the labour markets and of which type (formal/informal), household head (respondent/husband/etc.). These variables are important for the transformation of intersectionality theory into an operational tool, and they will inform the analysis in later chapters. The second tranche of questions related to their household structure: with whom does the respondent live? Is the husband Lebanese, or not? Is the husband from another confession? Those factors also affect the respondent's position of privilege and add to the axis of oppression due to the legal and structural entitlements that the respondent will receive, which differ according to those variables, discussed in Chapter 2. It also asks whether the household receives any remittances, if they have household help, medical insurance; as these are all factors that highly affect women's decision-making processes, as will be explored in the next chapter

(Chapter 4) and throughout the remaining chapters. The survey then moves onto precise questions relating to the women's labour market patterns of activity, their definition of work (which, as already mentioned, is the only open ended question in the survey, given the importance of understanding the nuances surrounding their perception and valuation of their contributions- both cash and non-cash). Finally, the survey asks questions with regard to gender roles and their perceptions regarding gender roles, as well as decision-making- all of which will relate back to the theoretical model, whose construction is in the Introduction (Chapter 1). This shows the tight interrelation, in this thesis, between a given theoretical approach and the methods chosen.

In fact, all the questions that compose the survey were also heavily influenced by intersectionality theory, as well as by interdisciplinarity. Some questions relied heavily on an economic explanation of women's economic inactivity in the labour markets, i.e., women who are not working in the labour markets and not looking for work. Others were inspired by theories of gender patterns and performances. Questions on decision-making were stimulated by the theoretical framework of this study, which comes mainly from the discipline of gender and development. Additionally, intersectionality played a big role in the design of this study. Each woman was asked questions that helped to situate her in different categories across the spectra of variables mentioned above, all of which will later on be analysed and questioned.

Sampling

The sample size was computed based on a calculation of representation, taking into account Beirut's population size, a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error and an estimation of the response rate (Agresti and Finlay, 2009). The computation outcome was 400 surveys in order to have a representative sample of the survey population (women above the age of 21 years who are living in Beirut). Methodologically, the survey adopted a multi-stage probability sampling so as to ensure a random, representative sample for identifying women in the target population and households. The questionnaires were distributed proportionally to the numbers of registered voters in each of the areas in the three districts of Beirut, and the total number of voters in each area was proportionally distributed to the

number of voters in each confession that was present in the relevant area (see Table 5, below).

Table 5 The Distribution of Questionnaires According to District

District	Number of Questionnaires	Percentage of Questionnaires
Beirut District 1	81	20.3
Beirut District 2	90	22.5
Beirut District 3	229	57.3
Total	400	100

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The first stage consisted of selecting neighbourhoods from each selected area in such a way that this represents the confessional diversity and make-up of the given area. Each area is stratified into zones or strata. Detailed stratification of the areas of concern was obtained from the Geographic Information System (GIS) of the areas concerned, accessed through Information International, a Lebanese statistical firm that allowed me access to their mapping system. At the following stage, I designed the survey after a careful review of the variables affecting female labour force participation that are taken from the literature. I translated the survey into Arabic after receiving feedback from my committee, computed the sample, and managed survey teams. However, the survey teams were recruited through Information International, as I used their enumerators (a total of 9 pre-trained fieldworkers as it was impossible for me to conduct 400 surveys), in addition to some of their research assistants, who helped me with the data entry. During the survey filling, I attended 10% of the ad-hoc visits in administrative Beirut (Hamra, Ras Beirut, Mazraa, Ashrafieh, etc.) to ensure that the surveys were being correctly undertaken. Below is a table outlining the distribution of respondents per area (Table 6).

Table 6 Distribution of Questionnaires According to Area

Area	Number of Questionnaires	Percentage of Questionnaires
Ashrafieh	48	12
Rmeil	24	6
Saifi	9	2.3
Bachoura	46	11.5
Marfaa	7	1.8
Mdawar	37	9.3
Dar El Mrayseh	9	2.3
Mazraa	73	18.3
Mina El Hoson	8	2.0
Msaytbeh	69	17.3
Ras Beirut	27	6.8
Zkak El Blat	43	10.8
Total	400	100

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

As the next step, and using GIS maps, the number of households/household concentration in each area was estimated, and the sampling frame's design was based on this. At a later step, and following the selection of the neighbourhoods to be covered by the survey, the number of questionnaires to be conducted in each neighbourhood was designed based on the estimated number of households there. The latter was then divided into sub-zones that covered the four geographical quarters of the neighbourhood (North, East, South, and West).

The second stage consisted of selecting households based on a systematic random sample in each selected neighbourhood according to the estimated number of buildings in that neighbourhood. In each sub-zone, the survey usually started with the first household on the right, and then the 10th or 15th, depending on the number of questionnaires allocated and the number of households available in that particular neighbourhood. In the case of

buildings, the first floor was surveyed in the first building, then the second floor in the building in the second one to be selected, and so on. Then, the surveying starts back from the first floor again so as to cover a variety of floors in different buildings. Once the households on the right side of the neighbourhood were surveyed, the field workers turned around and surveyed the households on the left, until the number of requested households was completed.

Finally, the third stage consisted of sampling a primary female respondent within each household. This was based on the most recent birthday. The field workers introduced themselves to the respondents, showed their credentials, and explained the purpose of their visit. When asked: “Why did you come to my house?” they politely explained to the person that the research was being conducted according to special scientific methods and that, according to this method, this household was chosen.

They then asked about the total number of female adults aged 21 years and above, who were living permanently in the household at the time of the study, and chose the one with the most recent birthday (at the date of the interview) to be the main respondent. If the selected person was not at home, a one-time follow-up was conducted before declaring that there had been a non-response. This method ensured that everyone had an equal chance of inclusion, with nobody being allowed to self-select into the sample. If the respondent accepted participation in the survey, the respondent was informed about the objectives of the survey and re-assured that the questionnaire was voluntary, anonymous and confidential.

Prior to the conducting of the survey, the questionnaire underwent field-testing on a random pilot-test sample of women in the streets, and in certain randomly selected households in several neighbourhoods, so as to ensure that all the questions were understandable. A few survey questions had to be changed or re-phrased to ensure that their objectives were met.

Problems in the Field

During the survey implementation, the following concerns should be noted. First, 8% of all cases (a total of 32 survey respondents) necessitated a second, follow up visit. This was because the relevant respondent was not at home at the time of the interview. Secondly, 435

respondents were approached in order to fill in 400 completed questionnaires. In fact, 35 respondents refused to participate, amounting to an 8.7% refusal rate. The refusal cases are detailed in the Table below (Table 7).

Table 7 Number of Refusal Cases by Area

Area	Number of Cases
Ashrafieh	5
Rmeil	2
Saifi	2
Bashoura	4
Marfaa	1
Mdawar	3
Mazraa	6
Msaytbeh	5
Ras Beirut	3
Zkak El Blat	4
Total	35

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The reasons reported for refusing to participate in the survey were limited to 'lack of interest in surveys as they never lead to tangible solutions,' as well as 'no time- busy.' Buildings in upper-income areas had more resistance to opening the door to surveyors, and some women in the low- income settings, who were most in need, also refused, after learning that their participation would not be paid for.. This resistance was also faced in the qualitative interview phase, which I will come to in the next section.

The section above has served to briefly outline the survey method, which was inspired by an intersectional approach through the stages of the choice of variables, its design, but also its analysis, which will be clarified in the following chapters. The main contribution of the survey was to sketch out the skeletons of female labour force participation statuses and some patterns for women who were over 21 years old and who

lived in Beirut; as well as their gendered perceptions, spending patterns, and decision-making processes. This will prove to be a very important contribution, especially in a city like Beirut where data on such issues is scarce and outdated, as discussed above. This skeleton will be fleshed out using interview material, which will add colour and meaning to the numbers and patterns. This is a great outcome for combined methods and makes the findings of this research more rigorous and diversified.

The survey results were also very important in understanding what the trends are and in highlighting interesting patterns in order to further explore them at the next, qualitative, phase. Survey findings further intrigued me in relation to married women in low-income Beirut, due to their diverse experiences. In that sense, the quantitative sections of this thesis will indicate the statuses of women in Beirut generally, who are above the age of 21 years, and the qualitative sections will focus the lens down onto another sub-set of this population, concentrating on their perceptions, values, and the meaning they attach to their lives and choices.

On Encounters: Qualitative Phase II.

Qualitative research is often criticised for the difficulty in replicating it (leading to the difficulty of arriving at rigorous conclusions and correlations), problems of generalisation (especially when sample numbers of respondents are small), as well as the possibility of a lack of transparency (or difficulty in assessing what the research actually did) (Bryman, 2001). However, the advantage of qualitative research is also underlined, especially in feminist theory, for its ability to give space to women's experiences, which are often silenced by quantitative studies (Mies, 1993), as well as the possibility it offers to draw upon aspects of oppression that need to be collectively addressed through analysis of women's discourses (Skeggs, 1997). The next section describes the third stage of the research, which generated the bulk of the qualitative data. The limitations of qualitative research were overcome by the fact that the results were combined and reinforced by the data from the survey, which is one of the strengths of a mixed methods approach.

Access to the Field

Born and bred in Beirut, I cannot claim that I knew this city before conducting this research as well as I do now. I was brought up in one of Beirut's most prestigious areas, my school ranked first in Lebanon and was located in Ras-Beirut (very central), and so was my university. My friends from both my school and my university, lived in high-end neighbourhoods: Koraytem, Rawsheh, Hamra, Verdun, Ashrafieh, Jnah, and Rabieh, to name but a few. This meant that I had never ventured outside the limits of these *quartiers* in Beirut, except to visit some family members whose houses were in the city's suburbs. Even while touring other cities, I mostly went to tourist attractions, and the houses of friends and family, all belonging to the middle/upper income strata. While this research calls for the unpacking of categories, and their examination at the axes of intersection, it is easy to understand some aspects of the category of 'class' in Beirut by just being a local. At first, you may not see it, as people tend to dress similarly; they have the newest phones, and keep up with all of society's impositions (I will delve more into this in following chapters, discussing consumerism, and differentiating between objective and subjective classes and their manifestations in women's lives). However, class distinctions become clearer if you live in Beirut for a few years. Be it your family name, the school you went to, or the way you may pronounce your words, you are easily categorised and judged in relation to your class.

El-Basta was my first stop in the 'new' Beirut that I was about to discover, an overpopulated low-income neighbourhood that is inhabited mostly by Lebanese citizens and some Kurds. I entered Al-Basta for the first time due to Ibrahim whom I met through a family friend who had a shop selling custom-made towel and bathroom sets. Hearing from my mother about my research, she proposed to introduce me to her tailor, Ibrahim, who gave me access to a few households in the neighbourhood. He was 'ibn al manta'a,' which translates directly as a 'son of the neighbourhood,' signifying that he had lived there for so long and was familiar with it. Ibrahim explained that 'Al-Basta,' which stands in Arabic for farmer's market, derives its name from the historical standing of the area as one in which fresh vegetables and fruit were displayed on the ground, with people coming from neighbouring areas to shop at the market, 'Al-Basta.' The area is divided into 'Al-Basta Al-

Tahta' (Lower Basta), and 'Al-Basta Al-Fawqa' (Upper Basta). No substantial difference exists between the two sub-areas except in their geographical locations. The atmosphere in the streets of the neighbourhood is very dynamic and popular, something I had never experienced before in the Beirut with which I was familiar. It was an atmosphere closer to that of Cairo, or maybe to villages in Lebanon, where people would greet each other in the street, and where Ibrahim gets called from the other side of the road, just to be asked how his wife was doing.

Figure 8 Building that Houses an Interview

Respondent



Ibrahim's mother is a Sunni Muslim, his father a Shi'a Muslim. His sister, a Shi'a Muslim, is married to a Sunni Muslim, and Ibrahim himself is married to a Shi'a whose parents, also inhabitants of Al-Basta, are of mixed Muslim confessional backgrounds themselves. This is highly reflective of the mixed sectarian group membership in this area, where pictures of Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, appears on shop windows, with pictures of Hariri on display next door. One respondent explained, "...this does not create problems because the loyalty of the men in this area is to the area [*manta'a*] or neighbourhood first

and foremost. They are ‘sons of the area’ [*wlad el manta’a*].” The architecture of Al-Basta is mainly made up of old buildings (see Figures 8 and 9), intertwined with a couple of renovated ones, as well as towers. Most inhabitants are owners, or they rent the apartments according to the old rental law, one that is to the benefit of the tenant, who pays a negligible rent that has not undergone inflation.

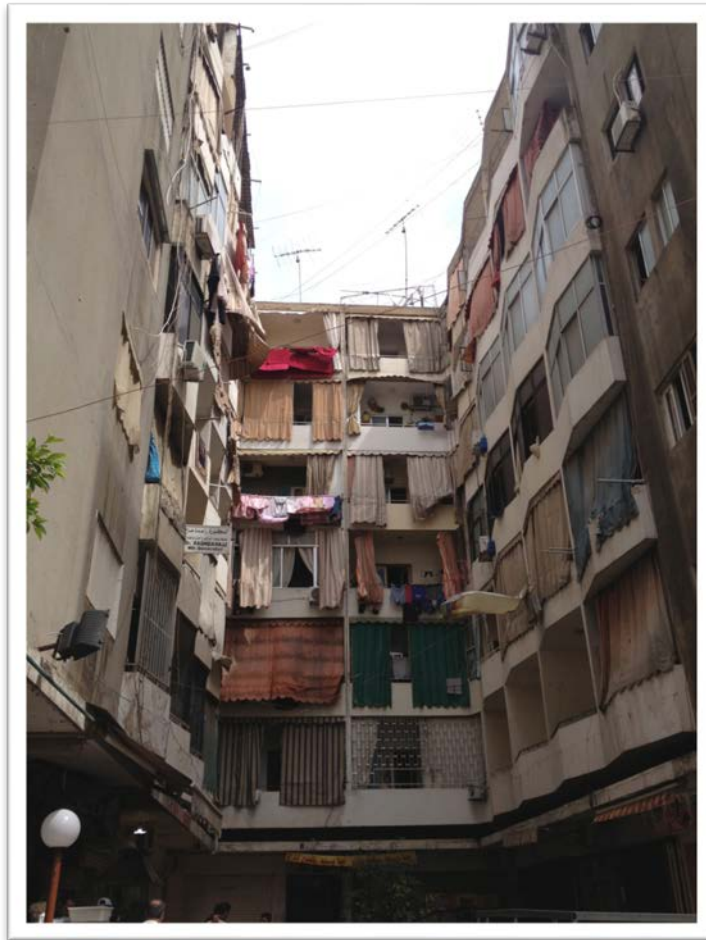


Figure 9 Ibrahim the Tailor's Building

Other areas housing interview respondents with Muslim concentration were Salim El-Hoss, Al-Mazraa, Tarik Al Jdideh, Mar Elias, and Zkak El-Blat. As was the case with Al-Basta, the last two areas are highly heterogeneous in terms of the Muslim confessions living in them, whereas the first three house predominantly Sunni Muslims. As mentioned, above, while Ibrahim guided me to the first few respondents, a snow-ball sampling technique followed. Women started introducing me to their friends and relatives, mainly in

different neighbourhoods. My other points of access included a chef we knew, who worked at a hotel in Ashrafieh, a maid who used to help my aunt, who lived in Tarik Al Jdideh, a friend's driver, originally from the South but living in Zkak El-Blat, my Gym's porter, and Yolla.

Yolla was a big help to me when it came to my interview respondent sampling in Christian neighbourhoods. At the end of my fieldwork, I suggested to Yolla that she ran for the municipal elections, due to her popularity, especially in low-income neighbourhoods in Ashrafieh, Rmeil, and Karm El-Zaytoun. The latter neighbourhoods are essentially Christian ones, and while Ashrafieh was a mix of high end streets with the richest Christian families, and alleyways with more modest buildings, Rmeil and Karm El-Zaytoun were mainly for low-income respondents.

Yolla was a secretary working in the port area (Beirut's harbour area) in a shipping company. In the afternoons and evening, though, Yolla had a second job: she goes around houses in the three neighbourhoods, above, to collect generator prescription fees. Lebanon is a country where state services are scarce, and electricity is one of them. In some upper-income areas where Zu'amah (or political/sectarian groups' leaders) live, the electricity goes down for three hours daily. However, in poor areas the electricity alternates with much more variation, reaching a minimal rate of 3 hours of electricity per household each day. It is very common, then, to find most households paying from US\$30-US\$100 worth of generator fees, which are monopolised by a few generator owners, for whom Yolla works in the afternoon.

Without Yolla, it would have been impossible for me to access Christian respondents in lower-income Beirut. When I used to walk alone in the neighbourhood, people would stare at me, especially as I wear the headscarf and look unfamiliar to the area (as the anecdote of the parking lot demonstrated in Chapter 1). When they saw Yolla waving to me, they would immediately lower their guard.



Figure 10 Yolla

Yolla is almost 55 years old, but dresses like a teenager (please see Figure 10). She loves life, and knows all the stories of the households of these neighbourhoods. Not only is this where she is from, she has also been visiting these houses once each month for the past twelve years. Yolla would introduce me to a family, and would leave me there while she went to collect the fees. In the month of June, the electricity was out for most of the time, and Yolla had to inform the families of an increase from US\$50 to \$100 in subscription rates for that month. Going into the homes and observing this process was a highly informative exercise for me. In another instance, Yolla got me to interview two sisters who work as prostitutes in the Rmeil area, which would not have been imaginable without her.

Structure and Flexibility

Immediately after the access, designing the qualitative component of my research was the second biggest challenge. After careful consideration, I decided to rely mostly on semi-structured interviews, due to their capacity to provide both flexibility and structure. The semi-structured interview (or focused interview) is a qualitative technique with which to gather data, and through which the respondents have the time to share their opinions on a topic, with the scope being mostly determined by the researcher (Crabtree and DiCicco, 2006, p.13).



Figure 11 A Respondent's House in Rmeil

One of the strengths of this method is its high validity, given that it allows the revealing of the meanings that people attach to certain actions and occurrences, as well as giving them the space to clarify complex issues. Rather than imposing close-ended, pre-set questions, this technique gives respondents the ability to open up on subjects that they deem to be important, thus eliminating possible pre-judgments of the crucial themes by the researcher. Additionally, this method permits recording, which can easily be accessed by the interviewer later. Finally, semi-structured interviews are praised because they allow the possibility of building a positive rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee (Opie, 2004).

In this sense, the character of the encounters was a careful mix of an intimate conversation and an interview. Given the methodology that I had adopted, I was careful not to fall into what feminist scholars have called the 'sometimes-oppressive tendencies of interviewers,' arguing that ignoring the social differences or 'roles' shapes the interviews

(Atkinson, 2002; Anderson, 1991). To overcome this hierarchy, scholars have encouraged acknowledging power differentials and using reflexivity in research (Ibid). Point taken: I tried to be careful to explain my background to the respondents, together with the purpose of my research, before they signed the consent form.

Additionally, since my methods were inspired by intersectionality, I tried not to impose any meanings for those categories while asking the respondents. For instance, I asked them about what they considered to be their class (rather than depending on their income level, which I had already noted), thus permitting the comparison between subjective and objective social classes and the unpacking of the 'class' category. Furthermore, this meant that I was attentive to the struggles that each woman was presenting, rather than trying to build on the previous interview and assuming a similarity between respondents who came from a comparable background.

During my semi-structured interviews, I had a set of guiding questions covering areas that were of interest to my research. Questions relating to respondents' pasts, their current activity status, their understanding of work, as well as their spending and housework arrangements, directed my interviews rather than limited them. Following the first few meetings, I did not need to use the interview schedule explicitly, as the questions flowed spontaneously according to the context or the respondent. The questions served only as an '*aide-memoire*,' rather than as a sequence of interrogations that were waiting to be answered (Bryman et.al, 2008). My encounters lasted from slightly less than one hour to a maximum of two hours, at times. During the interviews, I used verbal probing quite frequently, to ensure also that I understood the respondent's answers, asking them to give me examples, to elaborate on certain ideas, or simply to allow them the chance to add anything else before we took a different direction.

Limitations exist in the semi-structure interview method. The skills of the interviewer, her ability to question promptly, or to create ease in the encounter, figure as number one. Additionally, the researcher must be aware not to give unconscious signals that guide the interviewee's answers (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). However, to counteract those pitfalls in my interviews, I would pause and smile, allowing for a small silence that often probed un-asked-for aspects of the question. Most respondents signed a consent form and allowed me to record my interviews, which gave me

more space to practise eye contact and to interact, putting the respondent more at their ease. This fact also meant that, once home, I would re-listen to the interview and transcribe it, adding in my observations about the setting and the body language of the respondents. Additionally, after the first few interviews, listening to the recordings allowed me to overcome certain shortcomings in the way that I had conducted the interviews. At times, I was impatient and didn't give time for the respondents to pause and reflect. At others, I asked the questions in a way that implied a certain answer. Being aware of these flaws in the face-to-face interviews aided me in overcoming them after the first encounters.

Choosing who to have coffee with

In terms of recruiting participants, I moved away from a neighbourhood-centred method after a few interviews in Al-Basta and Rmeil, to a method that focused on low-income neighbourhoods generally. This was due to the fact that many people were reluctant to introduce me to neighbours, or said that they interacted little with people from the same neighbourhood. This finding was very interesting and will be discussed further in later chapters, but respondents were able to link me with family and friends in other neighbourhoods in Beirut. This directed me to implement a more purposive sampling method, that of the maximum variation, to ensure the representation aspect of my sample. Age, class, but also sectarian group membership, and their sector of labour market activity have all been visible in literature about married women and work as being crucial to determining work patterns. These variables were thus central when I recruited Muslim and Christian participants from low-income neighbourhoods in Beirut. However, while those categories guided my choice (just to ensure a certain variance in my respondents), they were unpacked during the interviews, and even more so during the analysis when they were considered jointly, rather than exclusively.

To that end, I conducted 80 semi-structured interviews with women aged 21 years and above. I also conducted 10 open-ended interviews with men, mostly the husbands and work colleagues of respondents. Although this number is not a large one, those interviews were informative in that they helped me to understand how men's views on certain issues affect women's decision-making, but also to identify if female respondents' answers were consistent with their husbands'. Even when I did not conduct interviews with the other 70

women's husbands, however, I interacted with them a lot during my qualitative work, which at times is more revealing than an 'official' interview in which the respondent is much more aware of their answers. This will be further discussed in the qualitative sections of Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

This sampling method was jointly used with the snowball technique, through which I asked each respondent to link me to another interviewee. At times, I had to direct their choice to dimensions that were of interest to my research, like asking them to link me to workingwomen in the labour markets who they know from a specific sectarian group membership, so as to control the variables that are of interest to my project. Below, is a table outlining the final respondent sample according to their distribution among variables (Table 8) showing that only 21 respondents chose to remain anonymous. Five respondents refused to sign the consent forms, two respondents refused to give their real names, and some asked me not to record the interview. The latter were mostly from the Shi'a community, especially those whose husbands were working in sectors related to politics, or who were clerics, who are generally very wary about their privacy, safety and security.

Table 8 Distribution of Respondents According to Categories

Category / Variable	Number of Respondents / Value
Total Number of Respondents	80
Age Group [21-35]	28
Age Group [35-50]	34
Age Group [50+]	18
Economically Active	42
Economically Inactive	38
Low-Income Subjective Class	36
Middle-Income Subjective Class	30
Upper-Income Subjective Class	14
Shi'a	25
Sunni	18
Christian	27
Request to Remain Anonymous	21

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

I interviewed women who are working in both the private and the public sectors, as well as those working informally, in addition to unemployed, discouraged workers, labour force dropouts, economically inactive and retired women. In terms of class, most of my interviews fitted the category of the low- and middle-income classes. These categories were set according to World Bank classification of the Lebanese classes (below US\$15,000 annual income defines a low-income class, between US\$15,000 and US\$27,000 a middle income class, and above US\$27,000 for an upper income class, as of the year 2011) (WB, 2011). A discussion about class categories will follow in Chapter 4, but the category of

‘upper-income subjective class’ among the respondents represents people who have a self-proclaimed belonging to the middle income class, but who were classified as being in the upper income class according to their family income.

I tried to interview women from Christian, Sunni Muslim, and Shi’a Muslim backgrounds equally. Druze women were left out of my sample due to their small percentage in the Lebanese population, as well as due to the difficulty of access. The greatest number of interviewee was in the category of middle-aged women, mostly those with children. This category was also very insightful, as it represented women who have either tried being both working and non-working in the labour markets at different stages of their lives, or women whose children are becoming independent, and so they are thus re-questioning their past decisions and choices. Finally, women from this category were able to provide an inter-generational outlook, whereas younger women were more optimistic and older women more reflexive. As mentioned above, the definitions of those categories will be questioned, and the interactions between them will be examined throughout the thesis by using intersectionality theory, which tries to overcome the silencing of women’s voices (Maynard, 1998, p.18).

Interviews occurred mostly in one of two settings: respondents’ homes or the interviewee’s workplace. The choice to conduct most interviews inside households was purposive, given the importance of this site as the one in which most women’s decisions are made. As previously argued, households are complex yet central sets of institutions, understood as “a bundle of relationships in a society through which its primary productive activities are organised, recognising that these frequently involve principles of kinship and residence (Kabeer, 1994, p.114).” Their centrality also stems from their role as a place for the production and perpetuation of biological and social relations. The shifting boundaries of households create a dynamic interplay between intra-household decision-making, and societal and structural elements from the public arena.

Additionally, this project will examine how women tend to less and less fit the relational setting described by Joseph in her writings (1993, 1996), which are discussed in the Introduction. Despite this, it will show that the nuclear family remains an important pillar of the society (Sharabi, 1988; Barakat, 1993), and that it is one of the main variables affecting women’s choices and, at times, constraining their options. Hence, the household

constitutes a site for the negotiation strategies of women, for marital power dynamics, and a space that shapes women's understandings. Interviewing women in this specific context has proved very insightful for this research's purposes.

I was able to conduct interviews in a public school, at the office of the political party of Michel Aoun, the social security office, the Ministry of the Displaced (*sondouk al-muhajareen*), a bank, a private university, an art gallery, a company in Hamra, cafés in different areas, and at a health clinic in al-Mazra'a. The interviews in the workplace were very insightful because they gave me a sense of how economically active women spend their days. I was able to observe office dynamics, settings, dress codes, and to understand the interviews in a very different light. This, along with visits to respondents' households, allowed me to have a better understanding of the dynamics and interplay between the public and the private spaces in their lives. Additionally, it gave me the chance to note changes in their answers and ideas depending on where the interview was held and who was present. On the other hand, varying the location of an interview may impact on a respondent's willingness, or lack of willingness, to share, thus creating some difficulty in comparing responses, while also being very revealing of space dynamics and the positionality of women in different settings.

The inside of the households in the areas looked very similar: rooms with old furniture but brand new flat screen TVs and open windows, giving a way for the dust of the busy streets to come into the homes. Most houses I visited contained either statues of the Virgin Mary, depictions of Jesus Christ, paintings with Qura'nic verses, pictures of religious leaders and politicians, or a mixture of the above. Descriptions about neighbourhoods, settings, and respondents are also discussed in more depth in the chapters that follow.

Positionality and Ethical Considerations

What started as mainly semi-structured interviews soon transformed into qualitative research, as respondents started inviting me to attend events, weddings, funerals, and involving me more openly in their daily routines. Qualitative research is frequently used in feminist research, given its valuing of women's voices, their experiences and agency through its emphasis on face-to-face egalitarian, reciprocal relations. However, it is

important to note that this does not automatically solve the problem of power differential between the researcher and the respondents, which should be addressed and acknowledged.

Stanley and Wise (1993) point to the fact that researchers are, at the end of the day, human beings: with feelings, with a past, with a consciousness that could affect their work and their research. This points to the fact that all research is subjective according to the researcher's unconscious biases, which stem from personal experiences. The second relates to the issue of the positionality of the researcher within the research: the power relations between researcher and researched that, if not taken into account, can be abusive to respondents, but also risky for the researcher himself (Okely, 1992). This section will briefly discuss some of the ethical considerations that were addressed during my research.

The first element to which I was attentive was the fact that in most of my interviews, the flow of information was one way. At times, the interviewees would ask me questions about my life, but I was reluctant about what to share, and what not to share, in order not to influence their answers. In many cases, the conversations became reciprocal and I would become the interviewed: Why are you wearing the headscarf? How is it living abroad? Do you want to come back? Are you paid to do this research? Questions sometimes reached personal matters like: 'I'm sure you would know from your parents how sexual relations become at a later stage of marriage. How would you describe your parents' marital life?' In such cases, I would pause for a while to measure the risk of affecting the direction of their answers, and the opportunity cost of their closing up completely if I didn't answer their questions. I would always try to find a careful equilibrium between being both the researcher and the researched at those specific moments.

Additionally, it was a bit difficult for me to answer some questions like: 'What's in it for us?' and to convince some older women respondents that I was not some disguised NGO employee, and that I would not be providing social support or food baskets at the end of the interview. Here an ethical dilemma presents itself. On the one hand, respondents don't get anything back in return for their time or their money. On the other hand, paying respondents may lead to other problems, such as a bias in their answers in an attempt to please the interviewer. Notwithstanding all the difficulties encountered, many respondents thanked me at the end of the interviews, saying that, in an increasingly busy world, no one

had the time to listen to them. My being there and listening to their concerns and problems was, at times, very rewarding for many of the respondents.

The fact that the interviews were semi-structured also removed some of the aspects of inequality, due to the fact that I was not constantly trying to manipulate the direction of the conversation, as was discussed earlier. In that sense, respondents also had the chance to put their input into the choice of the themes. This is often advocated by feminist research methodologies, as it would also serve to incorporate issues and themes that the women themselves deem to be important to discuss.

Another aspect of positionality was playing on the multiple aspects of my identity whenever this was needed. Far from deceiving the respondents, I was simply highlighting some identities more than others, depending on whom I was interviewing. This worked wonderfully for me as I was amazed by respondents' willingness to share even the most intimate aspects of their lives, concerns over their relationships, details about their spending arrangements, as well as opinions about their sexual lives, with such openness and ease that it pushed the limits of my research greatly towards new horizons. This was, in part, due to the great rapport that I was able to establish with them. For Christian women, the barrier of wearing a headscarf was overcome immediately when I highlighted that I was a researcher educated in the French system, who grew up with Christian childhood friends. For Sunni women, I was the Beirut divorcee who had failed to survive a traditional marriage, just like their sister/aunt/neighbour. For pious Shi'a women, I was the daughter of a Shi'a mother from the South, descended from a family of Imams. Highlighting relevant aspects of my identity often triggered comfort zones in respondents, most of whom said to me at the end of our encounters how happy they were to have opened up and shared their concerns with someone who listened.

While I definitely did not share many of the struggles that the women I interviewed were speaking about, I did experience some of the injustices and oppressions they referred to. It is said that a female researcher is able to operate from both an oppressed position as a woman and a privileged position as a scholar (Cook and Fonow 1990). I have experienced this expression in many ways, as, yes, I was the researcher from London, from a rich background and with a good education. However, I was also a woman who was discriminated against in the Lebanese legal system. I was a woman who could not give

nationality to her children. I was a woman who experienced discrimination, and harassment, and who was expected to do household work, even when working full time in the formal market. Indeed, intersectionality theory would treat those forms of oppressions as intersecting at different points, and as manifesting themselves differently in my life than in the lives of other women who are from the low- income classes, and who may also experience other forms of injustice. However, this does not mean that commonalities do not exist. This will be more thoroughly dealt with and expanded in the chapters of this thesis that follow (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

At the same time, knowing that I come from a position of privilege means that I had to be careful not to fall into the pitfall of imposing my value judgments on the research by talking about the normative ways in which women should be leading their lives (Williams and May, 1996). It is also important not to endow your own meanings and values, with an approval or disapproval of certain phenomena, and to accept that value judgments are also made according to beliefs and experiences that should not be generalisable. However, the methodology adopted by this research, a feminist, interdisciplinary, intersectional approach, and the methods that are derived from it -a mixed method in which quantitative data will provide a rigorous background sketch to the study, and the quantitative data (through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups, sewn into a qualitative account) - will allow the neutralisation of the essentialist tendencies of qualitative research (Cabtree and DiCicco, 2006). Intersectionality will bring the two together in an effort to help overcome the treatment of women as a single homogenous category, by allowing the unpacking of their understandings using several lenses.

In sum, the methodology and methods used will permit this research to be an honest attempt to understand women's own perceptions of the issues at hand. The next chapter will start by just that: asking women: what is *your* definition of work? And whether or not they *want* to be engaged in it: and why, or why not?

Chapter 4

Counterfactuals:

What Would Women Have Wanted, if They Knew?

“The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul is, what does a woman want?” Freud (footnote in Jones, 1961).

“I made the choice to marry him despite his circumstances, to work full-time, to be a supportive wife. Do I regret it? On some days, yes. Would I do it again if I go back in time? Probably. The problem is: you never know the counterfactual of the outcome of your decision. You never know how one decision made differently would have changed the whole outcome. And if you knew the outcome, what would you have chosen?”

(Layla, interview respondent, 48 years old, working mother of four, interview undertaken in 2013)

What Does a Woman Want?

Looking at Freud’s quotation, in which he recognises the difficulty of understanding women’s desires as an outsider, in parallel to Layla’s quote, in which she herself acknowledges the difficulty to make decisions that are based on her desires, and the sometimes random nature of those decisions sums up a lot of what I learned through interviewing eighty married women from low-income Beirut. Making choices is one of the outcomes of a very complex reasoning process, and as established in the theoretical chapter, a process that involves weighing implications and opportunity costs, but this process is also affected by external and sometimes haphazard factors. This chapter will show that, for most women taking part in this research, decision-making about issues surrounding work and marriage, which are central to this thesis, has been difficult; because some choices are irreversible, and others require a balance between desires and responsibilities. As discussed in the introduction, in a relational setting like Beirut, where individuals live within a web of dependencies, making choices becomes more difficult. In this sense, even if the mystery of ‘what a woman wants’ is actually resolved, there remains the question about whether this desire can be materialised into a decision, and whether this

decision can actually happen, despite the web of social and structural impediments (such as EEPs, also discussed in the theoretical framework).

Campbell (2014) posits that ‘what women want’ is, in fact, still a key political question for third wave feminism. However, she rightfully asks the question: how do we know others and ourselves at those critical times, when political and economic freedoms have emerged, the possibilities and choices of women have grown, everything has become an option: what are the desires of women today? What are the politics of those desires? The author develops a discussion on the intersectional epistemologies that aim to provide theories that help to answer these questions, and the importance of an interdisciplinary focus in feminist knowledge in a quest for a deeper understanding of both the category ‘woman,’ and the lived experiences of woman/women. As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), this is exactly how this thesis aims to approach the scrutiny of women’s lived experiences by using intersectionality theory in order to look at the intersections of women’s axes of oppression, as well as analysing them using tools from multiple disciplines that inform the attempt to answer the question: ‘What do women –in this research- want?’

Kruks (2014), in the same handbook in which Campbell writes, discusses the concept of ‘women’s experiences,’ which is much-contested in feminist theory. The first and most prevalent critique of this category is that such ‘experiences’ usually tend to capture only that of a sub-group of privileged women, often white, middle class, heterosexual, while muting others’ (Ibid, p. 75). While post-structuralists dismiss the use of ‘women’s experiences’ as a category that is both politically dangerous and methodologically naïve, Kruks argues that there are ways for ‘women’s experiences’ to provide invaluable resources in contributing to our understanding of feminist politics. For this purpose, Kruks encourages us to look at how the ‘experience’ was constructed and to analyse it within the ideological systems that create experiencing selves. This returns to the conceptual framework that was developed in earlier chapters of this thesis, and which places women within the larger system, at intersections of multiple sites of oppression, and that tries to scrutinise their experiences in relation to their decision-making and the subjectivities that have also developed within that very same system (Chapters 1-3). In other words, the same system that is contributing to the oppression of women, or that

obstructs them from entering the labour markets, if they so please, is also the ground from which their experiencing selves are created. In this sense, this system shapes both what women want (their desires) and also how they rationalise what they want into decisions (their choices) and the possibility for their desires to actually materialise (the outcomes of their choices in lived experiences, and whether those manifest their desires).

Beyond that, and within the question of ‘what do women want?’ sub-questions emerge, such as: ‘What do single women want?’ ‘What do married women want?’ and within these are a myriad of other questions, such as: ‘What do working women want?’ and ‘What do Sunni Muslim working women want?’ that arise. Hence, looking at the decision-making of married women is more complex than looking at that of single women, as it involves more factors, actors and stakeholders for the woman to consider and weigh - for she is not only a sister, a daughter, but also a wife and, very often, a mother, all of which add elements of responsibility to (and expectations from) others (please refer to the theoretical framework in Chapter 1). A study by Amin and Al-Bassusi (2004), which is based on in-depth interviews over two years with low-income economically active women from Cairo, shows that there are competing roles for marriage and work in women’s realities. They stress the importance of understanding women’s broader aspirations and their expectations in life, in order to better comprehend their presence or absence from the labour markets. Such studies are lacking in the context of Lebanon, and this is what this chapter aims to achieve.

Normatively, it is often portrayed in the literature that the most rational decision of women is to actively engage in the labour market, as this is portrayed as a decision that has empowering effects on women’s lives (Kabeer et. al, 2013; WB, 2006; WB, 2012). International and local organisations and development experts, as part of the development and modernisation paradigms, continue to stress the positive effects of work on women’s lives, portraying it as the ultimate ‘empowering’ strategy for them (Eyben, 2011; WB, 2004; WB, 2006; WB, 2012). Many other gender and development researchers and theorists have adopted this framework when thinking and theorising women’s economic activity patterns, which are developed in the introduction to this thesis, where a discussion of notions of ‘empowerment’ and ways to achieve it were fleshed out. However, as Amin

and Al-Bassusi's research posits, society operates in more complex ways than modernisation theory predicts (2004).

Hence, one of the hopes of this research is that it will be able to assess how a group of married women in low-income Beirut evaluate their welfare, and whether or not it coincides with the weight that the development paradigm places on the presence of women in the labour market. It is an attempt to understand how women in this study value work, and what pushes them to engage in it. As seen in the discussion on women empowerment in the introduction, access to resources alone is not always enough to create a real or sustainable change in the empowerment situation of women. This research tries to listen to the voices of the women interviewed and to hear what they consider to be the incentives and obstacles to work in low-income Beirut, something that no previous research on Lebanon has done.

In the same way that scrutinising the category 'married women,' –rather than comparatively studying married and single women's choices, greatly influences the answers from this research, class is another element that is taken as a constant variable within it. Being located in a class shapes cultural preferences, patterns of consumption, lifestyle, reproduction, and even world-view (Khoury and Moghadam, 1995). Class divisions find expressions in term of power, income, style, quality of life, and other aspects, notably, women's labour market decisions (Ibid). Class shapes economic need, and this need may frequently put pressure on women's choices with respect to the labour markets. Class also shapes preference, and collective notions of what is right or wrong- for instance, women leaving their house to work. However, within the same class, other variables intersect in shaping women's desires and subjectivities, and these impose upon their decision making processes. Such decisions include their choices with regard to their participation in the labour market, which this chapter will discuss.

Incentives and Barriers to Women's Labour Force Activity Patterns

As mentioned in the section above, this chapter will, through its quantitative sections, try to sketch out some of the characteristics of economically active, and economically inactive women's profiles, as well as explaining the reasons and rationales behind their decisions by engaging with the qualitative material collected during the field work. Before doing so,

however, this section will consider trends in activity, and inactivity patterns that have emerged in the literature. This will provide a general framework within which the material collected in the survey will later be analysed.

Understanding Women's Economic Inactivity Patterns

This section looks at the factors that are cited in the literature to explain the labour market inactivity patterns of women. The main constraints to women's participation in the labour market relate to structural factors and cultural understandings that women are always available for household chores, and that attributes household work mostly to women, which often pushes women to seek informal employment but also this mainly represents one of the key barriers to their participation in any form of income earning activity (Maloney, 2004; Breman, 1996). In certain countries in Africa, married women are often banned from work by their husbands, especially if the setting of that work puts them in contact with men (Backiny-Yetna, 2003; Oya and Sender, 2009; Oya and Weeks, 2004). The same phenomenon is found in South Asia, as summarised by Kabeer (2012). In Latin America, and in addition to the above barriers, the high responsibility of women for household chores, the lack of state services, especially the absence of childcare, also emerges as factors (Mercedes and Rodriguez-Chamussy, 2013).

In the MENA region, these factors are summarised as household inequalities and the unequal division of labour, the overall gender ideology of the society, the legal system and regulatory framework, the social and physical infrastructures of the countries, as well as the economic conditions and policies (Moghadam, 1998, p.6-7). However, those factors, in addition to the culture, lack of education, religion, the effects of structural adjustment programmes, as well as other economic factors that sum up the constraints on women's participation in the labour markets in the MENA region (Jansen, 2004; Tansel, 2002; Hijab, 2001; Elmi and Noroozi, 2007; Miles, 2002; Moghadam, 2003, 2004) are all structural factors that only cover the barriers to employment at the macro-level of the economy.

Structural factors also play a crucial role in the daily decision-making processes of women not to participate in the labour markets, and increase their opportunity cost calculations. Such factors are summarised in the literature as: the lack of legal support, the lack of job opportunities matching their education, the lack of health services, and the lack

of state services (such as childcare, transport, and infrastructure) (Hijab, 1988; Sugita, 2010; Ibrahim and Singerman, 2001; Moghadam, 1996, 1998). In fact, Moghadam, stressing structural macro-level determinants to work, argues that state policies and legislation, which regulate the opportunity structure for women, can be a major impediment to women's participation in the labour markets (1995, p. 11). This legislation includes a lack of affirmative action, provisions for, or restrictions on, working mothers, and policies on health, etc., making the state either a facilitator or an obstacle to women's participation (Moghadam, 1995).

Other studies that look more closely at micro-factors, such as household work, among others (Moghadam, 2004; Glas and Nath, 2006; Maume, 2006), don't delve into women's decision-making processes, or the negotiation strategies and power dynamics within the household but, even if they do, they ignore the other structural aspects. As discussed in the section on empowerment in chapter One, empowerment and choice cannot be looked at only at the individual level. None of the studies actually looks at women's decision making processes with regard to the labour markets bringing in macro-, micro-, EEPs, and other factors, in a framework like that established in the theoretical chapter of this thesis (Chapter 1), which will be used later in this chapter in order to explain women's activity patterns in low-income Beirut.

Women's Inactivity Patterns in Lebanon Relative to Literature Trends

In Lebanon, similar trends in explaining economic inactivity patterns are found. For instance, unchanging norms and perceptions of gendered roles within the household frequently lead women to bear a double-burden of work when working outside the home, something that acts as a big disincentive for them in taking on employment, in many cases. Habib et al (2006) consider the extent to which paid work affects the division of domestic tasks in randomly selected households in three disadvantaged urban communities on the outskirts of Beirut. The results of this study show that women perform most of the household labour (cooking, cleaning, laundry, and attending to the children's needs), while men perform other managerial and maintenance work, even when women are economically active. Men who were in the labour force, it was found, contributed more to the household chores, as they were still the main breadwinners, and thus they felt their masculinity to be

less threatened. Women involved in paid work, however, still performed the bulk of household work (Tailfer, 2012).

Other interesting findings from this study hint at certain patterns that are related to membership of sectarian groups. The neighbourhood inhabited by Christians stood out as being less ‘traditional’ than the other two, in terms of gendered division of labour, and more women in this area were involved in paid work. More women in this neighbourhood had also never been married. Conversely, the highest involvement of working men in household labour was in a Muslim neighbourhood, which makes it hard to establish patterns. Tailfer’s study (2012), while showing that household labour is still highly gendered and that membership to a sectarian group could have effects on decisions in relation to marriage and participation, has its limitations. It is based on one person per household, which can give an uneven perception about what is really happening in the family. Moreover, it covers only disadvantaged households, thus making it hard to detect how division of labour varies between classes. Finally, while taking membership of a sectarian group into account, it fails to make solid generalisations of patterns between religious communities. It hints however, at the likelihood that unchanging gendered household work patterns are one of the main demotivating factors for women to take up formal work, contributing to women’s calculations of work outside of the house as carrying a high opportunity cost.

As posited in the previous chapter, ‘fall-back’ positions are important determinants in women’s decision-making and negotiation processes. In cases when the fall-back positions of women are low, when their income contributions are not valued, and in cases where women continue to do the bulk of the work inside the household, even when they work outside, there would be a big opportunity cost for women who leave their house to work. Qualitative research in Beirut reports that various women describe their husbands and sons as their ultimate security, not wanting to risk losing the *status-quo* within the family if they left home for work (Charafeddine, 2009). Women thus chose to hold onto the *status-quo*, as the alternative is not always more empowering. The weak fall-back position of women is accentuated by the huge discrepancy between the percentage of women who own a house, company or assets (3%), and those of men (74%) (Ibid, p. 7). Moreover, in settings like Lebanon, where women often do not benefit from state social services (like

insurance, etc.), women rely mainly on the family as their support system, and they risk losing such support if they don't maintain their position within the family (IWSAW, 1998, p.8).

The latter point is supported by Hoodfar (1997), in Cairo who reports that many women fear going out of the household in search of employment as they do not wish to lose more functions to the market, given that a lot of their previous household responsibilities have already been commodified and outsourced. This might cause women to lose their bargaining power within the household, reports Hoodfar (1997, p. 132-134). This position is particularly weakened since women earned less than men if they were working. Activity in the labour markets thus ceases to be attractive to them, since it offers them minimal security and independence, and never compensates for the "material, nonmaterial, and emotional costs of venturing outside the household (Hoodfar, 1997, p.19)." Finally, Hoodfar's study of low-income Cairo reports that far from essentialising the obstacles to women's participation in the labour market, such as Islamic ideology or traditionalism, many women report not being active in the labour market because they cannot afford to outsource household functions in order to escape carrying the double burden on their own (Ibid).

In Lebanon, similarly to elsewhere in the region, the law presents itself, once again, as a barrier, instead of a facilitator, for women's decision-making, notably in their participation in the labour market in Beirut. Although the social security law, which was issued on 26th September, 1963, establishes that Lebanese woman are an essential part of the labour force, and the law even gives her certain preferential rights, it remains a hub for discriminatory rights that favour men (Boustani and Mufarrej, 1995, pp. 102-103). For instance, this law gives an expectant mother the right to medical cover before, during, and after delivery, and even compensates her for any temporary disability resulting from maternity (Ibid, p. 101-102). She is entitled to ten weeks partially or fully paid maternity leave, which safeguards her job and gives her ample time to nurse her infant (Ibid, p. 101-102). However, in the case of medical-services cover, a woman is only eligible if her husband is either over 60 years of age or mentally or physically handicapped, and thus unable to earn his living. Her children are eligible only if she is widowed or divorced, but retains custody (Ibid, p.102-103).

Moreover, while Lebanon has ratified the ILO conventions on women's work access and conditions, many clauses under Article 11 of CEDAW have still not been adopted (CEDAW, 2006). Such articles relate to women workers with family responsibility, maternity protection, and work at home.

For instance, women are only provided with half the days of paid maternity leave for which ILO conventions (Ibid). While laws prohibit discrimination between men and women when it comes to equality of pay and advancement in employment, there is a differential between what the law states and how it is practised (Tabet, 2005). All these loopholes in the legal system may constitute influences on the participation of women in the labour market.

Other structural aspects to consider are the lack of opportunities for women, or the presence of unattractive openings, making it uninviting for women to leave their households for work. Certain work prospects are jeopardised by a massive presence of foreign labour, which can have contrary effects on women's participation. Those workers, mostly women from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, India and Africa,⁸ provide household

⁸ The numbers of domestic workers are estimated at 40,000 Sri Lankans, 10,000 Philipinos, 10,000 Indians, and 10,000 from other African states. They represent over 30% of the official workforce figure of 1.4 million (in 1999). However, today, according to the Sri Lankan embassy, there are currently around 80,000-100,000 Sri Lankans in Lebanon, and the estimation from the Philippines Embassy is around 20,000 workers; i.e., a multiple of around 3 of the figures above (Jureidini, 2002).

services and similar functions in business establishments. However, the kinds of jobs they undertake are branded: “traditional, dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs characterised by the informal labour market (Jureidini, 2003, p.1).” Hence, it can be argued that female migrant workers are not taking jobs away from the majority of highly educated women in Beirut (Ibid). However, these workers may be taking jobs from women in the low-income classes.

Finally, one of the hypotheses that is often ignored in the literature, especially in the literature on Lebanon, is one that presupposes that the lack of women’s participation in the labour markets may actually be the result of their desire not to work in those labour markets. On the one hand, it is difficult to disentangle agency from the structural aspects, and choice from impositions on decision-making, when looking at women’s decision-making processes, especially in a relational setting, such as Lebanon. On the other, this should not rule out the possibility that women, as rational actors, may –at times– purposively choose to remain economically inactive, simply because work is not a priority for them. In economic terms, work falls outside their utility function. This idea will be considered in more depth in the next section. In sum, between the high opportunity cost of leaving the household, the legal barriers, gender based discrimination, and personal choice, women’s disincentives to participating in the labour markets reflects elements of both structure and agency.

A study carried out by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW, 1998) summarises all the cited factors and the constraints to women’s entry/advancement in the labour markets. The listed constraints to women’s work decisions follow a similar priority order, both nationally and in the country’s capital (Table 9). In Beirut, these represent low salaries (31.6%), lack of promotion opportunities (14.4%), and a lack of benefits (14.1%). Familial influence represents the next most reported constraint (12.8%). The highest constraint is thus linked to conditions that relate to the work itself (IWSAW, 1998).

Table 9 Constraints to Work Reported by Women in Beirut and Lebanon, 1998

Constraint	Percentage Reported by Women in Beirut	Percentage Reported by Women in Lebanon
Family Pressure	12.8	10.7
Non-Availability of Promotional Opportunities	14.4	17.1
Low Salary	31.6	35.9
Status as Married Women	6.7	5.3
Legal Problems	1.9	0.9
Being a Woman	3.7	3.3
Non-Availability of Benefits	14.1	14.4
Non-Availability of Day Care Centres	3.8	2.9
Other	11	9.5

Source: IWSAW, 1998

This IWSAW study (1998) shows that factors relating to family pressure are negatively correlated to the educational level, whereas promotional perspectives are highly correlated with the latter (Ibid). Surprisingly, only 3% of women state that gender has a negative effect on their employment prospects, and only 7% of married women think their marital status has an effect on their employment (Ibid). Moreover, family acceptance is said to depend on the amount of the contribution of women to the household expenditure (Ibid). Additionally, time is an important constraint that is mentioned by women (especially given their double burden in the household). This is especially true in poorer families who cannot afford help (Ibid).

Hence, the above research confirms a lot of the assumptions in the literature, and the applicability of factors in Beirut. It concludes that structural factors come before, but only slightly before, familial constraints, on the list of restrictions that are mentioned by women. However, the results presented above are based on a survey, which means women's answers could potentially have been biased, based on a list of choices, and other errors in data collection. Moreover, a survey is not sufficient for digging into the deeper aspects and constraints that are faced by women, and a control for variables, such as class or sectarian membership and the ways that they affect the valuation of work, and the perceptions of constraints. Additionally, this study was conducted in 1998, which makes the answers fairly outdated. To overcome this limitation, data from this survey will be refreshed by data from the survey that this research conducted, and this will be complemented by qualitative analysis in the remainder of this chapter. Finally, none of these studies actually consider choice as a potential element to explain women's lack of economic activity in the labour market.

Women's Economic Activity Patterns: A Survey of the Literature

Many hypotheses emerge when looking at women's motivations to work, central to which are choice and need (Kabeer, 2008; Quinsumbing, 2003; Assaad et. al, 2011). Need is cited, across geographical settings, as being the main determinant behind women's engagement in labour markets, especially in poorer societies, both in rural agricultural settings, and also among low-income class communities in urban settings. Research confirms this hypothesis across developing countries in East Asia (Agarwal, 1994; Bennett, 1992; Sathar and Desai, 1996; Hossain and Sen, 1991; Al-Samarrai, 2006), Africa (review by Whitehead, 2009), and Latin America (Deere, 2009). A full review of this literature can be found in Kabeer's Working Paper 'Women Economic Empowerment and Inclusive Growth: Labour Markets and Enterprise Development' (2012; also Kabeer, 2008; 2011) in which a comprehensive analysis of the incentives of women's participation in labour markets is conducted, concluding that, in most cases, women work to meet daily survival needs, especially in the lower echelons of society, rather than it being a matter of 'choice' or 'self-realisation.'

In the MENA region, studies confirm the above. Indeed, economic need plays a large part in women's choice to engage in the labour markets (Karshenas and Moghadam,

2001; Moghadam, 2001). Expanding on this idea, MacLeod (1996) looks at the decision-making processes of women at the intersection of the household and the market place, in relation to low/middle-income class women in Cairo. In this social class, women, a bit more educated than women in the lower echelons of the society, are the first in their families to work outside the house. Working women in this study cite the importance of earning an income to help their families. However, they also report being able to afford personal luxuries, like coffee shops, etc., as another motivation. Other incentives that are reported in this study relate to the increasingly consumerist culture, which has expanded the list of household needs to more than the necessities that men are able to meet with their incomes. A final reason that is reported by this study is that women value the mobility that is gained through employment, which gives them greater access to life outside the household.

While this might come at a cost, for instance, putting on the veil, among other things, it is claimed to have many reported benefits, such as the ability to meet potential partners and to escape from arranged marriages (Ibid). The mobility aspect, and the access to mobility through increased modesty, are often cited in the literature on South Asia that is cited in the paragraph above. It is interesting to compare these motivations for employment to women's incentives in low-income Beirut, and whether the women interviewed in the research share the same elements in their decision-making processes with regard to the labour market.

In another study on low-income class women in Egypt, Hoodfar (1997) reports the same findings, whereby women turn to employment in order to fill a gap in the income of their families. An interesting aspect of this study is that the interviewed women's choice of work is mostly in the informal market, as they search for flexible working hours and conditions, which allow them to combine cash earning activities with domestic chores. Another category emerges in which women head families whose 'male heads of household' have migrated to work abroad, unaccompanied by their families. In this group, women's main motivation for engaging in income generating activities was the fear or worry that their husbands, who might have migrated abroad, would not be able to provide for them, which is not a case of direct need but, rather, of economic security (Hoodfar, 1997). In another study, Moghadam reports that, in many countries in the MENA region, 'need', in

the form of a lack of state services, is pushing women to work, especially in public sector jobs, so as to gain benefits from social insurance, among other causes, which can greatly decrease their spending on health (Moghadam, 1998).

Moving from developing world and MENA region trends, Lebanese working women's cited that motivations for engaging in the labour market do not differ much at a national level among women in the region. Lebanese economically active women deem economic need (35%), financial independence (21%), as well as self-esteem boosting (20%), as being their primary incentives for joining the work force (Badre and Yaacoub, 2011). Financial need is recognised to be the main motivation for female heads of household, as it is they who are most affected by poverty, as well as those women from low-income classes. This leads them to derive most of their income from small-scale activities in the informal sector, confirming the findings in low-income class Cairo by Hoodfar (IWSAW, 1998; Hoodfar, 1997). While these data fit the trends reported elsewhere, this study was conducted in 1998, and on a national scale. Additionally, the study does not go beyond the statistics in delving into the decision processes of women that are behind their engagement in the labour market. Finally, no data that is specific to Beirut exists, nor does any study that looks specifically at women in low-income Beirut. The remainder of the chapter will attempt to fill this gap, after a literature review of the main causes of women's economic inactivity patterns, in the next section.

Who is Who in the Labour Markets?

This section will abridge this research's survey findings. It starts by sketching out who is who in the labour markets? Who are the women who work? What are their profiles, and what differentiates them from non-working women? It then outlines the main barriers to, and incentives for, women's participation in the labour markets in Beirut for the surveyed population. This section follows logically from the previous sections, as it will present recent data from Beirut that will either confirm or conflict with, the literature trends when it comes to women's participation in the labour markets. Additionally, it will be necessary in framing the qualitative discussion that will follow, which will move to a more micro-level,

looking at women in low-income Beirut, and unpacking the data resulting from the qualitative material that is presented in this section.

In terms of labour market status, the married women in low-income Beirut who were interviewed, as everywhere else, can be categorised as either economically inactive or economically active in the labour markets. The former category encompasses those who are not looking for a job, and who are not currently working, the latter -- those who are either in part-time or full-time employment, or who are unemployed and seeking a job. However, to truly examine the working patterns and decisions of women, one should go a step beyond those oversimplified categories. Many respondents are, in fact, on a continuum between working for cash in the labour market, not working, working informally or working in the household, and they often go back and forth between categories.

This category has been questioned by many feminists who continue to challenge such dichotomies, that are often used by economists, and which often hide the non-cash contributions of women to the economy and the household (Folbre, 1994; O'Hara, 2014; McKay, 2001). Hence, while the section summarising the survey findings can only minimally trace those changes in the labour market statuses of women, and provide reasons for disruptions in patterns, the interviews will reveal a lot about this continuum of the presence/absence of women in/from formal and informal work. It will also allow analysis of these patterns with attention to age, educational backgrounds, sectarian group membership, and other identities that intersect at specific points in time when a woman makes a decision relating to her labour market activity.

Overview of Women's Labour Market Status in Beirut: Survey Findings

As the previous chapters show, national statistics posit that 23% of the women in Lebanon were economically active in 2009. This rate encompassed working women in both the formal and the informal sectors, as well as unemployed women who were seeking employment. The majority of economically active women in Lebanon (57%) are reported to work in the 'informal economy', while the percentage of female unemployment is 10% (Tailfer, 2012). Statistics in the same year show that the rate is slightly higher for Beirut, but it is still just over thirty percent of women in activity. In recent years, there has been a recognition that informality of labour is a long-term phenomenon and ILO experts have

worked to broaden the definition of informal employment to include not only unregulated enterprises but also unregulated employment relationships, thus incorporating all forms of 'informal employment' (Chen, 2007). Formality and informality were started to be addressed as two ends of a continuum. Production, employment and distribution pass through chains of informal (unregulated) as well as formal economic relations. This is especially true in a context like Lebanon where even workers in the formal market do not enjoy many of the benefits and services associated with it. Additionally, as the section on labour markets has shown, in the Lebanese public sector jobs (which is a formal sector), there are many jobs that informal or unregulated (day to day basis). This is accentuated in the case of women where certain labour market regulations are discriminatory against them as has been discussed in other sections. This distinction will be an important lens when discussing this research respondent's presence in this continuum between work in labour markets, work in the informal sector, and household chores and other family business work they do that is unaccounted for.

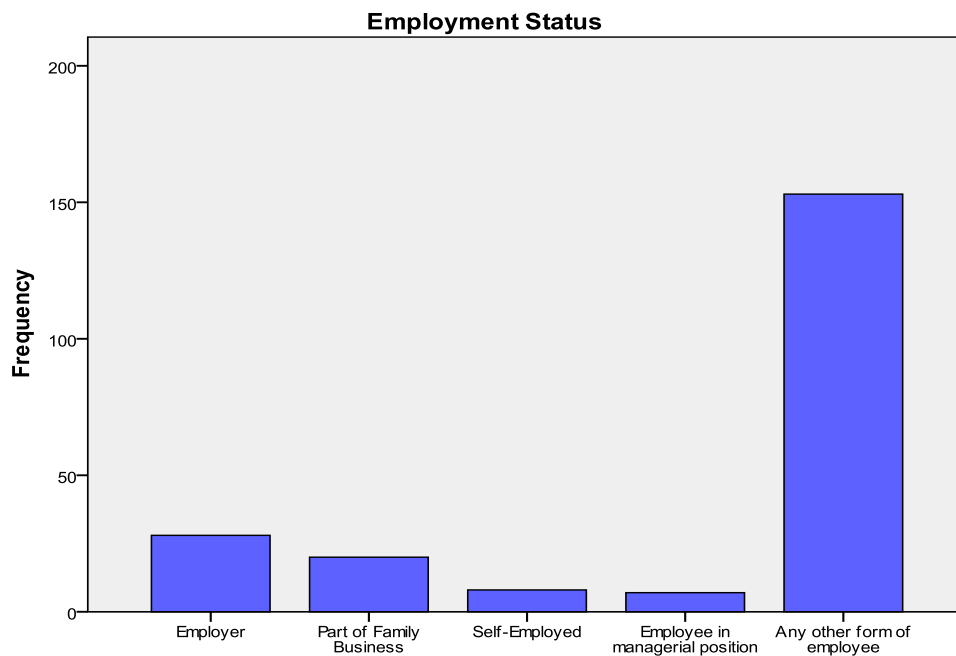
The survey data collected for this research actually shows that, differently from the national statistics, the percentage of economically active women in the survey's sample is 50.5%, of whom 42.5% are in full time employment. This may either be due to sampling problems in the national data, or an indication that the statistics are outdated. However, and as posited by the national statistics, the rate of unemployment among women in Beirut has not fluctuated much from the national rate reported in 2009. About 10.8% of women are unemployed in Beirut, a rate close to male unemployment, which is explained by structural factors in the economy. Among economically inactive women, only 2% had previously been active in the labour markets, which shows that there isn't actually a high rate of women who are dropping out of the labour force but, rather, women who are economically inactive tend to have always been so.

A common pattern of activity between countries of the MENA region (WB, 2004) was reported. Moghadam (1999) argues that this region has witnessed a feminisation of the public sector, especially in oil rich countries, because of a perception that jobs in state institutions are more suitable for women. In addition, this is due to the fact that the public sector provides social benefits, as well as job security, both of which compensate for the deterioration in income that has been experienced (Moghadam, 1998). Lebanese national

statistics, however, show that, in Lebanon, the majority of women are employed in the private sector and the public sector employs only 14.7% of working women (Tailfer, 2012). This is partly due to the higher salaries offered by the private sector, as well as the better working conditions for women that are reported (IWSAW, 1998). The women surveyed in Beirut confirmed that the majority of women worked (or have worked) in the private sector; however this rate was much higher rate that reported by the national statistics. In fact, 54% of women worked in the private sector, while 46% worked in the public sector, showing the competition between the sectors among working women.

Furthermore, the literature shows that the majority of the working women in Lebanon in the formal sector, are employees (79%), 8% are self-employed and only as few as 1.5% of women are employers (Tailfer, 2012). Only one quarter of working women are in professions such as medicine, law, and engineering (Ibid). 40% of women work about 33 hours, less than the maximum 48 hours that are stipulated by the law (Ibid). The results of the survey I conducted in Beirut for the purposes of this research (Figure 12) show a similar distribution of women's employment statuses to those of the national ones, with 70% of women employees, only 5% of whom are in managerial position, which continues to reflect the fact that women often hold jobs that are lower in the hierarchy and it is difficult to penetrate the managerial positions. Only 4% of women in Beirut are self-employed, and 17% are employers, and this also shows that economically active women remain locked in positions as 'employed' people, with little room or ability to lead their own business or projects.

Figure 12 Employment Status of surveyed women in Beirut



Source: Author's own data, based on survey results

While some MENA countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Syria, have been witnessing increased demands for feminised labour in the export manufacturing sector, but this did not happen in Lebanon where only 8% of females work in manufacturing (Moghadam, 1998; Tailfer, 2012). Lebanese working women are in the majority in the services sector (63%), followed by trade (22%) (Tailfer, 2012). For instance, Lebanon is a country that is highly dependent on tourism-related occupations, in which increases in employment are difficult to capture, since it is possible that most of it remains unrecorded (Moghadam, 1998). The quantitative data collected for this research show that 90% of women in Beirut work in the services sector, in jobs such as media, telecommunications, healthcare, banking, retail, and education, among others, and only 6% in the industry sector, showing a continuation of the pattern that has been reported in the literature.

Moreover, the majority of economically active women in Lebanon are, studies reveal, mainly between the ages of 20-29 years, with an average age for working women of

31 years (Tailfer, 2012). The majority of working women are single (68%), and their activity rate declines after marriage to 29% (Ibid). However, studies show that only a quarter of married working women feel that their marital status carries with it a negative effect on their decisions to work (Badre and Yaacoub, 2011). Married women work shorter hours than single, divorced or widowed women, and mothers seem to work for even fewer hours (IWSAW, 1998). Those who work most amongst the divorced and widowed are the female heads of households (Ibid). Despite this, only 18.4% of female-headed households are reported as working, mainly in the informal sector, and in jobs such as hairdressing, housekeeping, or as saleswomen (Tailfer, 2012).

The findings of the research that was conducted for the purposes of this thesis conform with the trends reported nationally, which show that the women surveyed are generally most economically active in full-time mode while they are in the age group 21-31 years old, and the highest rate of inactivity is for women above the age of 40 years old. Additionally, married women are mostly economically inactive, and single women are mainly in full-time employment. All this makes it more interesting to examine the category of married women, and their choices and dilemmas regarding labour market participation.

In the case of Lebanon, and unlike other countries where education is often a prerequisite for work outside the house, most working women come from families with low educational levels, thus showing that the educational level is not a main determinant for participation. Salary scale, however, varies depending on education and age, with low salaries being linked to younger, less well educated, and less experienced women (IWSAW, 1998). The survey in hand shows that women in Beirut have very low illiteracy rates, with 35% of women having an intermediate education, 23% a secondary education, and 17% an undergraduate degree. Among working women, the majority of those in full-time employment have a secondary school degree at least.

As to unemployment, which is hitting 10% of women in the economically active population, this mainly relates to women between the ages of 20-30 years, with a peak between 20-24 years, corresponding to the years in which they complete their studies (Badre and Yaacoub, 2011). This finding has also been confirmed through the survey completed. Additionally, unemployed women are also mostly single. Unemployment is partly caused by the massive influx of foreign capital into Lebanon, continuously leading to

inflation and a lack of jobs for educated youth (IWSAW, 1998). Moreover, the failure of the Lebanese economy to create jobs to help absorb the new female and male graduates leads to emigration, bringing in remittances. Given that Lebanese working abroad earn, on average, 31.6% more than they would at home, remittances cause more inflation and another vicious circle, which is closed by further unemployment and more youth migration (Jahn, 2012). Those patterns are important to bear in mind, as they will inform the understanding and analysis of the qualitative interviews and the rationales of women when it comes to decision-making processes pertaining to their labour market activity.

Explaining Activity and Inactivity Patterns in Beirut

In the opinion of the women I surveyed in Beirut (Table 10), and in accordance with most of the studies that have been cited in the previous sections, the three biggest motivations for work are financial need, the improvement of the family's lifestyle, and the possibility of gaining independence. For women in the low-income classes, the first two reasons were the main answers given, whereas women from upper-income classes mainly reported 'gaining independence' as being their primary incentive.

Table 10 Biggest Incentives for Labor Market Participation

What, in your opinion are the biggest incentives for working?	Percentage
Financial need	27
To get out of the household	1
Filling up time	1
Personal Satisfaction	7
Gaining independence	25
Securing old age needs	0.5
Improving family's lifestyle	28
Proving herself, Using her potentials in society	8

Equality with men	0.5
Duty of every person	2
Total	400

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The data show that the main reasons reported in low-income Cairo surface again in this survey, except for mobility, which does not come up as an important factor for women in Beirut. Despite the telling results from the statistics, numbers always hide dynamics and patterns that only qualitative data can bring to life. This thesis will attempt to make these statistics speak by trying to look beyond the numbers into how the incentives, cited above, are deconstructed and intertwined with other factors, desires and aspects of lives of the women who were interviewed.

The survey conducted for this research shows some differences in the women respondents' answers *vis-à-vis* the obstacles to activity in the labour markets (Table 11). The main impediment to activity, according to both economically active and inactive women, is cited as marriage (40%). 'Marriage,' as reported in the survey, can be seen as an umbrella for the tension between the benefits and the opportunity costs that we had considered in the literature, above. I will explore in greater detail the dynamics and calculations that are hidden in quantitative data, based on my qualitative research, which is discussed below. The second obstacle reported is the lack of jobs that match their skills; however, this was reported mainly by educated women and women from the upper-income

classes. Other structural factors, such as the lack of childcare centres, gender discrimination in the workplace, and the lack of proximity to workplaces also appear to be important disincentives. I will address all of these factors in the context of my discussion of the respondent's qualitative interviews.

Table 11 Main Disincentives for Labour Market Activity

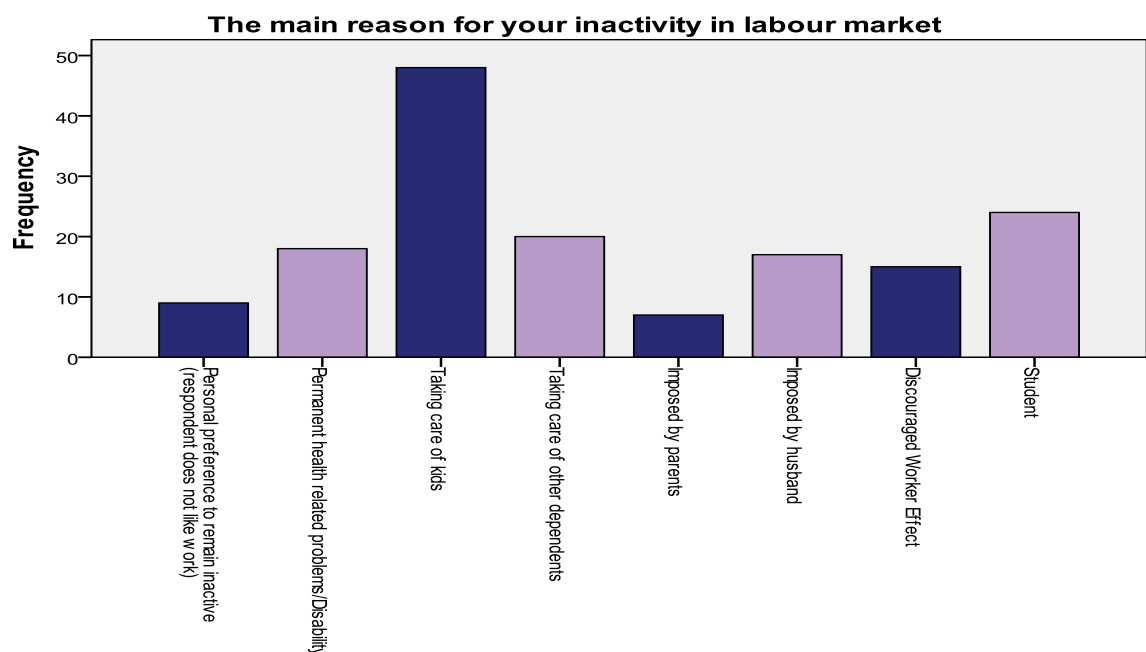
Main Disincentives for Labor Market Activity		Percent
	Gender Discrimination in the workplace	11.5
	No promotions	1.5
	Low salary	5.0
	Marriage	39.5
	No jobs to match skills	17.3
	No benefits	1.0
	No childcare centres	13.8
	Lack of proximity to the workplace	10.5
	Total	100.0

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

On the other hand, a survey question that was addressed solely to economically inactive women reconfirmed certain structural aspects that are cited in the literature as explaining the lack of the presence of women in the labour market (Figure 13). For instance, the majority of women name taking care of children as their main reason for inactivity. While this was the number one reason for married women, single women reported being a student; as the main obstacle to their involvement. Taking care of dependents, and health factors ranked next in women's explanations about why they were

not engaged in labour market activities. All of the previous answers are structural problems that relate to the lack of state services, whereas the next biggest reason for inactivity was their husband's imposition. Finally, while very few women cited a personal preference to remain economically inactive as the main reason for their inactivity, the rest of this chapter will try, through analysis of qualitative interviews conducted with women, to disentangle the structural elements that are impeding women's participation, from societal impositions and choice.

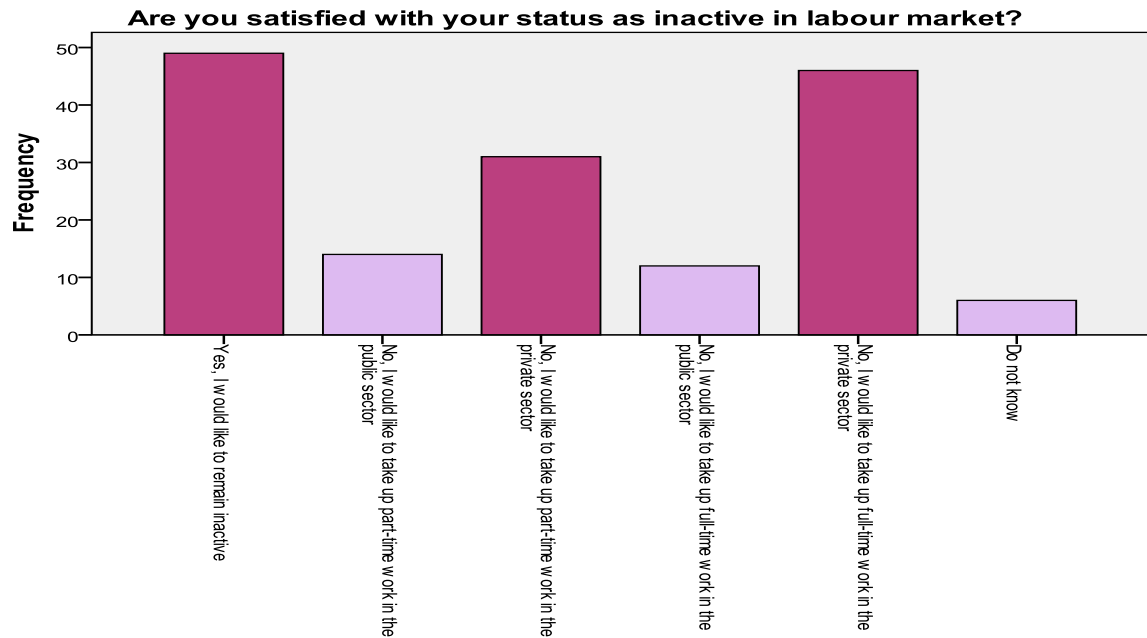
Figure 13. The Main Reason for Inactivity in the Labour Markets



Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The survey went one step further with economically inactive women and asked them whether or not they were satisfied with their status in the labour market, and whether they would like to change it (Figure 14). The results of this question are interesting; especially in the light of the previous question, where very few women answered that inactivity was their personal preference. In this question, a fair number of respondents (31%) answered that they would like to remain economically inactive in the labour markets.

Figure 14 Are you Satisfied with your Status of Being Economically Inactive?



Source: Author's own, based on survey results

The second biggest group of women answered that they would like to take on work in the private sector, either full-time (29%), or part-time (20%). Although there is a perception that public sector work is more stable and provides better state benefits, it is always more attractive among women to say that they are working in the private sector. Work in the public sector always carries with it a perception of low-income class, whereas work in the private sector is always more prestigious. In any case, only 2% of economically inactive surveyed women have previously been active in the labour markets, hence the big majority of women are projecting their thoughts on their preference in relation to private and public sector jobs from their surroundings and built opinions, rather than from first-hand experience. Delving deeper into women's decision-making processes will reveal more about the stories that are hidden behind the survey's results.

Working Women Talk

'I cannot afford this luxury'

As my methodology chapter showed, I had key access points in each area in which I conducted my qualitative fieldwork. Sometimes Yolla,, the tailor, Ibrahim, at others, or merely access through the snowballing method of finding respondents, and these helped me to gain insights into different aspects of the lives of the women targeted by my research. My access to the Ministry of the Displaced (MoD) was through my mother's aunt, who lives in the same building as the Ministry's offices. Formed as a temporary response to Lebanon's civil war, the MoD claims to cater for all the needs of those who are or have been displaced across Lebanon during its seventeen years of civil war. This ministry strives to ensure their return to their areas and villages, as well as to answer to their social and economic needs and to give them their citizenship rights⁹. Due to its 'provisional' and 'emergency' character, the Ministry had hired a number of employees temporarily. Today, and more than 20 years later, employees at the Ministry continue to work 'temporarily' and without a fixed tenure contract, merely operating on extensions of their initial contracts.

The Director of the Ministry granted me permission to interview women who work there and to spend a couple of days examining their working habits. Later, I was able to

⁹ <http://www.ministryofdisplaced.gov.lb/Cultures/ar-LB/ministry/history/Pages/default.aspx>

accompany several of my respondents to their homes to compare what they had told me about their domestic lives with their behaviour, in order to gain a better understanding of the every-day routines they lead. One of the women I accompanied home on several occasions is Najwa.

Najwa works as one of the secretaries in the Director's office and she was the first I was able to speak to there. Skinny and fairly tall, with dark black hair pulled up with a flower, and a fringe on her white forehead, Najwa looked very made up for a Monday morning. The red lipstick and charming attitude added to the look. She asked me to be seated while she received many phone calls and visitors to her office, which she shared with another woman colleague, Ghenwa. During the first half an hour, about ten men had entered the office for an inquiry, a signature, or just to say hello. Would her husband know how much contact with men she had at her job? I wondered, as I impatiently waited to start interviewing her. I stood up and did a quick walk across the building's offices and, for once, theory was directly tied to reality for me: this is indeed an embodiment of the feminisation of the public sector. Perhaps the reason for the dominance of women employees in the Ministry of the Displaced was more directly related to the fact that it is a job with very little security, given it was set out as being temporary. Additionally, the short working hours provided flexibility for the women, who also receive compensation for the schooling of their children, as well as health insurance.

It was time for Najwa's lunch break, so we moved to my great aunt's apartment (on the same floor as the office) where we sat alone in the living room. Najwa is 44 years old. A Maronite Christian, married to Tony, who is 7 years older. Her husband runs a freelance repair business, and finished his secondary school education. Najwa, on the other hand, did vocational training in a secretariat after dropping out of university in her first year. Najwa and Tony are both heads of the household- i.e., they are both responsible for the economic well-being of the household, and for its sustainability- with a joint income that is enough to classify them as upper low-income class.

Living an hour's drive from her job, Najwa and her husband are always struggling to balance the housework, the care of their children, and providing for the family. For Najwa, work is no luxury, rather, it is a necessity:

I started working when I was 12, and I did so because my father died and we needed money to continue our education and to survive. And now I still work, because I have to! My husband never asked me to stop working, because his financial position doesn't allow him that. He even doesn't complain about my working conditions, because he can't ask me to quit¹⁰. If you want to put your children in schools, you have to make sure they live at the same level as that of the other children. I go out of my house at 7 a.m. every day, and I start working here. I work until 7 p.m., and sometimes until 10 p.m., because here there is paid overtime work. My house is one hour of commuting by car. When the kids were younger they were in nurseries, now when I arrive home they would've finished their homework I just listen to them and overview what they have done. I can't afford to get a maid, but my son is 11 and his sister is 5 and he can take care of her. I am happy that they are turning out to be independent and responsible. I have taught them to study alone, to wash their plates alone, to fix their beds and their clothes. I am happy here, but I say that the best job for a woman - if at all - is teaching at a school: the same times away from home as her children, etc. The ultimate is not to work, but whoever can afford the luxury? Good for her, *I can't afford this luxury*. My kids are growing up and I haven't seen them, and this really is something that saddens me. If my husband had more money, I wouldn't be working all these hours at all.

Parts of Najwa's answers reflect the literature's highlighting that need is the main incentive behind a decision to be present in the labour market. Similarly to the situation in most developing countries, the MENA region, and studies conducted in Cairo particularly (reviewed in the previous section, e.g., Agarwall, 1994; Whitehead, 2009; Moghadam, 2001; Hoodfar, 1997), this confirms the idea that earning income in a world of increasing need is no longer a luxury, rather, it is a must. Her main motivation also echoes the findings of the survey conducted for the purposes of this research, from which it was demonstrated that 25% of women state need as being their main motivation (second highest percentage, the first is: improving the lifestyle of the family, which I will discuss shortly).

A few minutes after the interview was officially over, and the recorder was off, my great aunt joined us with three cups of Turkish coffee. Najwa started to summarise her answers to several of the questions for my aunt, but in a much more relaxed way and without thinking about her words in the way that she did on record. Work outside the house, in her opinion, is mainly attached to financial need, and is a real burden on women. She recognises the good aspects that come with work, in that it pushes women outside the home environment into productivity, but women have a lot more duties than merely work, she continues. Najwa confesses that she is tired. Her body and her resilience to long working hours are no longer the way they were when her children were younger. She feels as if life is a marathon that she simply does not have the endurance to run anymore. Najwa, like most working respondents, does not have much time for a social life outside the familial gatherings that happen every now and again. She speaks of her life as one of 'servitude,' in which her job is making use of her, but not giving her enough in return, nor, at the very least, what she deserves.

Najwa's case is similar to those of many other women that I have interviewed, who have mostly expressed their fatigue in having to work without having the luxury to opt out of this tiresome routine. In almost all of the interviews, across sects, women have questioned activity in the labour market, asking, 'why work outside and inside if you can only work inside?' This feeling is less striking among more educated women, but is accentuated among women who have children, and who don't have any family support for those children. In such cases, respondents unanimously felt a regret at leaving their children

unsupported and at missing important milestones in their children's lives. However, after voicing these regrets, most respondents immediately tended to rationalise them, saying that what they are doing is worth it when they see they can provide their children with a better lifestyle. These frustrations and emotional dilemmas are often hidden in the literature, and behind survey findings. Women whom I have interviewed - while recognising the financial need to work - unanimously agreed that the returns are many fewer than the rewards, and that they would chose not to work if they could. Additionally, as Najwa's answer posits, and contrary to literature on South Asia, Egypt and other parts of the developing world (Kabeer, 2008), Najwa's husband does not present an obstacle to her work. As the quotation above states, this is primarily because he cannot ask her to stop working when he cannot afford to carry the whole burden of the income. This was common to most respondents who, unlike the situations in other settings that have been reported in the literature, have never cited increased mobility as a motivation for their work: getting out of the house did not seem to be a problem for the women I interviewed in low-income Beirut.

On the Relativity of Need

As is clear in the above quotation, and in the interview more generally, Najwa defines 'working for need' as covering the expenses of schooling for her children, paying rent and saving for her children's university education. However, she also hints at the necessity to 'make sure they live at the same level as other children'. This echoes the definition of 'need' that is given by most respondents, which relates to more consumerist tendencies, or to 'luxury' items, such as buying a new phone for their kids, buying decorating items for the house, or other items. The interviews all pointed to an increase in the commercial culture in Beirut, whereby you cannot but keep up with new technology and you must maintain a certain appearance, pushing women into the labour markets to fulfill another kind of 'need,' which is mainly consumerist. This reminds us of the discussion at the outset of this thesis on the implications of the neoliberal model on consumerist tendencies among citizens. As was initially discussed, this is not only a feature of Beirut but of many other cosmopolitan cities in the new global age.

Most women whose husband earned enough income to cover their basic needs, in terms of housing, food and medication, would also list 'need' as their main reason for

working. However, the definition of this 'need' ranged across a wide continuum, from 'luxury travel' to 'jewelry' to 'changing their phone to the most recent one' and to 'registering my son in a private school.' Dana is a mother of three: Salim, Karma, and Karim. Her husband works as a salesman in a retail clothing shop, which means he spends his whole days driving a van full of goods either to show or to deliver, in exchange for around US\$600 per month. Salim and Karma go to school, a public school near their house. Karim is only 7 months old, and stays home with his mother. Dana used to be a stay at home mother until recently- a little before becoming pregnant with Karim. Dana's sister Sara married a rich man who inherited his family business, and Sara has children of the same ages as Dana's. On the other hand, Sara's children go to private school, they wear branded clothes, they have an i-pad, an i-pod, and a play station. This, Dana says, puts a lot of pressure on her. She says:

You don't want your children to be different. You don't want them to look at their cousins and think they are disadvantaged. Thankfully, my husband can afford us a decent living. We live in a house he inherited from his parents, so we don't have to pay rent. The children go to school. I have food on my table every night. But when Salim meets his cousins, I want him to know what the most recent game on the i-pad is. I want him to wear a Superman t-shirt. I want to show my sister that I am living a good life too. And to be able to do that, I had to go back to work.

Dana now works informally in a shop near her house. She earns almost US\$300 per month, enough for her to fulfill the 'needs' of her children that their father's income cannot cover. Since she has started working, she reports that their lifestyle has improved a lot, and that she is not quarrelling with her husband any more. Nothing that Dana mentioned about work related to her having a better say in the household, nor about her self-fulfillment. Expressing happiness that related to her work stemmed more from satisfying her children's and her own consumerist needs in buying the most recent clothing, games, and so on.

On the other hand, Dana is still the person who is mainly responsible for the cooking, housework, child rearing and domestic activity. Roles continue to be highly gendered, and so does decision making. Similar to

Dana's story is that of Nibal, a working mother of two. Nibal works in the kitchen of a restaurant in Achrafieh. She started working when she realised that her husband's income would be insufficient to buy her new make-up, to pay for her dresses, and to allow her to go out to lunch or coffee with her son's school friends' mothers. These two stories shed light on the experiences of most of the working women that I have interviewed. When asked where their money is spent, their answers showed that it is rarely spent on basic needs.

Almost all of them agree that, a few years back, they probably wouldn't have needed to work, but life is changing, everything is becoming more expensive and the list of 'needs' is growing. This thesis will come back to this aspect of need in the chapter on marriage (Chapter 6). However, the purpose of the paragraphs, above, is to highlight the complexity of women's definitions of 'need,' and impels us to question if work is 'necessary' in order to empower women. If so, what is 'necessary,' and who determines what is 'necessary'? Additionally, who determines if living a more 'Western' lifestyle, as one woman describes it, i.e., buying an i-pad, wearing more make-up, is providing women with satisfaction that can be associated with 'empowerment' in the sense claimed by modernisation theory and the development paradigm?

How does this discussion of need fit into the wider framework? In fact, and building on Pateman's sexual contract (1988), which was discussed earlier in this thesis, McRobbie (2009) refers to a 'new sexual contract,' that is emerging today, which displaces the older story of modern social belonging leaving the space for a new contract in the context of a new, globalising, post-Fordist and neoliberal capitalism (Fraser, 2009; Oksala, 2010). In developed countries today:

There is a more modern type of gender contract, which more or less normalizes women's role [in the] labour market. The gender contract presently prevailing in the Nordic countries entails the individual right of women to paid work and a certain amount of personal independence, both economically and socially- in exchange for women's continuing responsibility for human care,

both within the public services and in the family, and women's acceptance of 'women's wages' and a subordinate position within the processes of power. (Rantalaaho, 1993, p.5)

However, as pointed out elsewhere, e.g., by Moghadam (1998, p.9), these countries benefit from an institutionalised system of childcare, health services and rights, which allow women the time to do things, to work, and to be present in both spheres. This section on need shows that, in the case of Lebanon, in addition to this new contract, a layer of consumerism and societal pressure is added to women's lives, while they are not benefitting from a lot of the elements that make the new sexual contract more or less profitable for women in developed countries. For instance, women work outside the household, continue to work inside the household, without benefiting from any support from the state or the services provided to them. On the other hand, the rationale put behind work is that it enables them to fulfill another type of 'need', which benefits only a capitalist élite, through becoming both 'cheap labour' and 'heavy consumers,' thus putting them at an even lower echelon of disadvantage. This aspect of the literature is very striking among low-income Beirut respondents in almost all of my interviews with working women. It also brings into question how 'empowering' work can be within all those webs of dependencies and responsibility. This links back to the discussion on empowerment in Chapter 2, which aims to complicate the improvement in 'empowerment' potential of women beyond just access to resources or access to income, and that pushes us to look at 'empowerment' using a multi-layered set of indicators, taking into account individual and structural factors that add complexity to 'choice,' beyond its mere availability.

Work as a Facilitator of Social Mobility

The last point becomes more striking if we look at it in the context of Beirut, and through the lens of the theoretical framework of a patriarchal connectivity and the relational society, explained earlier (Chapter 1), in which a woman's decision-making process happens within a larger structure, whereby their choices are governed by expectations from within the household, the society, the neighbours, the legal system, and a very relational setting where others shape decision-making much more than in more individual-oriented societies. This brings the discussion to a second incentive for work, which was cited by the respondents to

the survey as a reason for participating in the labour markets (the highest percentage of responses: 28%): to improve the status of the family.

Other than education, respondents considered that a higher lifestyle is a form of social mobility in Beirut. Most respondents reported that you will be treated and viewed differently if your children are in a certain school, or if you have a new car. This helps explain some of the consumerist tendencies that are listed above, whereby some families try to compensate for their 'lower social standing' through purchasing items, maintaining a certain image (or lifestyle), and claiming to belong to a higher social class. In most cases, such a lifestyle cannot be fulfilled through the husband's income alone. Hence, many respondents cited work as a way of fitting into the middle-income class by providing more luxuries for the family, and permitting their children to go to better schools with middle and upper-income kids, and to be able to socialise with them and dress like them. This response was mainly among women who were educated and had university degrees, as well as among women who married down on the social scale and who wanted to better their families' social standing. One of the respondents, Zainab, a newly-wed, also working at the MoD as a bureaucrat, posits:

In Lebanon you are not working because of simple needs, but because of needs imposed by society. You are working to dress nicely and be under the spotlight, to be able to cater for the needs of the society, not your own. Nowadays, if you are super rich but you don't spend and buy clothes and a new cellular phone, people won't treat you nicely. But if you have money and you are well dressed and showing off, they will run to say hello to you at the door.

While most of the interviewed women - and in accordance with the survey findings - complained about their activity outside the house, most Christian women interviewed displayed a greater attachment to working culture. In general, the responses of Christian women about why they were working, were generally along the lines of 'why not,' and 'I studied, so I can use my degree and not stay at home.' However, the frustration with working conditions was the same, and the preference for leaving work, or working for fewer hours, was also clear amongst the Christian women I interviewed. Regardless of the specific sectarian group membership, wanting to leave the job market if they could surfaced more as a desire of older women (over 40 years old), who were now fed up with working.

Younger women were more eager to work and to balance family and working life, and expressed that work was an opportunity to socialise and develop yourself.

Other than those who voiced the desire to leave the job market if they could, there was a large proportion of women who agreed to the idea of not working long hours, or of committing to a difficult or full time job, but who dismissed the possibility of giving up work after they had become used to it. Such women expressed their view that one of their incentives to work, other than need, was simply 'being used to work,' but also 'loving the status and privilege of being looked at as a working woman.' One instance of this is Lina.

Lina is a 42 years old Sunni mother of three, and holds an undergraduate degree in Business. Lina got married at age 28 to her husband, who is 15 years older. When she got married, she had already been working for 7 years, and it was impossible for her to leave her job after being used to an independent income. Lina works to help her husband cater for the needs of the family, but mainly for her own needs. If she doesn't work, she argues, her husband won't be able to fulfill her needs, to buy her perfume, to pay for her hair dye, and other things. This hints back to the earlier discussion about the relativity of need, but it also points to a new finding: the difficulty in getting used to taking money from someone again, after being used to earning your own. Hence, here the 'choice' in decision-making of having resources is not only linked to the access over the resources but also what are the sources of the resources and the implications on the decision-making ability if these resources were accepted.

In fact, similarly to Lina, many other women who have married in their late twenties and were working before marriage, reported their unease in asking for money from their husbands. According to the respondents from this category, this type of response relates to two factors: the first is that women are marrying late, and thus now marry with certain habits that they cannot easily change, unlike the situation when women would marry at a younger age and would adapt faster to their husbands' lifestyles. The second is a factor that will be discussed in the coming chapter, which relates to changing conceptions of 'marriage.'

Increasingly, marriage is being viewed with scepticism, especially with the increasing numbers of divorces. Marriage is no longer a stable and longstanding institution, and women feel less and less secure in their marriages, as some respondents reported, and

so they would want to be able to count on themselves and not to ask for anything from their husbands. They also feel the need to continue working as a buffer for their future. Among women who have worked before marriage are those who would want to stop working if they could. However, even then, many of these respondents are advocates of a woman working when single, as this will help her to shape her personality, to enter marriage on solid grounds, and to deal with her husband as an equal, even when she later drops out of the labour market to care for her children.

An instance of this is Rola, a mother of two kids, Shi'a Muslim in her thirties. Rola works as a saleswoman in a shop near her house. She had battled with her brothers to allow her to work before marrying. Now that she has two kids, and that their homework is increasingly taking up her time, she envies non-working women in labour markets, but she can never be one of them, she says. Work has made her competitive. She jokingly argues that if all the women on earth were not working, then she would prefer not to be working. However, it would be difficult for her to have her friends working, buying new things, and meeting new people, while she sat at home just looking after the kids. Rola reminisces about her grandmother's time. At the time, she recounted to me, everything was simple and straightforward. People had something that is largely missing from today's society, she said, gratitude:

Back in our grandparents' time, they were satisfied with what they had. They had some things and liked it that way. Nowadays, people need more things, you get your son one thing, he needs another. Then you give him one thing, he needs yet another, etc., demands following one after another. When we were kids, whatever we played, we were happy. Today, whatever you do for your kids, they are never happy. When we were kids, life wasn't running, it was slow and peaceful. Today, life is all about running. Today, there is no gratitude or satisfaction, and the next generation will be worse. Take me as an example. I work because I keep comparing myself to others. The problem is that everyone works. In the morning, I meet all the women neighbours going out of the building together with their kids. The kids go to school, and they to work. Everyone works, so what can you do if you don't work? You wouldn't want to be the outcast.

This adds to the two initial incentives that were cited by respondents (need and improvement of the family's lifestyle, explained by most respondents as being represented

by luxury needs), a third incentive is the difficulty of giving up work after being used to it, or being used to its benefits. This incentive was not seen in the literature on incentives to work that is summarised in the section above, and is particular to the setting of low-income class Beirut. The latter was especially noted among younger respondents, and mostly among the Christians. Furthermore, Sunni Muslims placed a higher value on work, if compared to their Shia counterparts, who would all have preferred to give up work if they could. When I asked some of my respondents why they think there is a discrepancy in perceptions among those belonging to different sectarian groups, many linked this to the 'openness in Christian culture,' in which women enjoy more freedoms; or to the 'economically disadvantaged history of Shi'a Muslims after several wars with Israel,' which means that men are less educated and tend to stick more closely to traditions.

However, the variation among the respondents according to the sectarian group to which they belong was too small to allow for generalisation. In each case, several factors intersected, which made it hard to conclude that sectarian group belonging alone can be the reason for this difference. For each couple, there were several factors interacting at the same time, such as their fall-back positions (as discussed in the theoretical sections of the introduction: i.e., what other options each woman has, does she own any assets, etc.), the personal experiences of the couple, the number of children (given there is no state support for children), the type of marriage (and all the legal factors surrounding this), discussed in the introduction as part of the structural parameters that affect decision making, rather than to sectarian group membership alone.

For instance, the only three cases, that I encountered in my research, in which husbands asked their wives to quit work directly and continuously until they did so, are in Christian families. This is a surprising finding in the light of the previous one, where Christian women all expressed their views that working outside the house was a natural occurrence. Very few husbands from other religious sectarian group categories have done so on different occasions. Some husbands succeeded in convincing their wives, but only for a short while until the wives returned to work, and others failed to convince them. In most cases, such demands resulted from fights for diverse reasons, one of which is that women were not fulfilling their housework duties appropriately, where in-laws would try to

persuade their son that his wife working made him less of a man, or where working women abstained continuously from sex because they were ‘tired by work.’

These points will be analysed in more depth in the chapter that links women’s working patterns with their marital and sexual relations (Chapter 6). However, the fact that these occurrences are low in number challenges the idea that, in societies such as Lebanon in which patriarchal practices still exist in the culture, men often oppose their wife’s decision to work outside the household. At least in the case of low-income Beirut, and given the increasingly consumerist needs of society, coupled with a heightened pressure facing men to fulfill these needs, as well as a stagnating economy, respondents reported that their husbands often felt relieved when women took on a chunk of the responsibility. As one of the respondents said: “...he doesn’t have the luxury to ask me to stop working!” This brings us back to Najwa’s quotation at the beginning of the section above. Within those generic incentives and motivations to economic activity there appear differentiations across the types of jobs, and the security and benefits they carry with them. The next subsection expands on this element.

Informal, Unstable, yet Necessary Income

Other aspects that were cited during my focus groups and interviews with women from upper-income Beirut, which were carried out with family and friends, which I briefly alluded to in my methodology chapter, for instance, are: working to gain independence, working as a must after graduation, or working to achieve self-development. These aspects were largely missing from the narratives of the women I interviewed in low-income Beirut. Additionally, and as mentioned above, need, in its literal or relative meaning, pushed women into employment, both under good and bad conditions. While many of the women I interviewed worked in the formal sector, or in the public sector, thus benefiting from at least relative stability and social services, and therefore making their long working hours and double burden worthwhile; many other women were forced to work in the informal economy. Here, again, it is important to look at the continuum between the two, and to question, what does it mean in a country like Lebanon where even the formal economy is under-regulated, to be working in one or the other? What are the benefits of working in the informal economy, and how does it compare to the little benefits offered by work in the

regulated sector? Work in the informal economy was praised by the respondents for offering a flexible schedule through which women could juggle their many responsibilities as mothers and wives, as well as offering uneducated women a chance to earn an income. However, with this came a lot of negative aspects. The story of Salma is, indeed, an exceptional one, and will best demonstrate some of these characteristics of informal work.

At the point of my interview, Salma was almost 60 years old and had been a house cleaner for almost 40 years. Her husband, aged 76, works as a family chauffeur, meaning he also works in the informal sector, without stability or any social security benefits. Salma can only decipher a few words, whereas her husband has completed Brevet (Year 9 in the British system). She started work at a very young age: 13. Her tough childhood was a result of two things: the first, that her sister was kidnapped by her Muslim lover at the age of seventeen, which made her father, a devout Christian, paranoid about his remaining daughters. Her father would lock her mother, her sisters and herself in, and would not allow them to even go out to the shop. The second factor relates to developments later in her childhood, when her father's behaviour changed, now allowing his wife and daughters to leave the house, but only to work in a Coca Cola factory. Salma's father needed money to get drunk every evening, often beating her mother every night if she did not earn enough money cleaning the neighbours' houses. This encouraged Salma to accept her first bridegroom, her current husband, at the age of 18, so as to run away from the evil of her father and escape 'the prison' in which she was living.

While her first experience with work was 'forced,' in the literal meaning, rather than driven by choice, Salma speaks of her second experience with work as also being forced, but in a different sense. Soon after she gave birth to her first baby, Salma experienced separation from her young child, as she had to 'remove him from her chest' while breastfeeding and start working as a house cleaner herself. She narrates:

The first day I left my son, I started crying. I had only given birth to him 49 days ago. It was the start of the harshest days of my life, trying to pump milk for him in bottles. I used to cry, pump, feel the need to go and breast feed him. I felt so weak, so vulnerable. But this was my only choice; we had to have food on the table.

At the time, her mother in law had started living with them, and her husband's income simply did not suffice, but at least her baby was in safe hands with his

grandmother. Salma has 3 girls, she told me, forgetting she had just mentioned her first son. I did not want to ask, fearing she had lost her son to death, and that I would awaken her sadness or a certain sensitivity. Later, I found out from the neighbours that she actually had a son who had started his occupation as a priest in the area's church, and later left the church's service with another priest after declaring they were gay and in love. Salma no longer considers him her son, I was told.

Salma's experience with work continued to be challenging when, due to war stress and trauma, her husband began to gamble. He would gamble with almost all their money, and mostly, lost it. Salma speaks about work in a very pragmatic way:

My experience with work was not the best, but maybe this is just a matter of pure luck. Because of my father and my husband. I love work, because, despite everything, when my husband asked me to remove my three daughters from school, I refused. I told him one of the ladies whose house I cleaned would pay for their schooling, while I kept money aside for them from my own income. Had the state offered good public schooling with no fees whatsoever, this would not have been an issue. If God had sent me someone who made me live like a queen, do you think I would have said no? Of course, I wouldn't be going from one building to another cleaning bathrooms. But, despite everything, work was really rewarding for me in my situation.

The experience of Salma is one where work was often more disempowering, in the sense that she was driven to give up raising her children, a decision she would have preferred, in order to go out onto the market and work. Referring back to the literature on empowerment (Chapter One), choice and the ability to operationalize it are empowering to the decision-maker. As the discussion has shown, in certain cases where the choice does not seem to be explicitly in the benefit of the decision-maker, it has been hard to fit it within the explanations provided by the 'empowerment' literature. In this case, it is shown that the inability to choose to be economically inactive is as disempowering for women as the disempowerment that stems from their inability to work. Salma's experience, of course, is not the general trend among working women, but it is important to notice that there exist nuances between the extremely 'liberating' values that are attached to women's work, and questioning whether some of the experiences of women in low-income Beirut are trying to tell us otherwise. Of course, this is not to generalise the case of Salma in relation to all of

the women I have interviewed. While Salma's experience falls on one side of the spectrum, another woman I interviewed, whose husband gambled all their money away, was able to go back to the labour market to save her family from bankruptcy when her husband's situation hit rock bottom.

Motivations vary, and women's experiences and gendered subjectivities also. However, in interviewing women from the lower-income classes, it is no surprise that need recurred in all of the interviews, and was explained and experienced differently case by case. The few stories I was able to share in the chapter sections, above, are a sample of the rich and diverse ways in which work played either a central or a marginal role, an empowering or a disempowering one in the lives of the respondents. It makes us question whether work should always be framed as being the ultimate recipe for empowerment across cultures and classes, especially in a setting like low-income Beirut, where social security services are scarce, women are often 'forced' into work by need, and by an increasingly consumerist culture, and where formal work is not available for all. On the other side of the continuum live the women who don't work for cash, whose stories will be explored in the next section.

Tell me, Why Are you Economically Inactive

Considering the Counterfactual

In the same way that interview respondents among the economically active women displayed a wide variety of incentives for their participation in the labour market, economically inactive women's decisions can also be seen as forming a continuum that ranges from the lack of agency to choice, thus reflecting different levels of autonomy in decision-making. This, again, takes us back to our discussion at the beginning of this thesis (Chapter 1) about the difficulty in generalising about complex decision-making processes, but also reminds us that the context that was reviewed in a previous chapter (Chapter 2) matters. This section will show how previous studies hide a lot of the interesting dynamics that happen around women's work choices. Additionally, as mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), it highlights how qualitative work not only complements quantitative

data, but also enlightens us and explains a lot of the patterns that are reported from the survey.

One of my first encounters with an economically inactive woman was when I met with Ūmm Hussein¹¹. Ibrahim, the tailor in the al Basta area, accompanied me to the rusty and almost dysfunctional elevator of the building and gave me final instructions: “Whatever happens, don’t take your shoes off at their house. They are kind people, but given poverty and the age of Ūmm Hussein. You know, many people share the house, it is even welcoming to street cats. They put food for them in the house entrance. I wouldn’t want you to fall sick or anything.” He closed the elevator door, and I pressed the button for the third floor. The elevator did not move. Ibrahim opened the door again, signalling to me that there was no electricity, so I took the stairs. On each floor there were around ten apartments, and I had to be careful with my steps, as many animals must have confused the stairs of the building with pet waste disposal facilities. Little Maya (4 years old) loudly welcomed me into the house; an old fashioned living room full of pictures of Shi’a religious leaders and Hizbullah martyrs: Nasrallah, Berri, Mussa al Sader, Imad Moghnieh, and many others.

¹¹ Ūm Hussein is literally translated as ‘The Mother of Hussein’. This is a title given to the mother- whereby she is named with reference to her older son. Progressive families use the name of their eldest daughters, but this is very rare. However, using the name of your eldest daughter is a custom if you don’t have sons. If you don’t have sons, you might have a mock name and be called by it. Calling a women with reference to her son’s name is disappearing slowly in the younger generations, and in the upper classes.

Nariman, Ūmm Hussein's daughter, entered the room followed by her mother. The daughter was dressed in tight jeans, a revealing top, her long hair tied to the back. Ūmm Hussein was wearing a black *abaya* with a *hijab* wrapped around her head loosely, as is the custom in Shi'a villages in the South. Everything in the house was old and dusty: an old television, old furniture, and a very small kitchen. Ūmm Hussein was married at 14 and is now 64 years old, a mother of four sons and one daughter, who all live in this house, with only one bedroom and a living room. Abu Hussein, her husband, works as a vegetable seller in Al-Basta, the profession that had been shared by Ūmm Hussein's late father. The whole family income for 7 people does not surpass US\$1,000 in the best of months. One of Ūmm Hussein's sons is a discouraged worker- fed up with looking for work and having no luck, Nariman does not work either, and the rest of the siblings earn small amounts of cash from activities here and there, but have no fixed profession or secure job. Her sons are unmarried, because they cannot afford it, and her daughter is single too.

Then who was Maya, the little girl who opened the door for me? I asked. Maya is the daughter of Nariman's friend, who works from morning to evening cleaning houses because she is the family's breadwinner. Her husband does not work, simply because he is lazy and irresponsible, I was told; and she can't even leave her daughter with him because he is out all the time. They live in a rented room that Maya's mother pays for, and she doesn't have parents to support her, so she leaves Maya at their house and they charge her around US\$15 per month, which is a very symbolic sum, to offset Maya's costs, such as food and necessities. Nariman and Ūmm Hussein both think this is an extreme condition, and that other than cases like these, women should not be working.

Ūmm Hussein thinks financial need is the only incentive that should push women into leaving their house. However, by using intersectionality (discussed in Chapter 3) to examine the definition of need using the 'age' lens, it is interesting to highlight that, unlike what the younger women in this generation consider to be 'need' (consumerist need, explained above), what she means by 'need' is extreme need, as even with the harsh conditions in which they are living, she kept repeating to me, 'Alhamdulillah [Thank God] we are not in need!' If there is no real need, Ūmm Hussein thinks a woman should not venture outside the household, and she should be committed to caring for her children and grandchildren. Women are looking to prove themselves but, in her opinion, women can still

prove themselves inside the household as much as outside it, for instance, by raising an ideal family.

Nariman, who is in her mid-thirties, interrupts but, much to my surprise, she agrees with her mother's opinion:

Women go outside the house and leave behind them great chaos. When women earn a certain amount of income, they start telling their husbands, "I am working like you, I am earning as much as you," and the next thing is that she asks him to work inside the house, like her. The whole balance of the family is broken. Husband and wife start fighting. Do you think Maya's mother, if her husband were providing for her, would be working? Believe me, there is not one woman now who would be working if her husband could provide for her. She would sit at home. Even me, as a single woman, I used to work as a hairdresser for around two years, then I quit. The shop I was working in did not give me as much as I deserved. I used to exhaust myself and work all day in return for around US\$180 per month. If I were a mother, I would start calculating my costs, and then see clearly that my home and family are more important to me than this small amount of money.

Umm Hussein and Nariman's anecdotes give a good overview of many of the respondent's answers. Umm Hussein embodies the older generation, especially among the Shi'a Muslims in my sample, who still think about work in a conservative way. While Abu Hussein would not ban Umm Hussein from going out of the house, to visit her friends, or work, Umm Hussein thinks it foolish to leave her home and her duties unless she really needs to. This sense of responsibility for housework and raising children is something that I have noted more in older women. As to Nariman, while her speech is clearly influenced by her mother's principles, she hints at the end of the quote at what is perhaps another main reason for her inactivity: the high opportunity cost of leaving the household for very little return. Had her job maybe been more secure, with better pay, then she wouldn't be talking about work in the same terms. This relates to the literature on responsibility for doing household work (Bremen, 1996), as well as the not so encouraging cost to benefit of leaving the household, for fear of losing bargaining power to the market (Hoodfar, 1997). However, this also differs from the literature, echoing the previous section, in that women being banned from work (such as those reported in Africa and in other contexts: Oya and Sender, 2009) are not really reported in the majority of the interviews.

When being banned is reported as a reason for labour market inactivity, it is usually a trend among women who have been previously banned by their parents when they were single, and who have carried this habit with them after marriage. In this sense, women were not really ‘banned’ by their husbands, but their attitude towards the issue did encourage their husbands not to be enthusiastic about their wives working. The majority of this category were women from Muslim backgrounds. While only two cases among around forty economically inactive respondents reported that their husbands restricted their mobility generally, most women had the liberty to visit friends, go out to the market, attend religion classes, and often to volunteer for NGOs and social organisations. The majority of women also had the liberty to dress as modestly or revealingly as they wanted. What mattered for their husbands, however, was that he remained the main breadwinner. After discussions with women, this was related to several factors, which differed according to the nature of the relationship, the social standing of the family, the education of the husband, and other factors. At times, it was considered a matter of dignity, that a man should not take money from his wife. In others, husbands thought it was shameful not to provide enough for your wife to ‘live like a queen.’ Some men allowed women to work with them in the shop, as long as ‘she did not take orders from strangers.’

All the explanations, however, hint at an embedded culture and norms that was driving men’s perceptions and thinking about women earning income, and there were extremely gendered familial roles that continue to reproduce themselves from generation to generation. This echoes the previous discussions about marriage as framing women’s decision making through contracts, such as social contracts (Pateman, 1988), and conjugal contracts (Whitehead, 1981), which was discussed in previous chapters, but which is also specific to the context of Beirut. Additionally, while the survey in this research posits marriage as being the main impediment to work (40%), this section shows that it is rather logistical elements relating to marriage (household work, family responsibility, fear of losing bargaining power) that impede women from work, rather than their being banned by their husband. This poses some important questions: who has the final word in women’s decisions not to work? Is it a matter of structure, or agency? This will be explored in the next section.

A continuum Between Structure and Agency

As the previous sections of this chapter show, structural factors such as the legal system, the economy, the infrastructure of the country and the services offered, figure in the literature of the MENA region (Moghadam, 1998). In Beirut, the main factors reported in secondary data are low salaries, and the lack of the benefits of promotions, both of which are also structural factors (IWSAW, 1998). In the survey conducted for the purposes of this research, as was also summarised in previous sections, women in Beirut listed structural factors as impediments to work. While the lack of jobs that matched their skills was reported more by women in upper income classes, and educated women (presumably because they have more skills and abilities), the proximity of work and a lack of childcare centres were more specifically related to women from low-income classes. However, while all the above hold true, many of the respondents' answers from my encounters with regard to their inactivity, were very mixed accounts, mixing choice (agency) and structural factors in their rationale to explain their decision not to work.

In most cases where women have not tried work, their opinions about work were not communicated with certainty, as they did not know the counterfactual of what they would have felt had they been working. Their perceptions are heavily influenced by the experiences of working women around them. Take, for instance, this middle aged mother of two, Sirine, a Sunni Muslim who is a full-time stay at home mother. She does not work because her husband prefers it. However, she has never insisted or tried to convince him about work; as she is herself undecided:

I don't know if I would have wanted to work. Maybe if my job were to be from the morning until two. This is why I said I would have wanted to be a school teacher, because your schedule is the same as that of your kids. I know a lot of women who are working outside and who feel that they are running without being able to sustain themselves in this country. Living expenses have increased a lot, and what this woman is earning from her job outside, she is paying it all for the maid. You find women who tell you they would wish they could stop work and stay at home. Others, who are comfortable on their jobs, tell you work is like a *sobhya* [brunch], where you dress up nicely and meet all your friends. My life is very boring inside the house. I wake up, cook, get the groceries, pick my children up from school, visit my parents, and that is pretty much it. [...] This is my daily programme and you would find the majority

of non-working ladies like that. You know, a woman would feel bored with housework after a while. Your body gets tired - but imagine if you also work outside the house, *La Samahallah* [God forbid]. You really need to be crazy to do that.

The reasoning of Sirine hides exactly the tensions and dilemmas that a lot of economically inactive women that I have spoken with actually live, and that fits the theoretical framework (Chapter 1). Women's decisions cannot be looked at in isolation of the structures in which they operate: the EEPs, the legal system, the status of the economy. They would like to leave their homes for work, but only if the jobs were fairer, only if they could tailor things to their own daily lived realities. Most of the time, this is impossible, and they have to choose. However, this does not mean that their choices are void of agency, which is generally manifested through a complex web of negotiations and intra-household dynamics.

While many economically inactive women feel more inclined to negotiate work with their husbands before having children, raising kids is usually an argument that always wins them back onto the husband's side. One respondent, Nahla, confessed that she knows that her husband simply wants her not to work for selfish reasons that pertain to him and his comfort, but that he uses children only as an excuse. "... but it works!" she says, jokingly, "deep down, I know he just likes the attention. He doesn't want me to neglect the housework. He loves me to sit and talk and talk and talk, while he stares at the television without saying a word. He likes the coffee to come to him, and the food to be waiting for him. He likes stability, and if I were working outside the house, he wouldn't feel stable in his own home." In that sense, it is difficult to differentiate between structure and agency. Choices are the outcomes of continuous negotiation and renegotiation, which occur in a complex and dynamic network of changing structural factors that are not easily generalised, as the next section will also confirm.

Intersectionality and the Dangers of Generalisations

An intersectional approach (discussed in Chapter 3) has been used throughout this chapter as a lens through which to look at women's decision making processes where several sites of oppression and inequality cross. It is an important tool that allows the unpacking of otherwise 'straightforward' data, and the recognition of the complexity of factors and the

difficulty of generalisation. For instance, as previously discussed in this chapter, while Christian families tend to display more open attitudes with regard to work than do Muslim families, this issue is equally related to age and education, as well as to family backgrounds.

In my interviews, I noted that in younger, more educated couples, husbands rarely asked women to remain economically inactive. The two interviews that I found most 'conservative' in their outlook on work were actually Christian families. One of the Christian husbands that I interviewed said he had banned his wife from working because all sins came from work, and most women who go out to work end up engaging in sinful relations with other men. Many other Christian families I interviewed also displayed very traditional outlooks on the role of women, and the importance of women staying in their homes. Whether these cases are exceptions or not, is debatable. However, my point is that across the spectrum, and despite general trends on which I can report, the picture that emerges is far more complex and nuanced than anticipated and cannot be easily generalised.

This is the difficulty of qualitative research, where women at times went back to stories of their childhood, to anecdotes about their neighbours, to a book they had read years before, or to a specific experience in their marriages that had heavily influenced their choices about labour market decisions. In my opinion, their decisions are not straightforward, nor are they related to a set of predetermined factors that I, as an economist, know very well how to measure and weigh. This research has really challenged me and made me question a lot of what I have learned in terms of computations, methods for generalisability, among others.

For instance, many of the husbands who tried to ban their wives from working came from families where their mothers did not work. However, ironically, many of these men did not mind their daughters working. One of the husbands was betrayed by his ex-wife with her colleague, so would it really matter to classify this couple as a Shi'a Muslim couple, and to count him in the role of 'Shi'a Muslims who generally display bigger resistance to their wives' work'? While it is important to detect trends and make observations, it is also crucial to keep in mind all the nuances of these women's lives. Something I found really helpful was for me to think about how I had made certain

decisions at specific moments in my life, and the immense number of factors, and sometimes luck or chance, that were involved in the outcome. Respondents are not numbers or just elements of categories, they are like us, complex women with pasts, histories, and dilemmas that they themselves find hard to explain or understand.

While some elements are harder to generalise, straightforward factors that were always cited by the women as being main factors in their decisions to remain economically inactive, on the other hand, are structural factors that were discussed in the previous section. These include elements that can be categorised as the lack of support (by the state or by family members) for instance, work opportunities tend to be very far from home, no one to stay with the kids, no ability to hire a maid to help with household work, and very long working hours. All of these factors hint at the high opportunity cost, which is not offset by the benefits, thus leading to the second category of reasons cited that allude to the structure of the economy, as well as to the inherent discrimination against women in the exercise and formulations of labour market laws and institutional practice. Examples of these include: a lack of education, the lack of jobs matching skills, no schooling benefits in most jobs, no promotional opportunities for women, jobs are unstable, and the salaries are insufficient to offset the cost of leaving the household.

The costs, of course, need not always be material, and are often moral. An instance is the lack of recognition. In the words of one of the respondents, “when women work, they start paying more money than they are required to. They become responsible for certain things without having equal rights or recognition.” Another structural barrier cited by one woman is that the system does not cater for the physiological needs of the woman. In her opinion, women’s bodies face periods, pregnancies, missing their children, separation from their babies, etc., and the system’s pace is really fast, and is frequently not sensitive enough to the needs of women. She says, “we need to be able to enjoy our human instincts more, and to be treated less like robots.”

In fact, apart from the internalisation of husbands’ guilt feelings about children, and from logistical obstacles to childcare, I sensed a real desire, from certain respondents, not to work in paid labour in order to care for their children. I have also felt the extreme guilt that working mothers have reported about having to leave their children and work. One story that stayed with me is that of Hala, a middle aged Sunni mother of two. Hala and her

husband both come from low- income class families, but are extremely well-educated, with Masters' degrees in business. Before Hala was engaged to her husband, when she was almost 30 years old, she warned him that, for her, work is sacred. It was a red line, and she would never stop working. Her husband had always been very supportive in her work. After she had her two children, she was given a promotion in her job at the bank, something nobody in her family had ever dreamt of. However, with the promotion came increased working hours, gala dinners, social responsibilities with colleagues, and at a certain point, Hala started to feel very distant from her children, since she only saw them on Sundays:

I felt that they were increasingly growing apart from me. Although I had become really used to working, and was very proud of my promotion, there was something that was always irritating me. At one time, it was the end of the fiscal year, it was 10 p.m. and my phone was off. The bank phone was constantly ringing from across branches, so I stopped picking up. I was surprised to see my mother standing outside the bank entrance. My son had had a terrible fever since the morning and had reached a critical stage and no one was able to reach me. This really shook me and, after my son had recovered, I took two days off to think. My husband would help me with the housework, but I felt that I was losing my relationship with my children, that there was no longer an emotional bond, that they were slipping away from me. I noticed how annoyed they were if we had visitors on Sunday, because they would be taking time away from our time together. Housework is the easy part; you get a maid, your husband helps you. But your child's first step, the memories you build with your children, those are priceless.

The day afterwards, Hala presented her resignation at the bank, which was met with surprise. Her Director tried to convince her by offering her a bonus on top of her salary, but she refused. She had taken what she today calls 'the best decision of her life.' When she looks at her friends who are still at the bank and going higher and higher up the promotional ladder, she does not regret it. She sees how drained they are, and how many milestones in the lives of their children they have missed, and looks back at her life and smiles. Far from trying to portray Hala's case as the perfect story with a happy ending, this anecdote shows that right and wrong is relative to many factors and, depending on different stages of their lives, women feel different needs, and their priorities change.

This is a perfect illustration of the complexity of women's 'lived experiences' (discussed at the beginning of this chapter: Campbell, 2014), and the importance of

examining all the factors that affect the choices that dictate these experiences with the virtual extended household framework (Chapter 1) in which the natal household, the kinship system, the neighbourhood, the relational individuals, the structural factors, the marital and social contracts, but, above all, women's preferences, have been shaped by all the above, but are also used to negotiate the limits and limitations set by the above, to work together. All this hints at an important question that the literature does not often answer: what if women do not work because they simply do not want to? At the end of this thesis, hopefully, a better understanding of this question will have been formed.

Conclusion

This chapter started with a quotation from Freud (in Jones, 1961) in which he testifies to the fact that determining 'what does a woman want?' is one of the unresolved mysteries in his work. This question summarises the difficulty I myself encountered interviewing eighty women from the low-income Beirut in a quest to understand their decision-making processes when it comes to their labour market choices and their relationship to their marriage. This chapter has relied heavily on tools that are inspired by intersectional approaches (discussed in Chapter 3), in order to unpack those choices across the several axes of inequality and oppression in which women operate. It also looked at women's thought processes within the framework devised for this thesis (Chapter 1), in which women's choices are the outcomes of elements of their agency, which operate within a larger structure.

In this chapter, women's experiences, are revealed through the qualitative work, which has challenged the straightforward assumption that is much discussed in the literature: that the most rational decision for a woman is to engage in the labour markets (Kabeer et. al, 2013; WB, 2006, 2012), and that this pathway is the among the 'empowering' strategies for women (Eyben, 2011), showing that there are more complexities that emerge in women's lives than modernisation theory and the empowerment paradigm predict. The nuanced accounts and life stories of the women I have interviewed provide evidence that within the category of 'married women in low-income Beirut,' there emerge trends in each sub-category, such as age, sectarian group membership, and other categories. Despite this, and within the same category, no woman is

similar to another. A Christian, young, married woman with two children can have an experience that is similar to that of a Muslim woman in the same category, and very different from that of other Christian women, who are young and married with two children. If women who are at the same stages of their lives, and who come from similar sectarian group backgrounds, share very different opinions, and have chosen different 'pathways' to empowerment, and if difference is so pertinent within the same category, how can we continue to draw assumptions on what works and what doesn't in relation to 'empowering' women across the developing world?

Looking at the incentives and barriers to women's labour force activity patterns, some trends reported elsewhere in developing countries have emerged in the context of Lebanon. For instance, this chapter - in both its quantitative and its qualitative components - confirms that need is the main incentive behind women's engagement in the labour markets, similarly to East Asia (Agarwal, 1994), Latin America (Deere, 2009), and the Middle East (Moghadam, 1998, 1999, 2004). The qualitative work in this chapter, however, has contextualised the issue of need in a local, relational setting, whereby 'need' is defined differently and is shaped by the larger structure in which women make choices, as discussed in the Introduction (Chapter 1). The definition also varies across age groups, so that younger women have a much broader definition of 'need', and this is affected by a global consumerist culture. In the context of Beirut, work and what cash can buy play a role in facilitating the social mobility of the family, pushing more and more women to engage in the labour markets to enhance the status of their families. This chapter has demonstrated that, in many cases, women feel 'disempowered' by work, especially in the specific context of low-income Beirut, where the costs of working overshadow the benefits, especially in the informal markets. Finally, 'increased mobility' does not appear in this research as being an incentive to work, unlike the situation in other countries in the MENA region. This relates to the fact that most women do not report mobility problems, and can easily go out of the home, even if they are not working.

In terms of constraints to work, this chapter confirms the existence of structural impediments to women's entry into the labour markets, such as the legal system, the economy, the social contracts governing society (Miles, 2002; Moghadam, 2003, 2004; Jansen, 2004; Hijab, 2001). However, the majority of those studies have looked at women's

inactivity patterns from a macro-perspective, thus hiding the complex dynamics that occur in women's decision-making processes at a micro-, intra-household level. This chapter fills this gap, especially within the context of low-income Beirut. The survey used for this research shows that while marriage is listed as a main disincentive for work by women, similarly to other contexts, it is, rather, the logistical elements that are attached to marriage that are at play, rather than the husbands 'banning' their wives from work. An interesting finding is that 31% of economically inactive women listed their desire to remain economically inactive. This is mainly among women in low-income classes. This finding was complemented by the qualitative work with women, who are not active in the labour markets, a notion that was briefly discussed in this chapter, but that will be further elaborated upon in the following chapters (5 and 6).

This chapter thus confirms what has been reported in the literature (Kabeer, 2008), that women's decision-making processes can be drawn within a continuum of choice and constraint. However, it contextualises this process within low-income Beirut, both in the specificities of its setting (with reference to Chapter 2) and of the theoretical framework that provides the perfect tool for the analysis of such a process (with reference to Chapters 1 and 3). The findings in this chapter represent one piece of a larger puzzle in understanding what drives women to make the labour market decisions that they do, an answer that will fully materialise in the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 5

Economies of the Household: Who Spends What and Where?

When I first started my research, I thought that determining the trends in women's spending patterns would be its most straightforward topic, if compared to decision-making on labour market participation, marriage, sexual relations, among other topics. On the other hand, I also anticipated some resistance from women in opening up on this subject, given that it might be a sensitive one. In my focus groups, participants told me that Lebanese women, even if they don't earn much in the way of income, like to show that they live a luxurious life. Hence, they warned me that it was likely that none of the women I would interview would share their spending routines, especially if there were a critical relationship with their husbands in relation to this.

In fact, both my expectations were erroneous: while some respondents actually reacted in a way that was consistent to what I had predicted, the majority of women opened up straight away. Talking about money, who pays for what, and the ways in which their husbands give them income, was something very normal for them. In fact, most respondents told me that they would often discuss this with their neighbours, the women in their circles, their sisters and mothers, and they would compare habits of spending, and ways to convince their husbands to change their expenditure patterns. Respondents were very open in sharing their daily economic routines, showing me receipts, pay cheques, and even confiding in me about financial problems, about which they did not dare speak with their husbands or family. However, determining trends in spending was harder than I had thought, as many factors affected this pattern, and each woman was optimising her resources within a set of constraints that was specific to her situation.

This takes us back to the theoretical framework discussed at the beginning of this thesis, specifically to the Rational Choice Theory, which places the rational man/woman at the basis of the decision making process. This neoclassical economic model has its foundation in the idea that each rational individual will maximise his or her utility in each choice by weighing the opportunity costs. As shown in the Introduction (Chapter 1), this

model is subject to a lot of criticism. This model is also complicated by the addition of the utility of the household, as one component. Later, this was challenged by the incorporation of bargaining strategies and negotiation dynamics within the household. In the case of Lebanon, in my theoretical chapter I built a model embedding context-based notions, such as the ‘virtual extended households,’ that are formed by the natal-, conjugal-, neighbour-, and family related household. In this model, each person is a relational individual, who is governed by a ‘patriarchally connected’ society. Finally, these households, and the society itself, operate within a web of structural constraints and Extra Environmental Parameters (EEP) (Chapter 1).

The need to remember this model at this stage of the thesis is required to highlight the fact that decision-making that is related to household spending, despite it being a straightforward ‘economic’ decision relating to measurable transactions (supposedly much simpler than decisions to marry, to work, or some other things), is still very complex. This is why it is important to analyse this phenomenon through the lens of the framework above. Interdisciplinarity thus emerges here as an important tool of understanding, because economic decisions are analysed using economics and gender theory, but also sociological elements. Additionally, the fact that this research examines the decision-making of women, incorporating a gender lens, will be important in order to understand the power dynamics of spending decisions.

Gender relations are inherently unequal, but also interact with structures of social hierarchy, such as class, ethnicity, marital status, age, etc. (Floro, 2014, p. 415). An incorporation of such factors is, again, successfully achieved by using an intersectional methodology that looks at the crossings of all those sites of inequality. Adding to the complexity is the fact that gender relations are not static. They change according to context, time, and the trajectory of each relationship (Ibid). This will be fleshed out throughout the chapter when looking at how the decision-making of each woman, in relation to household expenditure and spending dynamics, changes depending on what stage of her life she is in, for example. In addition, these negotiation dynamics differ from one woman to another and depend on a series of factors, as will be shown in the qualitative work that was done.

Hence, looking at spending patterns, especially through an intersectional approach, leads to conclusions that are only generalisable in relation to an individual, or a group of

individuals. This chapter will show that there is a very high level of diversity within groups, which confirms that trends are at times hidden in the pure quantitative or macro-scale study of spending patterns and economic-related disciplines (Sigle-Rushton, 2014). Additionally, this chapter is important because it will fill a gap in the study of the economies of the household in Lebanon. It will shed light on differences in spending patterns between working and non-working women in the labour markets, confirming certain trends in the literature, while questioning others.

Singerman and Hoodfar (1996), among other researchers in this particular field, have carried out in-depth research on the informal socio-economic structures of low-income communities in Cairo, where they studied the reactions of household in low-income Egypt to the changing economic and social conditions of the time: in particular, they looked at the market-oriented shift that Cairo underwent, which led to the commodification of services, and the implication that this had for women. However, the context of Cairo is very different from that of Beirut: respondents in low-income Cairo are highly dependent, both economically and socially, on an extended network of kin. Women in low-income Beirut, additionally, are more educated (on average) than women in the context of the Singerman and Hoodfar (1996) study. In this study (Ibid), respondents are mainly in low-skilled jobs in the informal market, something similar to rural areas in Lebanon, rather than to low-income Beirut, where most interviewees have at least finished their secondary education, and many have also completed university. Those same differences emerge in many studies that were reviewed in the literature on Egyptian, Jordanian, Bangladeshi, and other communities in the Middle East and South Asia (Kabeer, 2000; Hasso, 2011; Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997).

In addition, the women I have interviewed display much higher trends to consumerism, which is manifested in their spending habits and cultural conduct, and this is something that I did not encounter to the same extent in the literature. Finally, studies about Beirut that look at aspects that are discussed in this chapter, such as gender roles, decision-making, and relationality -mainly championed by Joseph (1993, 1996)- need to be revised and updated in light of changes in the structure of the economy and globalisation patterns in the recent years. Since there are no studies on this particular subject in relation to low-income Beirut, the next section will provide a background to the economies of spending in

this context through an overview of the data gathered from the survey that was conducted for the purposes of this research.

Economies of Spending in Low-Income Beirut

Subjective Social Class

Before delving into the particularities of the qualitative sample, which consisted of around 80 women (and 10 men) from different families to whom I have spoken about household spending habits, this section will provide an overview of the relevant findings from the survey of the data that was collected in Beirut for the purposes of this research.

To begin, the statistics from the survey that was conducted in Beirut show that only around 3% of respondents earn below US\$450 per month, and only about 26% report their monthly household income to be below US\$1000. This means that less than a quarter of the households in Beirut are considered to belong to the low-income class. On the other hand, the highest income category is found in those who earn between US\$1,500 and US\$2,500 per month (23%), which qualifies as middle income. These findings become more interesting when compared to the responses of the interviewed families, who report their subjective class (i.e., their social class according to their perception; Evans, Kelley, and Kolosi 1992) as being lower than it actually is, if we use the monthly household income as an indicator. Again, this is an observation that points to the importance of qualitative findings in explaining trends and in highlighting issues that do not appear from the quantitative data.

In different contexts, this finding differs: In the States, for instance, the majority tend to identify with the ‘middle-income class’, no matter which class they belong to (Adair, 2001). Studies show that people tend to identify with a subjective class according to the ‘objective’ elements of status, i.e., education, family name and reputation, among others (Evans and Kelley, 2001). Given that, in a city like Beirut, families spend a lot, especially on services such as health, education and transport (which are not provided by the state), their income (even if it is higher than the nationally set standards, on which classes are determined) remains barely sufficient for them to belong to a higher social status.

Identifying Breadwinners

Across social classes, the main breadwinner is the husband, for married women, and one of the parents, for non-married women. Only 14% of respondents report that they are the main heads of the household (Figure 15). These are mostly divorced, separated and non-married women. This confirms the traditional pattern reported in many countries in the MENA region whereby the gender norms still dictate the head of the household as being a male (Roudi-Fahimi and Mederios Kent, 2007). In the survey conducted by this research, this does not necessarily coincide with who it is who earns the highest income, as, in many cases, the respondents still name their husband as the household head, despite the fact that they are working and, at times, they are earning a higher income. Their perception of the head of the household is not simply as the person who is the primary bread-winner, but this perception is also associated with the notions of power and decision making that will be discussed in more depth in later sections of this chapter.

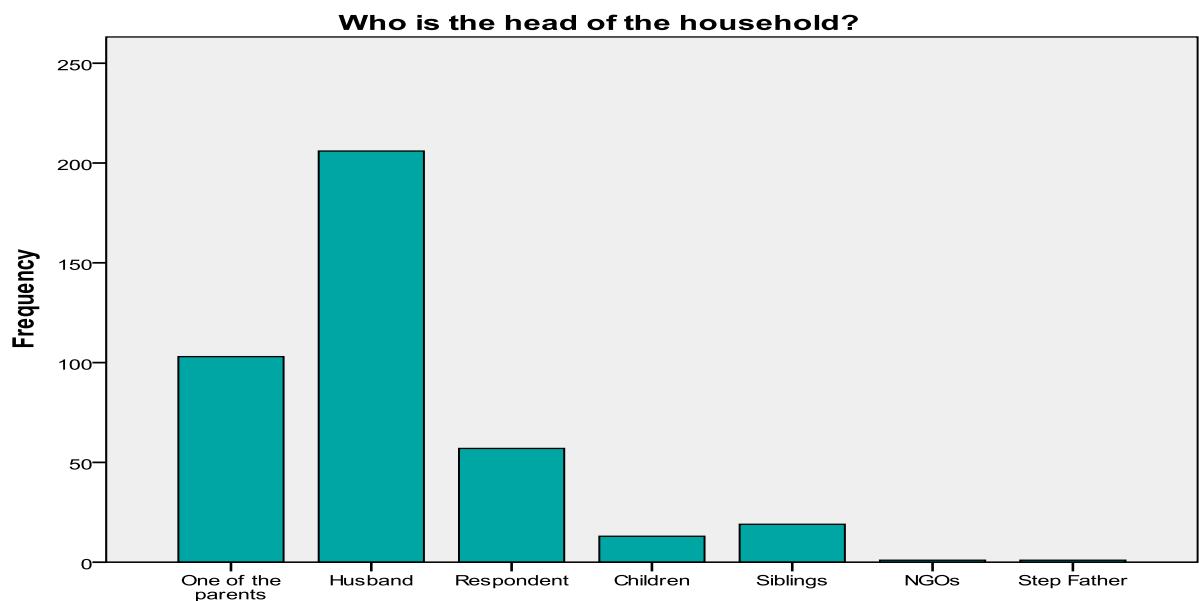


Figure 15 Who is the Head of the Household?

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

Among surveyed women, the majority (42%) reported that they did not have an income, which is lower than the percentage of women who are active in the labour markets.

This percentage roughly coincided with the percentage of working women in the labour market, leaving out the 7% who reported being active in the labour market, but who then answered that they do not earn an income. This can either signal that the respondents have confused ‘earning personal income’ with having an amount of money that they can spend on their own leisure, or it could imply that some women work in family businesses, shops, or at home, without any cash earnings in return. The majority of women who reported not having income are married women.

On the other hand, being married does not affect how much money a woman earns, as a high percentage of women who are earning a higher income are married. Those earning around US\$450 are, in the majority, single, which means that their income could be related to their youth (and lack of work experience), rather to being single. The respondent’s personal income level increases with their educational attainment. The same correlation was also reported by the positive correlation between employment status and level of education.

Sources of Income

Although the majority of Lebanese live outside Lebanese soil (there are around 16 million Lebanese expatriates and people of Lebanese origin who are living outside Lebanon, and 4 million living inside it), the majority of respondents in Beirut (92%) report not receiving any remittances from abroad. In some instances, remittances can be considered to play a positive role for women who don’t work outside the household, but who still enjoy some independence in spending if they receive money from abroad. In Beirut, according to the survey for this research, this is not the case.

Does the household receive any remittances from abroad?

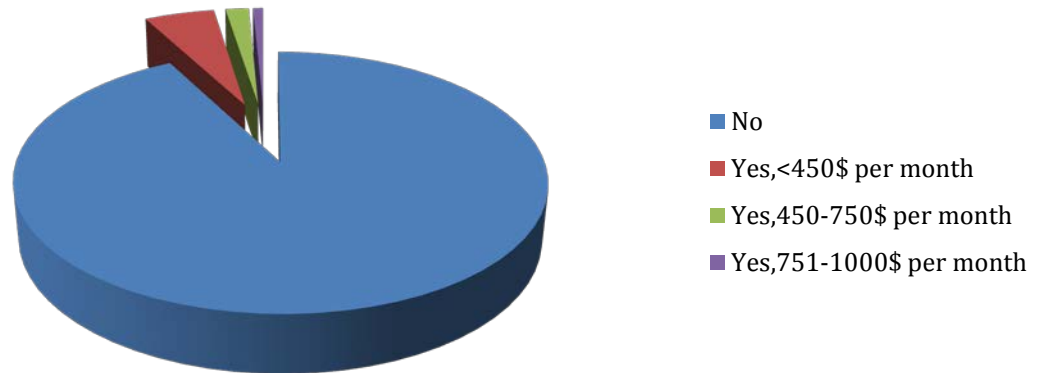


Figure 16 Does the Household Receive Any Remittances from Abroad?

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

On the other hand, half of the respondents reported owning at least one asset (car, land or house), which is a high percentage.

Does the respondent own any assets?

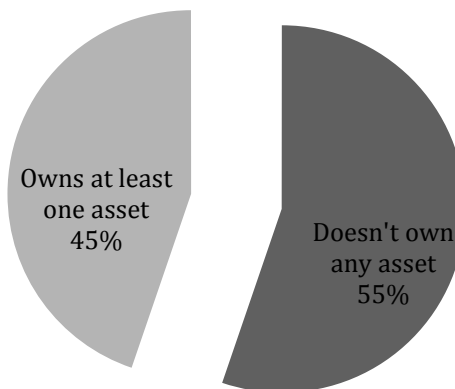


Figure 17 Does the Respondent Own Any Assets?

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

This factor has been reported in the negotiation literature, which was discussed in the theoretical section (Chapter 1) as influencing women's positionality and decision-making powers in the house. This statistic is another indicator of why the context in Beirut may be different and requiring further study.

Discerning Spending Habits

With regard to women who earn an income, most women spend some percentage of their income on household needs. Only 16% of income-earning women do not spend any of their income on the household, but rather only on their personal needs. The majority of the latter category is constituted of women from households with higher income levels. There is an almost equal number of women spending a quarter, half,, and three quarters of all their income on the household, thus showing a wide range of contributions to household spending, which will be discussed in more detail in the qualitative section that follows.

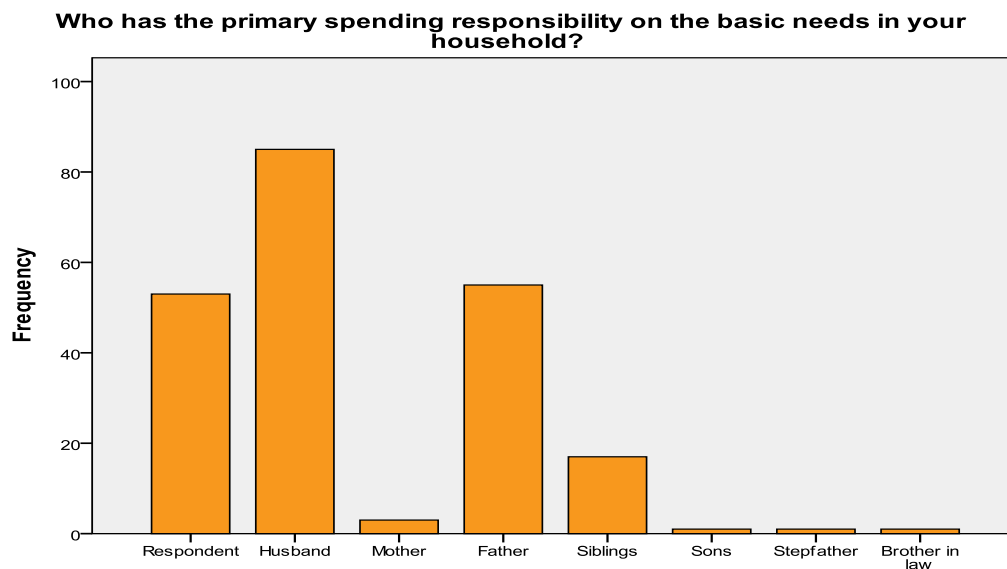


Figure 18 Primary Spending Responsibility for Basic Needs

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

In terms of primary spending responsibility for basic needs, the majority of married respondents reported that their husbands take care of such expenditure. Single respondents have reported that they and their fathers are equally primarily responsible for covering the

basic needs of the household. As discussed above in relation to the head of the household, some married respondents answered that they spend most on basic needs, regardless of their answer with regard to the main breadwinners in the family; however, this percentage is fairly low. The next section serves to better understand those trends in the light of the qualitative work that was conducted to complement it.

Negotiating Income Among Economically Inactive Women

It's All About the Image

I have known my friend, Mira, for many years now, and I had never thought of her as anything other than a girl born with a silver spoon in her mouth. She always carried *signé* designer bags, lived in an upper-income class neighbourhood, and had a driver. Her father had studied in France, and she, too, had a very good education. Most respondents thought that social mobility is a possibility in Beirut through education and economic standing, as the society is not constituted of tribes, nor of family status inheritance. Clearly, discussions in focus groups show that there are families who are known to be more 'powerful' than others, with regard to social standing, but you can earn your way up the social ladder if you work hard, and if, like Mira, you can cover this image well. The proof of this argument is the discovery that I made about Mira's family after years of friendship.

Mira and I were sitting in a coffee shop in Beirut, and I was complaining to her about the difficulty of finding respondents in a low-income neighbourhood of Beirut, especially among the Shi'a communities, as I did not have a lead contact for this category. Mira kept silent. Months after this encounter, and seeing my frustration turn into panic, Mira decided to introduce me to some respondents. Timidly, she said, "you know my father worked in Africa, and he is a self-made man. His family, however, live in Al-Basta, and maybe you can interview my aunt, and her neighbours. Here are their numbers."

It was then that I discovered one of the reasons why most citizens of Beirut dress somewhat the same. Most of them, no matter how little income they earn, owned a cellular phone, and went to the same restaurants. As social networks are narrow, people know each other, and people may have links across classes, and may have kin across economic and

social backgrounds. Mira's aunt repeatedly refused to meet me, giving me polite excuses each time. I later discovered from her neighbour that she refused to meet me because her husband works in Hizbullah, and secrecy is one of the main principles that governs their lives. She was suspicious of my motives and, of course, of my recorder.

I ended up meeting Mira's aunt's neighbours, in a very old, but beautiful, building in *Msaytbeh*. Each step of the staircase leading to the first floor –where Mira's aunt's house faces the house of their neighbours, whom I was interviewing- counts as a double step in today's new staircases because of its height. I rang the doorbell, which sounded like a bird's chant. Mayssa opened the door. Mayssa is a 48 year old mother of three. She is a Shi'a Muslim, with an education to intermediate (middle school) standard. What started as an interview with Mayssa lasted for ten hours, after we were gradually joined by her daughter, her son, her nephew, her husband, and her other neighbour. With each person that joined, we would revisit all the topics and highlight different aspects, sometimes disagreeing, to the extent that I believe Mira's aunt could hear us behind her Hizbullah-like, carefully closed doors.

Mayssa is economically inactive, but her daughter and her eldest son work. Back in the days when she was still unmarried, her parents did not even allow her to go outside onto the balcony. Her husband, 5 years older than she is, reached only the fifth elementary in terms of educational attainment. He owns a small sweet shop near their home. I was welcomed, and seated on an old couch in a salon that I later learned Mayssa inherited from her in-laws.

Mayssa's case is uncommon among the respondents. In fact, her answers only represent a minority of women who work in the labour market, and they don't represent any of the economically active women that I have interviewed. Only less than twenty percent of respondents, like Mayssa, don't interfere at all with spending. Most of these women come from conservative families across religions, rather one from particular religion.

Mayssa rarely has cash in her hands. Everything she needs is bought and delivered home to her by her husband, or by local shops that her husband pays directly, or she goes shopping with her husband, who takes care of the bill at the end. According to Mayssa, this does not relate to a lack of trust, or to increased control by her husband, but rather to the fact that she considers this simply not to be her area of expertise or of interest. Like her,

most respondents from this specific category do not see this as being a negative aspect of their lives but, on the contrary, they think that this removes some of the responsibility from their shoulders, especially as most, if not all, of the household responsibilities are theirs to handle. Generally, most women who are not employed do not have an idea about how much their husbands earn, and they claim not to be interested in knowing.

Whether or not to take their words at face value is always a dilemma for the researcher. However, the strength with which the women who responded in this way have argued for this spending arrangement is definitely telling. Women who are used to this system, and who have not tried another, somehow feel satisfied, or at least used to it. In the ten hours I spent at Mayssa's house, there was nothing she said or did that contradicted the image she portrayed about her life. Although this time was too short, Mayssa came over to me as a very consistent person. She says:

My husband has a sweet shop that he owns. It is a small one, but it earns enough money for him to take care of all the spending. At least, I don't ask anything from anyone. I used to ask my father for things, and wished I didn't. Never ask anyone for money. Not even from your husband, even if he is your husband. My husband takes care of all the spending. And if I worked and earned income, I think my husband wouldn't let me spend it on household things, because he is the type who likes to say 'I am getting the things...' [...] I don't know how much my husband earns... he says, I spent them here and there, I paid off some debts and spent everything... believe me, I have never asked him, and it's not a constant salary, so I would not know... My husband, even if he buys something for US\$2, he would tell you I bought it for 3, so I got used to it... I would never believe, *khalas* [that's it]. Something that is not in my interest... I gave in, for example, he would tell you: I paid here, I paid there, and the salary is gone... *khalas* why do I need to know?... I get all I want... He gets the vegetables, I don't know how to get vegetables, I don't know how to get meat, and I don't want to know! He gets everything, especially here in the vegetable market. And I don't even know how to pick the things up... and at the supermarket, when we go to get stuff for the house, we go together, and he would pay... for example, there are women who would go to get things and take up the rest for their pockets... I don't have such a thing! And I don't need to do this, because if I want something, I ask for it, and I get it. The things I usually like to pick are clothes, for example, or shoes... then, we go together and he will pay.

Mayssa's quotation reveals two possibilities. When she says, 'I gave in' about knowing how much her husband's salary is, Mayssa embodies the position for which Sen argues- when women come to accept and like the position of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice in it (1999, p.7). Of course, here there is the debate about the extent to which this is the outcome of an active choice, or whether it is compliance to a subordinating position. Additionally, this 'underdog' position should be viewed not only in the light of their decision-making and positionality within the family or the household, but also within the web of expectations and responsibilities within the larger system. Maybe a decision that seems- at face value- if examined only within the household, to be an acceptance of an underdog position, may be, if looked at within the larger structure, the best decision to have taken, or it could even be an act of rebellion.

The other possibility comes into view when she says, 'I don't know how to get the vegetables [...] and I don't want to know.' This lack of interest, other than being a total surrender to the order, might be a real comfort in the current situation, as in a further conversation, Mayssa compares herself to her sister. Her sister is married and is a working mother. Mayssa thinks her sister over-works: she takes care of the children, cooks, cleans, goes to work, and has to do all the shopping too. In Mayssa's opinion, her sister is unlucky, because she did not marry someone who would pamper her [*yssateta*] but, instead, she has to spend her income on the household and run around from one supermarket to another, comparing prices and carrying bags. This is consistent with many working women's answers about regretting the fact that they work, or that they regret spending that much on the household needs, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

Generational Shifts

In total opposition to Mayssa's case was that of her nephew, who later joined the conversation. At the age of only 26, Khalil is married to the love of his life, two years younger than he is. While it is fairly uncommon for men of his age to be married, Khalil's family supported his marriage. Khalil and his wife live in a rented apartment, and his wife is currently not working because they have a small baby. His Aunt, Mayssa, mocked Khalil when he confessed to me that he, in fact, gives his wife his whole salary as soon as he receives it. She is then responsible for all the spending. This

pattern of household spending was actually more common than Mayssa's pattern, and covered more than half of the economically inactive women's cases in my research. Souheir, a Christian respondent in her mid-sixties, whose husband recently retired, has now started to count on her children for financial support, and says:

When my husband used to work none of my kids used to spend on the household. He would take his salary and immediately give it to me, and we would pay the rent, I would pay for the electricity, and use the rest for household expenditure. He would give me everything in my hand, and I would go to register the kids at school, pay their fees, even if they asked for parents of the student, he would be in his job, so I would go to all these... All the financing plans were me... I was the planning head [*al ra2s el modabber*]. The most important thing is that the planning head knows how to manage, as they say '*mara bit 3ammer w mara bet dammer*' [one woman builds, and one woman destroys]... He gave me the salary knowing that it was in safe hands... I am honest with him regarding everything... I don't spend on unnecessary things. This is why women are not marrying, they would tell you: I want a Srilankians [a maid], I want a house.... Who can get you a house now? Who has money...? But when the husband sees his woman is just and righteous, he will trust her with his money. In the end, he trusts her with what is more important than money. His children.

In such cases, the husband often does not feel any threat to his masculinity, because he is the main income earner, and gives his wife all the freedom she needs to spend their income. Most of the women from this category started giving me tips about how to turn my future husband into a man like theirs, who gives me all his income. They told me the most important thing is to always show him that he is the most important person, and that you are happy with whatever you are buying with his money: "Men want to feel like they are the source of your happiness. They don't care about anything else. If they don't feel threatened, they will give you the world." Here is a clear instance of the patriarchal bargain that is discussed in Chapter 1 (Kandyoti, 1988), whereby women strive to achieve certain trade-offs within the patriarchal system that governs their lives. At the same time, based on my respondents, many seem to be doing this 'willingly', and they are happy with their choices, since they are receiving everything that they perceive they desire.

In these circumstances, as I will develop more thoroughly later in the chapter, these women consider themselves to be the most important pillar of the house, and that no matter

how much they argue with their husbands, they have the final say in everything. Those women, who still undertake a large share of the household activities and have not outsourced those 'services' to the market, still enjoy a very high position in the household.

'Le fond Secret,' French for the Secret Account

Another respondent considers herself a success story with her husband. Salam, a Sunni woman in her mid-thirties, is married to her second cousin, who works in a clothes shop. She used to work as a secretary in a law firm before she married. After delivering her first baby, she dropped out of the labour market, and stopped earning an income. She says that nothing changed because, from the start, she didn't make her husband used to not paying for her needs.

When I worked I spent my income on myself... No no no no, not on the family. Never on the family. This is where most women go wrong. On myself, my clothes, bags, shoes, additional things for me. Now my wants have changed, I like to buy things for the house... I like to fix my house, get things that are missing. From the house income, I save and I buy what I need for the house. My house is sacred to me. My type is like that. I like the house, *baytoutyeh*, I like to fix it, I like to cook, to do deserts...

In terms of spending, her husband gives her money whenever it is needed, as happens with almost a quarter of the nonworking respondents. She recounts:

Now, and after I stopped working, he is the only provider; I don't know specifically what his income is, because he works in commerce, so there is not a fixed salary. Maybe one day he gets US\$5 per day, on another US\$50, it depends on each day... but I gave you a range. He gives me the salary for the house, and each day he asks me how much I need for the house to be full and not lacking anything? No, maybe one day he will give me an amount to get stuff, and another day I would have people coming over, he would give me something else. The meat, I would call the butcher and he would get me my meat to the house every two weeks, all that I need, meat and chicken... and I put them in the freezer... I don't ask every day for money. But when I need, I ask. But I have a personal salary that he gives to me privately, but for the house daily needs... But, for example, one thing per month, if I saw something and I liked it, I get it, not necessarily from my husband, but also from my inheritance from my parents... but I try to leave things aside, because you never know what will happen to you... But, for

example, if I needed something, I am sorry [*ma t2akhzeeni*], if I put aside 20 from here 20 from there, from here 50, I can fulfil all my needs. So without his knowledge, if would get things.

Many respondents reported using this technique to get the extra things that their husbands do not support. For instance, if they spent 8 dollars on fruit and vegetables from the 10 dollars that their husbands gave them, they would put the 2 dollars aside. And they would add up extras from here and there, until there saving amounts to a number that can buy them the luxuries that their husbands think are unnecessary. As one respondent called it, this is 'le fond secret,' French for the secret bank account. When I asked if the husband finds out, some women said that the husband would know, but would let it be –better than opening the space for them to ask for more money. In other cases, women would say those were gifts from their parents, in a common arrangement with their mothers and sisters to use the same argument with the other husbands. This type of negotiation and these tricks give women the satisfaction of being able to do what they want, despite their husbands' agreement.

Again, this strikes as being related to the patriarchal bargain, which was discussed earlier. However, there are two interesting observations to make. Those same bargains, those same tricks, will figure again in the lives of working women, just in other forms. In this sense, work in the labour markets—or the lack of it- is not the ultimate empowering or disempowering factor. Just like women's decision-making processes, those bargains and negotiations need to be seen not only within the household, but also within the larger system: the extended household system, the structures and factors that were discussed in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 1), which will be revisited later in this chapter.

Need- Revisited

Where do women spend this extra money that they put aside from their 'income'? Most respondents report household items (furniture, décor, accessories), as well as income support for their parents as being the main categories of spending for which they use this extra income. Marianna, the mother of four children, who stays at home, a Christian who

earned a baccalaureate and got married without pursuing further education, and whose husband works in the public sector, describes this habit:

I get things for the home [laughs], accessories for the house, [laughs] because he tells me 'Why this? What for? What for? We have...' men don't like these things. I prefer to buy them from my money without giving myself a headache in asking him for it. But other things, like clothes, he pays for, and he goes himself and buys me perfumes, for instance. But bed sheets, nice towels, accessories for the house, all these I buy from the house expenditure savings, without him noticing. Like if I bought meat, or chicken or something else, I pass them with them... without him noticing... For example, I liked something for the salon, a painting; I bought it for 75,000 LL (US\$50). This month, I don't have any money anymore. You know? On the other hand, if I want to buy boots this month, give me,... he gives me... But the painting, he would have said to me, 'why did you buy it? We have!! Our house is now full!!'

Marianna does not know how much her husband earns, and does not ask him, as long as her needs and wants are satisfied. As with many other respondents who see that I am still single (which in their mind translates as not officially engaged or married yet), they give me extensive advice on relationships. Marianna thinks that if you ask your husband how much he earns, you would start getting into the detail, and if you get into the detail, then your husband can easily tell you: "this month, I don't have enough." But if you make your demands clear from the start (with a big emphasis on **from the start**), then he will feel the responsibility to always secure your needs. A very popular saying among respondents translates as: 'you habituate your husband, and you train your dog,' to illustrate that the wife has a big role in what the husband does, and that each women's relationship fate is in her hands. However, the wife should also be considerate at times when her husband is in need, so that when he is in good standing, he will support her. Marianna narrates:

Sometimes in one month, I might get an unexpected event, I need to buy a dress, He gives me money to get it, but sometimes when he has to pay the school fees for the children, I would not ask for anything. I know this month he has the fees to pay I don't ask. I just take the salary for the house. I am not a demanding woman. And. Also, this would make him trust me more. When he feels that I am feeling for him, feeling when he can and when he can't, he stops questioning me when I next ask him for something. You need to be considerate, you know.

A few years back, Marianna inherited from her parents. But, she tells me that since the system was already set and running, this inheritance did not change their pattern of spending:

Nothing changed after I inherited, but I tell my husband you have *carte blanche* on them, just like I have *carte blanche* on my share. I don't have any differences, and I don't even think about this. But he knows that I don't touch this money. He knows that it is mine, and even when he needed a loan, he did not ask me for the inheritance money. I then proposed to lend it to him, and he accepted it. But he returned every cent of it. I am not stupid, I would not give it to him, because then he will get used to it.

Marianna explains this husband/wife relationship like any other business relationship, it's about expectations, interests, competition, and rewards. She says that, just like work, if you do not compete with your husband in his 'department', you will keep good ties with him. And if you give enough (are a good listener, cook good food, etc.) you will receive in return.

Fixed Contracts with Variable Clauses

Marianne's thoughts are very close to Pateman's social contract (1988), in which marriage is an underlying contract in which a set of unspoken laws are there to manage the relations between husband and wife. It also speaks to the neoliberal views that are discussed in the introduction, that portray marriage as being based on a utility maximising equation.

Marianne's thinking merges these two theories as she indeed sees her relationship with her husband as an equation. While the fact that she is bargaining with restrictions (such as saving to buy what she wants) fits Deniz Kandyoti's (1988) bargaining with patriarchy, as discussed above, the case of women who are not economically active in low-income Beirut varies at times from Kandyoti's theory.

Kandyoti argues that women use coping strategies and mechanisms to optimise the patriarchal system, to maximise their security and to increase life options. Kandyoti further posits that those bargains are perpetually negotiable, while many women whom I've interviewed say that those bargains are fixed, and they are determined from the start of the relationship. They consider that it is not only about owning assets, earning income, or being from a better family (things that can all somehow help), it is mostly based on the terms on

which the women 'enter' into the contract that sets the relationship for life. Many women think of the time after the engagement and before the marriage as being very crucial to setting the boundaries of the relationship. Some women I have interviewed regret the fact that they allowed certain actions to pass while they were engaged, without making a big fuss about it. Those actions became normal behaviour for the men later on. And other women argue that the time of the engagement and the first month of marriage are the times when husband and wife test each other's' limits and set the boundaries of their relationship. This means that they consider the terms of the contract to be fixed, rather than negotiable.

Kandiyoti also describes the women as maximising their life decisions in the system in which they have become vested. This goes back to Sen's argument that women seem to feel that they are in an 'underdog position,' investing and participating, and reinforcing their positionality in the household. However, given most of the interviews were with economically inactive women, their perception of their positionality is that they have the upper hand. Most of them consider that they are in a stronger position, they do what they want and make their husbands think that they, the husbands, are doing what they want. They recognise the inequality in the system, and they are well aware of it, and turn it to their full advantage, rather than not recognising it and becoming an implicit accomplice to it, without knowing this, as is portrayed in the theory. By choice, women become complicit actors in the system only if the system is in their interest.

This goes back to the previous chapter (Chapter 4), when many women are, in fact, willingly choosing not to work. Many women think the system would become unequal if they started to work, as the husband would start expecting them to share their income, and then they would be giving more than they are receiving. For instance, Jana, a middle aged respondent narrates:

The main provider is my husband, because he is the only one who works, maybe if I worked we would've shared this responsibility. If I worked, I would help him with my salary, of course. If the husband knows you are working, he will count on you 100%. Even if there is no financial need, the man will count on your salary if you work. For example, now, all my expenses are required from him: my clothes, my outings, everything. Maybe if you work, he would tell you to pay for these from your salary. If you liked something for the house, you would get it from your own money. To me, there aren't advantages to having your own income, because

I don't need anything. I get everything I ask for. In terms of my say in the household, I don't think it would matter... working or not, there are men who are dictators and whose opinions have to be heard, despite everything, and you have men who don't like the woman to pay for anything in the house, so that she wouldn't tell him 'I pay with you!' and you have a lot of types, not all your fingers are the same, each man has a different mentality... [...] You have different types of men, I am telling you... he tells me: "get, and I give you, buy and I give you, buy and I give you,..." For example, today I went and bought chicken and meat, how much is the total I would take from him... I don't write it, I just tell him I paid this, and he gives me... everything is from him, he charges my phone, dyes my hair, everything.

In her book *Between Marriage and the Market*, Hoodfar (1997) has summarised the financial arrangements of women into several patterns with self-explanatory titles: wife as financial manager, wife as family banker, full-housekeeping allowance, husband as financial manager, and 'guest-husband.' Some of those categories re-emerge in the context of low-income Beirut, where respondents can indeed have the features of certain categories. However, I think the story in each household is different, as the quotation above highlights, there are many types of male personality, and each relationship is based on a different dynamic, and different resources and constraints.

Behind each door there is a story which, despite patterns, cannot be fitted under one big title. Most of the stories that I heard were not of oppression and lack of trust. Although one might argue that oppressed women would be more reluctant to share their stories, this research aimed to highlight that those are not the only stories. Women whom I interviewed recounted stories of a reality lived with a lot of obstacles and constraints relating to earning and spending in a developing country. Such obstacles and difficulties are not recounted when Arab men are reported to be 'oppressing' Arab women who don't earn an income. These are stories that, in their diversity, are not meant to justify or judge, but merely to understand.

Working Women's Household Spending Patterns

Spending patterns vary between economically active and inactive women. The majority of income-earning respondents spend most of their income (if not all) on the household; very few of them spend it only on their leisure, or on savings. Going out of the household and

into the labour market shifts the dynamics between husband and wife from being one in which women maintain responsibility only for the chores in the household, into being one in which women are responsible for everything- including household work.

Way too Much, Way too Little

Ūmm Walid is a retired teacher in her seventies. Skinny, wearing a black skirt to the knee, and a white shirt, she welcomed me into her house as she would welcome a principal into a classroom, in a very formal, yet friendly, way. Ūmm Walid is the mother of three: Walid, now married with three children himself; Aya, married with four children; and Niveen, also married with one child. Ūmm Walid describes her husband as being the main breadwinner, although she was the one who was mainly spending on the house. Her husband used to work at a law firm, but his income did not match hers. As a teacher at a public school, and as a private teacher in the afternoon, Ūmm Walid had health insurance, schooling for her children, and a good income also.

Working in what the society at the time considered to be ‘respectable’ job, she had nothing to worry about. She describes herself as a workaholic, while her husband used to waste most his time playing cards with friends, inviting them over, and doing nothing, she narrated. Every night, after having worked for the whole day, she came home, cooked, received kids for private teaching, showered her children, overviewed their homework, and prepared their lunch boxes for the next school day; it was time for her second shift. Ūmm Walid would then have to get dressed again, prepare the table for the cards and backgammon, the snacks, the drinks, and become, as she described it, ‘a waitress’ for Abu Walid and his friends, “every night would be the same. He had absolutely no consideration for me, or for how tired I was. Pleasure was his only consideration.”

Ūmm Walid described how she did all the spending, and how, over the years, he would spend some of his income on the household, but seeing that she was disciplined and would also spend hers on important things if he didn’t, he started spending less and less, increasingly counting on her to do the spending. Ūmm Walid regrets her decision to help her husband with the household spending, and thinks that it would have been better for her had she saved some money, “if I had money on the side, I would have had a much better life after my retirement.” Her two daughters, who joined us later, after the interview, agreed

with her. Aya is not working, simply because she did not want to repeat the mistakes of her mother. As for Niveen, she works full time, but she has made sure that her husband is the sole and primary provider for the household. Ūmm Walid's words would always resonate with her two daughters:

All these years we would both be spending our income, but I am a 'donkey' (Hmara) all these years, I didn't save up even one penny, and today I am penniless. What did I gain from all that? He used to travel and spend all his income on his leisure, and I would take care of all the different loans and all the things we needed to pay, I was very stupid. Above it all, I was the housemaid. If only he had paid me what a normal man would pay the maid, I would have been better off today!

In the above scenario, and according to Ūmm Walid, earning an income was not a necessarily a positive element in her life. While she agrees that the situation might have been worse without the income, as he might still have spent his money on his own pursuits, she says she was too tired to be working and paying for it herself. Many respondents reported a similar pattern, especially women in their later forties or in the fifties. Women in this age group, whose body has started to wear out from working two shifts, both in- and outside the household, and who have used all their income to help their husbands, would, in general, show direct or indirect regret at the decisions they took.

Gendered Roles Within the Household

The trade-offs that are discussed above relate to the fact that women are still carrying out their traditional roles in the household, and they are also doing labour market work. According to the survey, 65% of the respondents do the bulk of the household chores (like laundry, cleaning, etc.). The second highest percentage reported in the survey was respondents' mothers, who performed the majority of house work. This was mainly reported among single women (Figure 19, below). This confirms what women in the interviews say about the gender patterns of household work, which have not changed even when women are working (Himmelweit, 2002). In fact, the literature on this double burden confirms this to be a universal phenomenon: women around the world continue to do the bulk of the household work. In Latin America (Lourdes, 2008), women tend to look for jobs in the informal markets in order to provide them with the flexibility to cover both

housework and paid work (this also happens in the MENA region, as discussed in Chapter 4).

In Africa, women are expected to perform household chores, but unlike the MENA region, this extends also to agricultural forms of work, for which they are not remunerated but which they are expected to perform (Bardasi and Wodon, 2010). In Asia and the MENA region, as reviewed in Chapter 4, this pattern is also unchanging in terms of housework being a gendered phenomenon (Floro and Pichetpongsa, 2010).

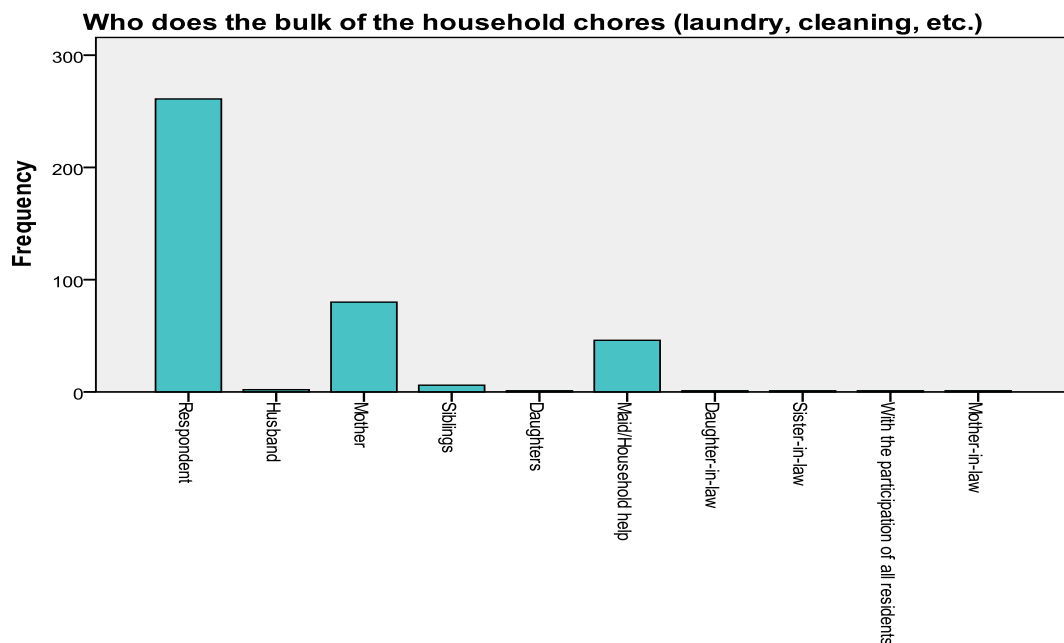


Figure 19 Division of Household Chores

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

Audette, mother of four, reports:

He doesn't help at all in the household work. He doesn't like this at all... unless he is hungry, he would prepare something if I am not home, although he still expects me to have something ready for him in the fridge. He wouldn't even help me with the kids, this is why I felt pressured... It is very rare to find a man who does the household... Very rare, there would be problems if you had this expectation... No one said women have to do the housework, but in our Oriental society, and in our conception of family on this side of the world, housework is generally forced on women, or is expected

of her. If the husband helped, it is something really good. I am not against it, if the husband were able to work, this is very nice, but this never happens!

While the above respondent is a Christian working woman in her forties, another Shi'a working woman in her twenties shares the same views, highlighting how close the thoughts of respondents from many sectarian backgrounds were on the same issues:

In terms of household work, cooperation is nice [laughs], but most men tell women: "it's your job." For example, my husband - he doesn't even get himself a glass of water. He wants everything while seated on the couch. He doesn't help me at all, although there are men who help their wives a lot, I am telling you. I am a housewife when it comes to work [laughs]....even child care is all on me. I am used to this now, it's been fifteen years. I am like that. Especially in this house, you know this house is the fifth I have moved to... This house, I feel that I am strangled in it, it's a big house, and it feels like it needs a lot of work. And also, you need to go get your vegetables, etc., and sometimes I get them all by delivery. And sometimes you have guests, etc., so I feel pressured sometimes, given all the work I need to do outside the house as well. It's a big burden on all women.

This pattern is interesting if compared to the household work habits of women who are inactive in the labour markets. Women who do not work outside the household, as previously discussed, often ask their husbands to help them with the housework. Many husbands, given that their masculinity does not feel threatened by a change in gender norms, accept doing it without much in the way of questioning or quarrels. Finally, and similarly to other questions on which this research focuses, similarities across sectarian group memberships are very high, and household chore patterns are not affected by the ages or generations of the respondents.

Household Help

The previous section shows that the bulk of the household work is still done by women. The question to be asked, though, is: if women are still doing this work; is it the respondent themselves, or other 'women' from the lower echelons of the hierarchy who do it? And: Do these women stand at the intersection of more axes of inequality? If you hear the conversations in the cafés in Beirut, or among Beirut's upper and middle-income class men

and women when they meet, they always say that there is no house in Lebanon without a maid. This perception, however, according to the survey conducted for the purposes of this research, is not supported by data. Over 60% of respondents in Beirut reported not having a maid who lived with them permanently. Among those who have a maid, only 10% have help who lives with them in the family, and it is usually families from upper-income classes, or mainly the economically active women from other sections of society (Figure 20, below).

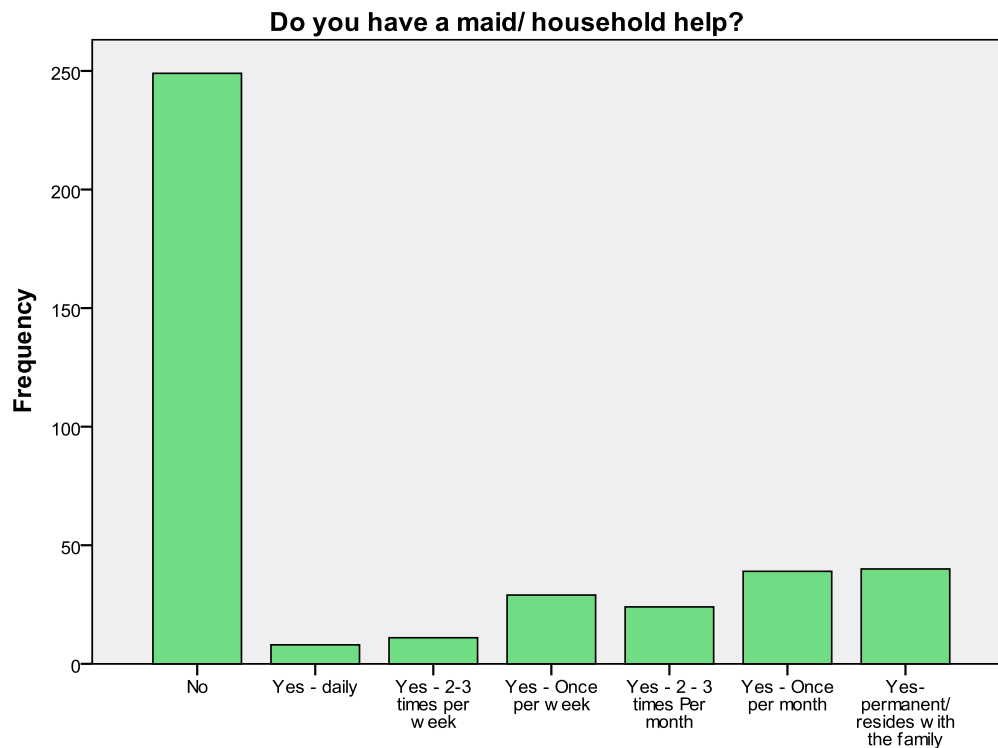


Figure 20 Do you have a maid/domestic help?

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

Domestic help trends are similar across sectarian group membership. Younger women tend to rely on household help more than older women, which shows that this trend has become more popular over the years. Many respondents confirm this pattern, as they, in fact, link this habit to upper-income class families in historic Lebanon, where poorer Lebanese or Syrian women from the villages would come to work as maids. With time, and given the increased participation of women in the labour markets, together with the

globalisation of work chains, migrant domestic workers have started taking on those jobs, and so this system has eventually become more popular across classes. Some respondents report that this habit is increasingly seen, to the extent that younger women from middle-income classes sometimes included ‘having a maid’ as a requirement in their marriage negotiations. Hence, as most respondents do not have enough household help, and as they still bear the main responsibility for household work, the majority of economically active women who help their husbands with expenditure report their deception about their need to still spend income equally, without sharing the household work equally.

Work Income Spent on Work Related Needs

Household help, as the previous section has shown, is not one of the main outlets for spending that has been reported by economically active women relative to their participation in the labour market. However, another pattern emerges in regard to household spending that is common to many economically active women, especially those who work in the public sector, in companies, or in jobs that are office based (rather than in the informal market, or in home based work, and who don’t meet a lot of people). This trend is that those respondents report that the income they earn is spent on work related outlets.

In addition to the need for the women to sometimes put their children in kindergarten and to hire household help, which has been discussed in previous chapters with regard to high work opportunity costs, those work-related outlets are summarised by respondents as being: the clothes, accessories, and hair-dos which are necessary in an office environment; lunches, dinners, and coffees with colleagues; gifts for colleagues on diverse occasions, such as births, weddings, and house-visits; among others. In the words of Yasmine, a full-timer in her thirties, mother of two children, those factors are all related to exposure:

Let me tell you something, when you work, you meet a lot of people, and this person got engaged, and this person at work got married, you’ve got to buy dresses and gifts, and if you are invited to their house you have to take something with you... So this would all be spent out of your income. And, often, all of your income!

Those expenses are said to relate to three things, the respondents argue. The first is that, in order to keep up your image and continue fitting into the office environment, you always need to maintain a certain image. Rima, a secretary in a company working in rentals, is low paid. However, her colleagues in the office are more educated and come from 'higher' social classes. In her opinion, it is very important for Rima to dress like her colleagues, or else they will not treat her with the same respect with which they treat one another. In this case, most of Rima's income is spent on luxuries that she would otherwise not need, had she not been working, but that are a most crucial form of 'social mobility' in her job environment.

The second reason is that this 'image' that is 'bought' with this new look can play a role in finding better jobs. This is related to a culture which is described by many women respondents as being based on 'women's assets'; where many women are recruited to certain positions based on their looks. This is especially poignant for women with lower level degrees, or no educational background, where the only resource on which they can capitalise is their beauty. Hence, those women work and use their salaries to better their 'image' by buying more expensive clothes, or even having plastic surgery, at times, in order to ensure other, better paying jobs in the future.

The third aspect relates to the increase in consumerist habits that is related to being in the labour markets, where women are exposed to newer fashion trends, restaurants, etc., and hence start demanding, or wanting, to spend money on more things. Women who work in the same office sometimes get to socialise with each other, thus 'showing off' their new outfits, or simply discussing recent fashion trends. Beyond this, alone, a female respondent who opened up a lot to me during our interview told me that sometimes, working in a mixed-gender environment makes you want to wear nicer things and look more beautiful to receive more compliments at work than 'those you barely receive any more from your husband, who is too tired when he returns from work to notice your new haircut, or hair colour.' The same applies not only to the respondents themselves, but also to the consumerist needs and luxuries that relate to their families. As an illustration of the last point, let us take Maliha, a woman in her-mid-thirties with a 9 year old boy and a 5 year old girl. Maliha narrates:

Before I started working, I did not like social media much, but after I came to the office, my colleagues pushed me to open a Facebook account. On each person's account, you would see pictures of where they had lunch with their families, what gifts they bought for their children, and so on. The story does not end here, on the following day in the lunch break, we would all be discussing those photos. So not only are we looking at these pictures, which are virtual and may not even mean that the people in them are happy, but we are taking time to discuss them in the real world. So my nine year old boy, how would I look as a mother if I didn't get him an I-pad for his birthday. Even if the I-pad costs one month of my salary, my child would not know that some people are richer than others, and my colleagues would make me feel bad, by telling me that everyone has an I-pad, you must get your child one! This also applies to our Sunday outings. Before I was working, my husband would normally take us to visit his mother and have lunch at her place on Sundays. Then, my colleagues at work would start discussing where they spent their Sunday, at which restaurant, and if you don't add anything interesting to the discussion, if you don't compete, you won't have a good 'social standing' in the office anymore. So, Rouba, are you still surprised how my income gets spent so fast? In the time of my mother, the most she could see would be her neighbour's luxuries, which, of course, wouldn't be too far from hers. Their lives were simpler and happier!

Of course, Maliha's question is relevant, and was asked of me by another respondent when I questioned her about where the income was spent:

You must be kidding right? The income is not too big anyway, and is barely enough for the basics. Let me put it in other words. We don't have enough money to fight over. Yesterday we ate water melon for lunch, and today will do the same.

Certainly, this shows the diversity of income spending, even among families from the same social background. Families with more kids and more responsibilities could not afford luxuries, whereas families with fewer kids spent even more on luxuries. Very few respondents reported saving any of their income.

Income as 'Empowering'?

Despite all the above, earning an income comes with positive aspects that women respondents report: more independence in spending, the ability to save (although a very

small number of respondents actually were able to do so), and sometimes a bigger say in decision-making, which will be discussed at more length in the following chapter. One of the advantages of work is what many women reported as being the increased flexibility in spending income when they are earning it. In most cases, such as these, respondents report that earning an income allows them to help their natal families in ways that they could not have otherwise done. Samah, a Shi'a respondent, whose family still lives in the South with little income, reports:

My husband takes care of the main spending responsibilities, but I also spend from my own income without thinking. We don't agree between each other who spends on what, and how to spend what we earn... I am sure that if I wasn't working, my husband would be as flexible as now with spending. However, earning your own income enables you to be able to spend it in places where- even if your husband allows it- you wouldn't feel comfortable doing so if it were his income. For example, I help my parents from my own income, and he cannot say no to that, whereas maybe if it were just his money, then he could have said no. It is a relief to be able to support my mother, my sister, and my brother when they are in times of need.

The respondent's last sentence links to another aspect that was recurrent in most interviewees' descriptions of income spending: and this is similar to what development literature argues: most women allocate a big chunk of their income to their children, rather than to themselves. This altruism also extends to other family members (especially respondents' mothers), as in Samah's case. Colette, a Christian respondent in her early thirties, speaks similarly about the division of her income:

I work, and he works, but he should pay for the main household expenditure. He pays for all the household items. He gets the stuff from the supermarket. I pay for matters that are related to the children, like the schools and universities. I support him, not only emotionally, but also financially. Working means that, with my income, I can put my children in better schools, but I can also help my uncle, and my parents.

However, the biggest trend amongst most of the respondents was found to be that what they spent on the household was a lot more than the benefits they reported from earning income. Lara, after years of marriage and work, reports:

We used to pay everything together, but now I feel like I give a bit more than I should've and, in general, men don't really recognise these things, or memorise them, so maybe I shouldn't have. I should've put some money aside, especially now that I am not very happy with him, especially as, at some point, he had stagnation in his income, and he didn't have a job, and I felt like I was paying for everything alone -- and it was too much.

Of course, the picture is nuanced, and more accentuated for some respondents than for others. The number of children, the dynamics of the relationship, as well as the amount they earn, all play a role in making each story one that is very different from the others. However, the overall trend points to a disadvantage. When gender roles are not changing inside the household, and when the bulk of the household chores are still done by women; when the work environment still places great value on women's appearance, which forces them into consumerist spending; and when they work in a country where few benefits are attached to their work, and little value is attributed to their contributions, most of the economically active women respondents think: 'work is not worth it!'

Conclusion

This chapter, similarly to the previous one, has shown that women's decisions are the outcomes of very complex factors and processes that need to be examined beyond the quantitative trends, by using interdisciplinary tools and intersectional methods. It has also demonstrated that the context plays a very big role in shaping women's choices and, in the case of this chapter, spending patterns, since women's decisions, negotiations, bargains and spending occurs within a larger structure that is governed by specificities relating to that context. Despite similarities across contexts, big differences thus emerge (Kabeer, 2000; Hasso, 2011; Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997).

On a given axis of inequality, say, class, women from the low-income Beirut and Cairo share the same class disadvantage. However, women in Beirut tend to be more educated. This means that no common conclusion for 'women in the low-income classes' in the MENA region can be drawn. Further, while women everywhere in cities that are within global networks are all exposed and practice more consumerist tendencies as was reviewed in Chapter 2, women in Beirut live with a different experience of, say, consumerism, pushing them to make different choices when it comes to spending patterns. This is not to

say that other settings in the MENA region –such as Cairo, for instance- do not experience the same challenges due to consumerism. However, the degree and manifestations of consumerism are different in each context, but even within the same environment, this chapter shows that each woman’s story adds different elements that further complicate the picture: whether this is age, educational background, the number of children, the number of assets owned, or other factors.

Empirically, this chapter advances several findings. Unlike other contexts, the people surveyed in Beirut report a lower subjective class than their actual class. With the exception of 14% (who were mostly divorced and non-married women), the main breadwinners in the family, similarly to trends demonstrated in the literature, are the males (husbands for married women, and fathers for single women). Interestingly, the economically active women who were surveyed, and who earn a higher wage than their husband, still report them to be the household head, or the main breadwinner, confirming that this is a matter of perception that is affected by culture, patriarchy, and societal norms and expectations. Finally, among the women surveyed, the majority report not having an income, nor owning any assets. However, the qualitative work undertaken for this research shows that those are only some of the many other factors that influence women’s decision-making processes, or affect their perceptions of how ‘empowered’ they are. For instance, some women, who neither earn any cash, nor own any assets, are more in control of spending than others who do.

Additionally, the survey conducted for the purposes of this research shows that, in the majority of cases, married women’s husbands take care of the primary spending responsibilities of the household. However, interviews bring about a multitude of stories that add colour to this quantitative finding by unpacking the decisions relating to spending that lie behind those trends. Amongst the interviewed, economically inactive women, only 20% of respondents do not interfere at all in income spending. This is not common across generations, as all younger women, even if not earning any income, interfere in choices on spending. However, the most common trend among women who do not work in the labour markets is the model whereby the husband gives all his income to his wife for her to spend on household needs. Contrary to what the literature on empowerment might predict, this was reported in most of the interviews with women in low-income Beirut, but was also

confirmed by the qualitative work conducted with husbands. This, in many ways, relates to the fact that the husband does not feel his status as the main breadwinner to be threatened, and he defines his mission to be: 'pleasing his wife', through financial means. The majority of respondents report giving their husbands 'positive reinforcements' as part of the tactics that they use to keep this pattern. The more the wife shows gratitude, the longer this pattern continues. Most non cash-earning women who were interviewed perceived themselves to be the main pillars of the household, and believed that they have the final say in the decision-making.

All of this can be viewed in the light of the literature on negotiations and intra-household bargaining (Sen, 1999; Kandiyoti, 1988; and others- please refer to Chapter 1), whereby women –through bargains- are optimising their resources within the system, even sometimes by internalising their 'subordinate' position. However, this can only be applied to a certain degree in the case of respondents in low-income Beirut. Firstly, it is important to highlight that those bargains and negotiations not only occur in an intra-household environment, but should also be viewed in the greater structural, societal context. As shown in this chapter, what might seem like an internalisation of a weaker position in the household, may, in fact, be the conscious choice of a beneficial, more profitable solution if looked at from a macro-perspective within the larger structures.

Secondly, while the literature reviewed in previous chapters discusses the dynamic bargains that occur in the family (i.e., post-marital bargains), respondents in Beirut show that the most important bargains occur before marriage, and these dictate the rest of the relationship's - and intra-household - dynamics. For this purpose, respondents devise strategies so as to enter the marital contract from a strong position at the beginning. Finally, while some research (Hoodfar, 1997, among others- please refer to previous chapters) categorises respondents into groups in terms of spending patterns, respondents in this research show a continuum of stories on which it is difficult to generalise, especially when looking at this continuum through an intersectional lens. For instance, sectarian group membership does not seem to be a divergent factor amongst respondents in relation to their spending patterns, nor does 'earning income' seem to empower those women that have been interviewed, across the board, as is in line with the Empowerment discussion in Chapter One.

In fact, the majority of working women in the labour markets seem to be less content with their lifestyles and spending habits than are economically inactive women. In the interviews, the former category often reported being tired, feeling under-valued and appreciated, being stuck in their traditional roles, and being only able to affect spending in the portion of their income that they own. This, again, brings into question the notion of automatic empowerment that comes with cash earnings. Finally, the concept of ‘need’ re-emerges in this chapter as an important theme, whereby economically inactive women tend to have ‘secret’ ways of gathering income to spend on ‘consumerist’ items, and economically active women define ‘need’ in a very ‘relative’ way, which is highly affected by the environment in their jobs.

Despite all of this, there are cases where the women’s earning potential did raise them up and enhance their lifestyle, save them from violence, or give them the potential to escape poverty or failed marriages. Notwithstanding this being a minority scenario, within each story recounted by these women are elements whereby earning cash seems to be empowering. However, it is important to highlight that this is countered by other aspects of those women’s lives, in relation to which earning an income has disadvantaged them. This chapter thus does not aim to say that women are generally better off and have more liberty in spending when they do not earn an income from labour market activity; it aims to highlight the diversity of women’s experiences, and the risk of over-simplification and generalisation that the empowerment paradigm calls for when addressing the issues surrounding women’s work. The next chapter will further illustrate this point by looking at the interconnectedness of decision-making in relation to work, and the choices surrounding marriage.

Chapter 6

Empowered Workers/Powerful Wives: Women, Work and Marriage

A few weeks into the field research phase, I found myself continually observing and making mental notes, even when I was not ‘officially’ on research duty. Before we went out with family friends, I would ask my mother about them: was the wife working? How much age difference was there? What was their relationship like? When we met, I would pay attention to the relationship dynamics between the couple. At the restaurant: who ordered the food? Whose hand reached out for the bill first? Was the woman free to talk and joke with her husband’s friends, like he was with hers? When I took cabs everywhere in Beirut, I would listen carefully to the cab driver if his wife called. I would analyse his tone of voice, and sometimes find myself asking him follow up questions. If the driver would not bring the subject up, I would make up a scenario with ‘my husband’ to try to understand how he was thinking.

As time passed during the fieldwork phase, I started developing trends and patterns in my mind about how income, work, and marriage interact. Interestingly, those patterns are not really ‘patterns’, in that they are not as open to generalisation as I had expected, but were a lot more nuanced and complex. The more I observed, the more I could see the linkages between the work-related decisions of women, their spending patterns, and the relationship dynamics. Work decisions and marriage-related choices both influence and are influenced by one another. The two spheres- public/private, production/reproduction- are, in fact, not binary, but there is a continuum that exists between both, and this governs the decision-making processes that are happening in and in between those spheres.

The relationships between work and marriage decisions are dynamic and they are affected by a multitude of factors, such as age, education, the nature of the relationship between the couple, and the nature of the woman’s job, if she works. The informal contracts governing the marriage, for instance, are very important to scrutinise so as to better understand the differences between economically active and inactive women in the labour markets. It is also beneficial to examine the perception women have of their

marriages, and then to compare those perceptions to the observations that I collected during my qualitative work. In sum, this chapter is dedicated to sketching out the linkages between women's labour market decisions and their marriage-related choices, and how those differ between women who earn income and those who don't. The next section provides an overview of the institution of marriage, as well as of marriage patterns, which will be the basis for a better understanding of the quantitative survey findings, as well as allowing a more in-depth analysis of the information collected during the qualitative work.

The Institution of Marriage:

Structural Changes and Unchanged Expectations

The previous chapters have examined the work-related decisions of married women in low-income Beirut, as well as their income spending choices, and the negotiation dynamics within the household. The picture, however, will remain incomplete if we don't look at the 'sexual contract' governing those decisions, which, to a large extent, occurs within the institution of marriage (Pateman, 1998).

While this research deals mainly with married women, it is important to examine the changes in marital patterns in society at large in order to understand the positioning of the institution of marriage within this specific context. Structurally, marriage in the region, but in Lebanon more specifically, is experiencing notable changes. As outlined in a previous chapter (Chapter Two), the average age at first marriage is rising for both genders, marriage rates are decreasing, and the numbers of women who have never married are increasing. Additionally, the divorce rate is increasing every year. The perception of marriage, however, as being a social and an economic contract between two families, bringing pride, prestige, and social recognition for men and women alike, is not changing at the same pace (Rashed et al, 2005). In most families, marriage is still considered a turning point in an individual's life, and as the most accepted doorway into physical intimacy (Ibid). Accompanying this change is an increase in neoliberalism in the economy of the country. This means that consumerism is also having an impact on marriage- from the preparation of the ceremony, home appliances, honeymoon, jewelry, all the way to shaping relationship dynamics, and at times affecting divorce decisions.

Women's perceptions about marriage relate to the value that they place on this institution. It also relates to their decision, their rationales for being married. Their perception of their role in the institution of marriage is key to understanding the trends in women's participation in household chores, decision-making with regard to the household, and to their position in the family. How do women in low-income Beirut view marriage? What value do they place on it? How do they perceive their role inside the family? Does this differ among working and non-working women in the labour markets? What other factors influence these perceptions and patterns? And how do they affect their decision-making processes?

Research in economically advanced countries, summarised in the work of Lee and Payne (2010), shows that the centrality of marriage is decreasing in society. These explanations fall into the rational choice paradigm, in which people's preferences, and the utilities that inform their choices, are changing. Young Americans, for instance, no longer believe that marriage is important as a goal in itself, but, rather, they favour other ways to fulfill their lives. This, the authors argue, goes back to several factors, including the domination of an ideology of 'secular individualism', which gradually leads to the fragmentation of the family.

Another account, by Geist (2010), confirms this trend. In this research, the author compares 23 European Union countries and the USA, to show that a general trend to falling marriage rates has been reported since the 1960s. Additionally, marriage rates appear to be negatively correlated to male unemployment, but this trend decreases over time. This shows that while marriage may have been related to the capacity of men to earn in the past, this relationship is changing. This can also point to the increased participation of females in the labour markets, as well as to changing perceptions about men and masculinities.

Both the studies above examine national level data in a quantitative way, with no micro-level evidence, nor any in-depth qualitative work, to explain those trends. However, they point to interesting linkages between marriage and working patterns. While norms greatly differ between societies, globalisation has led to the spread of Western values across the globe. In fact, some of these studies' findings are confirmed by research in the Arab world. Based on secondary data, as well as on the World Values Survey 2005-2008, Sawaf (2011) confirms the emergence of individual elements guiding the marriage process in the

MENA region, such as marriage timing, or partner choice. The author contends, however, that the extent of this individualising of choice differs, depending on the age at first marriage of women- with increased elements of individualism that depend on the length of time that the woman remains unmarried.

This autonomy in choice, the author adds, is not only linked to marriage decisions, but also to several aspects of the women's lives, such as the dresses they prefer, the music they listen to, the way they spend their leisure time, as well as having a greater say in how they lead their lives more generally. Other research done by Khouri (2011), argues, based on a study that surveyed Lebanese youth, that communal values, which have always been characteristic of Middle Eastern families, are now complemented by individualistic norms that mostly come from the West. However, he contends that family identity remains the main allegiance of these young men and women, and this is followed by national and sectarian affiliations (Ibid, p.15).

Sawaf (2011, p.25) confirms this last point, arguing that cultural norms nevertheless play a large role in keeping marriage a highly family-centred affair, especially for women. Hence, this independence of choice, which women are increasingly displaying, should always be analysed within the wider structural boundaries of the family. While this study raises interesting points, it is mainly based on secondary data, and does not answer questions such as, for instance, the extent to which preferences and family pressures play a role in women's decision-making in the different classes, or in relation to membership of different sectarian groups. Do more educated women, or women from different income levels, display higher levels of independence in their decisions? What factors influence women's decisions most, and which choices are least affected by external parameters? Those aspects remain very interesting to consider in the context of this research.

Despite increased elements of independence in women's lives, as discussed above, what is the extent to which a patriarchally connective society, in which individuals, but also 'virtual extended households' (explored in Chapter 1) are incorporated into a network of relationality, obligations, and expectations, plays a role in the decision-making of women? In a study completed by Diab and Prothro (1974) in Amman, Damascus, Beirut and Tripoli, where married women from different classes were recruited and interviewed using a snowball technique, the authors found that while the extended family is on the decline, the

nuclear family is rarely fully independent of the extended kinship network, especially when it comes to big decisions, such as marriage, illness, births, and such major events. This study, while having qualitative elements, falls short of recognising the variables that differentiate such patterns between women, and merely hints at communal values that can still play a part in women's decision-making. Finally, Hoodfar and Singerman (1996) argue, based on their study among the low-income classes in Cairo, that women from low-income families have fewer links with the power structures in society, which makes them more reliant on their families. In Lebanon, where the state has a weak social system, but where capitalism is increasing in the economic system, is this also the case? What shapes women's decisions as they relate to marriage, and within marriage? This chapter aims to cover these gaps and to look more closely at family structure in Beirut and the difference in positions that working and non-working women in the labour markets hold in them.

Structural Explanations to Marriage Patterns

Other than elements of preference, it is of no doubt that increased opportunities for women and competition in the labour markets, play big roles in women's decision-making about marriage, and within marriage. In an ethnographic study on Egypt, Singerman (1995) adds further explanations relating to the phenomenon of the increased age of women at first marriage, or what she calls 'wait-hood.' Young unmarried people in the MENA region, she argues, are experiencing a prolonged adolescence that has been facilitated by female education, demographic transition, greater employment opportunities for women, urbanisation, as well as changing norms; which are all affected by globalisation and consumerism. Hence, while women are increasingly becoming more educated, more resourceful individuals, there are proportionally fewer economically attractive men in the population whose resources would actually improve the lives of the unmarried women and their (actual/potential) children (Amin and El-Bassusi, 2003). Women, thus, will have to be presented with a better, more attractive 'contract' in order for them to leave their parental homes to move into the conjugal homes. These aspects also affect married women's decision-making within their marriages, and the opinions that they hold of their husbands, as well as their positionality in the household.

This idea is also complemented by Oppenheimer's work (1997, 2003), in which he argues that men's 'career immaturity' is a major impediment to their marriage. Career difficulties, he contends, significantly decrease men's marriageability. In such cases, men who are more educated, with better, fixed, and higher paying jobs are more likely to marry. On the other hand, he contends that economic opportunities for women increase their independence, and can thus raise their expectations about what acceptable living standards are. All these studies suggest that there is a possibility that some non-married women are simply not finding men who are able to enter a marriage arrangement. Alternatively, it could be that the available men are not presenting them with financially attractive contracts. In fact, material needs and increased expectations are said to play a big role in changes in the marriage market in Egypt. In certain cases, in Cairo, especially among the working classes, this is leading women to delay marriage in order undertake jobs to meet marriage expenses (Ibrahim and Singerman, 2001; Hoodfar and Singerman, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997). The latter is triggered, among many factors, by a visible upsurge in consumerist culture (Ibid). This is also leading some men in Cairo to marry older, more financially secure women (Rashad et al, 2005).

However, while women in Cairo are culturally expected to maintain half of their marital expenses, women in Beirut usually count on the groom to cover all expenses (National Research Council, 1993). Hence, in Lebanon, the average age difference between spouses was 8.3 years in the 1960s (Hatab, 1997), and is reported by the maternal and child health survey (MoPH, 1996) to have increased, with one quarter of the (then) recent marriages in Lebanon having a ten-year younger age gap for women. The increase in the age gap might potentially be another manifestation of the financial hurdles that are imposed on young men, and the continual choices of young women to marry older/more financially secure men (Farsoun, 1971; Khlat 1989).

The Changing Reality of Marriage

All the above factors pave the way to question how views of sexuality and relationships are changing in the Arab world. Mernissi (1991) argues that the idea of a young, unmarried woman is completely novel in the Muslim world, and the whole concept of patriarchal honour is built around the idea of virginity, which reduces a woman's role to its sexual

dimension: reproduction within an early marriage. The concept of unmarried women is thus alien to the entire family system, Mernissi adds. She contends that the unimaginable is now a reality; young men are faced with job insecurity, which leads them to postpone marriage. Women, confronted with the pragmatic necessity to count on themselves instead of relying on a rich husband, further their formal education. As a result, as argued above, the average age of marriage for women and men in most MENA countries has shown a noticeable increase (Hatab, 1997). Other than changing patterns of marriage, the increasing numbers of women who are not married may be linked to the emergence of other types of unions, as well as to women who will not 'marry' because of their sexuality.

One instance of these new alliances is the increase of another form of marriage, the *muta'a* marriage- a temporary union that is recognised by Shi'a Muslims in Lebanon (Tabet, 2005). The literal translation of *muta'a* is 'pleasure', and these marriages are similar to the *urfi* marriages reported in Egypt (Ibid). The *muta'a* marriage comprises of a form of contract between the bride/groom, including a payment of dowry. However, this agreement is not official or state-declared and, usually, the period prescribed in the contract is not long (from a few days, to a few months), and such arrangements rarely lead to long-term marriage (Rashad et al, 2005).

Moreover, although not quantifiable, there have also been observations of cases of cohabitation in Beirut (Keddie, 2007). Many young men and women, often perhaps those from higher classes or of certain educational backgrounds, are choosing to experience their sexuality differently, far from the institution of marriage. Who are these young men and women, and what are the opportunity costs with which they are faced when they make such choices? As Hoodfar and Singerman (1996) argue, all the above changes, some of which are reported in Cairo, are leading youth to view relationships through a new lens. What is this lens in Beirut, and how, in a society that is governed by relationality between individuals, are these changes in perceptions of relationships manifesting themselves? Is this changing the roles of wives in marriages, and/or their say in decision-making within this institution?

The Legal Factors to Consider

Decisions relating to changes in marriage patterns and perceptions of relationships are affected by yet another structural obstacle, the Lebanese legal code. In fact, women in Lebanon, a country with high confessional heterogeneity, face a discriminatory personal status code that renders them ‘second class citizens’, a status that bears great consequences for their decision-making. The eighteen religious communities that have survived a seventeen-year civil war play a big role in dictating this complex legal reality. A Maronite Christian president, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, and a Shi’a Muslim speaker of the national assembly, represent this highly non-secular state, which establishes religion as a differentiating factor, notably in family issues. For instance, a Muslim and a non-Muslim will be subjected to different legal regimes under different religious courts (Tabet, 2005). Hence, atheists, and those who belong to officially unrecognised religions (Buddhists, Hindus, etc.), as well as those trying to escape certain unattractive religious laws (like the forbidding of divorce in the Maronite church, or the Muslim inheritance laws), are forced to seek a civil marriage abroad (Anon., 2009).

Civil society has been lobbying for the provision of civil marriage (efforts having begun in the 1950s), civil marriage was only legalised in 2014. However, surveys that have been conducted reveal that only 29% of Lebanese are in favour of this adoption (Nashif and Hindi, 1998; Kazzi, 2007; Meier, 2008). Its adoption has been weakened by religious men (sheikhs and priests alike) who run the lucrative ‘businesses’ of marriage making and breaking. In fact, the religious authorities benefit from marriage and divorce, which can cost the couple up to tens of thousands of dollars. Hence, the prospects for change are few, as Hilal Khashan, Professor of political science at the American University of Beirut, states, “any attempt toward secularisation would mean the erosion of the whole system [...and] the entire political system is opposed to it (cited in Ajami, 2007).”

How does this legal reality affect women’s decisions within marriage? When women feel like second-class citizens, how will they continue to ensure their well-being within the institution of marriage, and how will this affect their decision-making processes, more generally, when they feel that their fall-back position is weak?

Positionality and Decision-Making

In the previous section, the literature suggests a huge amount of analysis of the changing patterns of marriage and the perceptions of it, and these will serve as tools for our analysis of the position, and of the decision-making processes of the respondents within the institution of marriage. Marriage frames women's decision-making in many ways: the expectations of women as wives, her obligations toward her husband, and the support (or its lack) within marriage, play a crucial role in many of the decisions she makes. However, it is important to highlight that, while there are certain broader common terms in a 'sexual contract' that governs the relations between husband and wife, this unspoken contract varies tremendously from one family to another, and shapes, and is shaped by, different women in peculiar ways.

The second aspect to recognise is the structural changes that are occurring in the institution of marriage (women marrying later, divorce increasing, etc.) that are discussed in the second section as shaping the perception and the power dynamics, not only of single women, but which also affect existing marriages. Women who are married at an older age and who, hence, have more savings, and perhaps even, more work prospects, will have relationships that differ substantially from those of women who are married at a younger age. Additionally, when the perception of marriage is changing in society, and when men and women start looking at divorce as a potential exit strategy that is becoming more accepted in society, this can give women leverage in relationship dynamics.

Thirdly, it is important to relate women's positionality in the household to the wider structural aspects that underlie this and that are changing marriage patterns. Unemployment and competition, in an increasingly harsh economy, are leaving many men at a competitive disadvantage to the women, as they cannot always perform the roles that society expects of them. This leads them to feel that their masculinity is being shaken, something that is coupled with the increased presence of women in the labour market, thus challenging existing gender roles. At the same time, gender roles within the household, the literature suggests, may not be changing at the same pace (as reviewed in Chapter 5). This, coupled with the disadvantaged legal position of women within marriage, often leaves women stuck between unequal power relations within the household and with increased responsibilities.

The sections that follow use qualitative and survey material to look at these points in more depth, in the case of married women in low-income Beirut.

Gender roles: An Unchanging Pattern and a Market Oriented Shift

As reviewed in the last chapter (Chapter 5), perhaps one of the first subjects that the workingwomen in the labour markets open when they talk about marriage is the division of household work. The survey conducted for the purpose of this research shows a very high consistency with traditional gender patterns in regard to household work. In terms of household work, the majority of the surveyed women (65%) reported that they were in charge of the bulk of household chores (laundry, cleaning, etc.). The rest of the surveyed women reported that other women from the household, or house help (mainly women), did the workload if it was not done by them (32%). This shows that the gendered aspect of the household work is still very much accentuated in the families, but also in society as a whole, whereby if the wife is not able to conduct the household work, she delegates it to another woman. Less than 1% of husbands help their wives with household work.

In terms of sectarian group membership, the results did not differ much across categories, which challenges the spoken assumptions by the Muslim female respondents, during the interviews, that Christian men might be more ‘Western’ or ‘Liberal’ and so might help their wives more. Additionally, according to the survey results, the pattern of household work did not differ much between working and non-working women in the labour markets, both of whom were responsible for most of the housework. Finally, and consistently with the literature from other countries that is discussed in Chapter 5, the survey shows that there are specific tasks which men continue to perform within the household. These tasks relate to maintenance (fixing the sink, changing a bulb, etc.) or anything that requires physical strength.

In terms of household help, the majority of the surveyed women did not have any help (62%), and around 16% received help between once a week and once a month. Ten percent of women have permanent household help residing with them in the house. Those with live-in help are mostly economically active women, or women from upper-income backgrounds, the data shows. However, while it is important to remember those patterns as being one of the variables affecting gender roles, the next section will go into more depth

with regards to the dynamics that were hidden in the previous chapter when this subject was explored without considering the implicit marriage contract that governs it. The next section will scrutinise this more closely through the qualitative work undertaken with respondents.

None of Your Business

An only girl in a middle-income class family of seven siblings, Mirna was always very spoiled. When she was eighteen, she already had her car while her brothers were still commuting on public transport. Soon after she graduated in tourism studies, Mirna started work in a travel company. It was there that she met Ali, as a client. He wanted to book a ticket, but from the first second she saw him, she fell in love. Mirna then used several pretexts to 'get him hooked,' she recounts proudly and playfully. At the time, she was 21 years old (she is 38 now), and there were still no mobile phones in Beirut. She would call him home to chat, and if one of his parents answered, she would hang up. They were both the same age, and belonged to the same sectarian group (Shi'a Muslims), although they are from different backgrounds. While Ali had also completed his university studies - he studied engineering - he came from a low-income Shi'a family. Mirna didn't care much about that, as he was undeniably the most handsome man she had ever seen. He is tall with blue eyes, and is very charismatic, with a dynamic personality. Mirna, thinking she was not attractive, knew she was the one to pursue him.

With Ali increasingly becoming attached to her, Mirna told him it was time to get engaged. Before taking an official step, Ali had some things that Mirna had to agree on first: that she would give the car that her parents had bought her, back to them, and that she would never accept any type of financial support from them. He wanted to be respected in her family, and not to be looked down upon as the 'house in-law,' an Arabic expression signifying the 'stay-at-home' in-law who counts on his wife's parents for financial support.

Today, Mirna is a mother of three. She has two boys and a girl. She and her husband both work full-time, as they are still paying mortgage loans for their house as well as for their family car. Mirna earns the same as Ali, working as a store manager, and helps Ali in the restaurant he runs after her job. Looking at the household chores and the division of labour inside their household is very insightful. Mirna says:

I can recount to you one small incident that would explain a lot about how the housework is divided between Ali and me. One time, I injured my back, so I requested from Ali that he remove the curtains from the rails for me to wash them. He shook his head, went to get the steps, took the curtains off, threw them at the floor, and left them there. That day, I had gone to work - despite my injury - came back straight to the kitchen to prepare dinner, washed the dishes, put the kids to bed, cleaned the house, and went to the living room, only to find the curtains on the floor. This small incident left me in tears. I felt so under-appreciated. This shows you that, for Ali, going up the steps and removing the curtains from the rail is okay; however, picking them up and taking them to the washing machine, or, God forbid, doing the laundry, at the only time when I physically could not do this, is not okay. You know, Rouba... I don't know if what I am about to say will make sense to you. Maybe I am being over sensitive. But, sometimes, I feel like Ali is trying to punish me. He is punishing me for being from a richer family, for being brighter, for earning money, for running his restaurant. I look at my sister in law sometimes, and I feel so under-appreciated. Hana doesn't work. She is at home all day; yet, her husband helps her around the house. He cooks and sometimes even helps her with the cleaning. I know each relationship is different, and the proof of that is that two brothers from the same family can be so different, but sometimes it occurs to me that her husband appreciates her more because she does not threaten him as a man. Her existence, her brilliance, all of this does not threaten him. While, for me, to Ali, I need to keep proving my femininity to him all the time. I need to continue proving to him that I am a wife, a good one. And that he is a husband, a provider. I don't know how to put this into words, but I hope I am getting my point across to you.

In fact, while Mirna was thinking that what she was saying did not make sense to me, I could completely understand her case as being an instance of something that came up in many of the different interviews I had done. Unarguably, women who worked outside the household always felt the need to accentuate their performances inside the home in conformity with the expected gendered norms in society. This was a result of different reasons, one of which is the fact that many of the husbands felt their masculinity threatened when their women worked outside the household. Another reason is that many women feel

bad about not being able to fully perform what is expected of them as wives, so they start doubling their efforts, as is the case with Mirna.

For her sister in law, Hana, however, similarly to many economically inactive women I have interviewed, there is nothing for them to prove to their husbands. Their husbands are still the breadwinners, and they are the housewives. In many other situations, women reported still doing the bulk of household work, however, perfectionist traits in household chores did not arise as much as was reported with economically active women.

Another economically active woman, in her fifties, made an interesting observation. Samia, a Christian woman who works as a nurse, and who is a mother of five children, says:

Similarly to the crisis in masculinity that the men are facing, economically active women were experiencing a crisis in 'femininity,' as society defines it. This was not felt among the economically inactive women who would be, for instance, more open to acknowledging that they received help with the household chores, or who would feel that it was okay to feel tired and not to perform household work when they were having their period, for instance.

A Crisis in Femininity?

Salam, a Sunni, economically inactive mother of two who is in her thirties, is a woman with a very shy personality. At first glance, looking at her dress code (loose skirt and long top) and at the fact that she is not engaged in any labour market activity, you would think that she was leading a conservative life. Looking at her marriage as a researcher from outside, you would actually be tempted to conclude that she might be under her husband's power. Salam's life revolves around her family, she has no sources of independent income, and she would confess that her husband has a say in most things. However, one of the most important conclusions of this research is that things aren't always what they appear to be. In a conversation on housework, Salam raises an interesting point:

I am among the lucky women whose husband is religious. It can be a blessing, believe me. You might be surprised at why I am saying that, but let me explain to you. My husband always uses Islamic texts as a torch with which to lead his life. For instance, he drinks hot water with honey every morning, because the prophet (pbuh) used to do that. To counter the expectations of my husband, who is like any man in society, would think of

household work as something to be done by women, I went back to the Qur'an and the Hadith. I used those as a weapon against him. The prophet (pbuh) used to help his wives around the household. He used to do everything with his hands. If he wasn't found praying, he would be cleaning, or even sewing his robe. Also, in Islam, if a woman had a maid in her parents' house, it is her right to ask for one in her husband's house. In Islam, women can ask for money in return for any work she does in the house. A lot of women don't know that. Men use religion when they want, and leave it out when they want, but knowledge is power. When I told this to my husband, he couldn't say no. He helps me around the house all the time, and he is convinced that this will bring him closer to God.

Salam's quotation hides very interesting dynamics that I tested through being present around the house for a weekend. Indeed, Salam's husband was openly helping her with the housework. While we drank coffee, it was his turn this weekend to do the cleaning, and so he did the laundry and hoovered. Whether or not the couple was acting out what they wanted me to see is something really difficult to tell; however, it shows that qualitative data also unravels dynamics that can, at first sight, be concealed during an interview. Secondly, this quote shows that, within the household, many negotiations occur. Nothing is taken for granted, and there are no such things as 'rules' that are being imposed by one party, with the immediate consent of the other.

As Kandiyoti (1988), Kabeer (2000), Sen (1999) and others have described, the household is a place of struggle. In the case of Salam, religion, the very same tool that is often portrayed as further suppressing women, is being instrumentalised by her to get what she wants from her husband. Another thing that this quotation might suggest is that, in the case of Salam, her husband doesn't feel the need to overtly delineate the borders of his 'masculinity', since he is the provider. Salam is a stay at home wife, and her husband has a stable income. Helping her around the house - making her happy - is something he would want to do without this threatening the roles that are ascribed to a married couple by society.

During a one on one with Salam's husband, while she was making coffee, he told me that he was at first outraged when she asked him to help her around the house. Her husband at first thought this was unfair, she was, after all, at home all day, but then he realised that raising two small children under five was a source of stress. In his words:

Salam is a smart woman. She doesn't force things on me. She persuades me. She drops a bomb, and leaves the room. She wouldn't discuss her suggestion, or nag about it. Instead, she would just let me think about it. She would then support it with arguments here and there.

This form of tacit power has been described in some of the literature as women accepting their position of subordination (Sen, 1999). However, the success of Salam, and many other respondents, in reaching what they want in other forms of 'struggles' than those prescribed by many Western, or liberal feminists, in the negotiation literature, should be taken into account (please refer to Chapter 1). This idea will be explored in more depth in the next section, which deals with decision-making and women's position in the household.

Decision Making within Marriage

As I point out in points in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 1), development theory suggests that work outside the household - empowers women by making them more independent economically - has many positive impacts on women's lives. Some scholars have argued that one of those positive spillovers is the increased capacity of women to make independent decisions, and to have an increased say in the household (WB, 2001; Kabeer, 2000). Parallel to that are the changing societal norms, as discussed above, with the rise of individualism, and with market forces replacing kinship relations and service provision (Hoodfar, 1997). However, and away from binaries (individual/communal), kinship relations are more diverse and elaborate, and thus decision-making is more individual in certain areas, and more affected by society and kin in others. This makes it harder to assess the implications of choices, for instance: what elements are increasing women's independence, and what choices are not.

In some of the case studies that are related to several African countries, for instance, women earn cash, but this does not affect their position in the household, as the husband still controls the income, and women are still expected to work on the land (Oya and Sender, 2009). In other cases, it has indeed been reported that women who earn an income gain independence in relation to their choices and decisions, and that they even may become the main managers of their families (O'Laughlin, 1995). However, despite the added value of earning income, there are still obstacles to having an increased say in the

family, due to the legal system, the educational disadvantaging of women, and patriarchal norms which still mean that ‘empowerment’ is not always automatic (Ibid). This section will examine whether the data collected for this research (both qualitative and quantitative) confirms or challenges those explanations that are found in the literature.

Whose Decision Is It?

As has been shown in previous sections and chapters, decision-making processes are complex and they involve a variety of stakeholders and factors. ‘Empowerment’ is not only about the ability to make decisions (as was shown in Chapter One), but also which decision is it? Does it fall in the realm of areas already restricted to women? Are women making the decision, or are only implementing choices within a decision that has already been taken on their behalf? When it comes to decisions that relate to the labour markets, survey results show that, when making work related choices, 53% of women report making these decisions on their own (Figure 1). This trend is easy to explain through the qualitative work conducted, which showed that husbands often do not like to interfere with their wives’ work related decisions, and even sometimes act as if their wives did not work at all. This affirms the findings of the previous section, whereby both husband and wife accentuate their ‘traditional’ (or expected) gender roles, and undermine their ‘non-traditional’ roles to decrease the stress caused by changing gender roles. On the other hand, 31% of women respondents say that they mainly consult their husbands in relation to work related decisions. Again, interviews reveal interesting patterns that explain this trend, whereby women often report consulting their husbands only in order to make them (the husbands) feel that the decision is theirs.

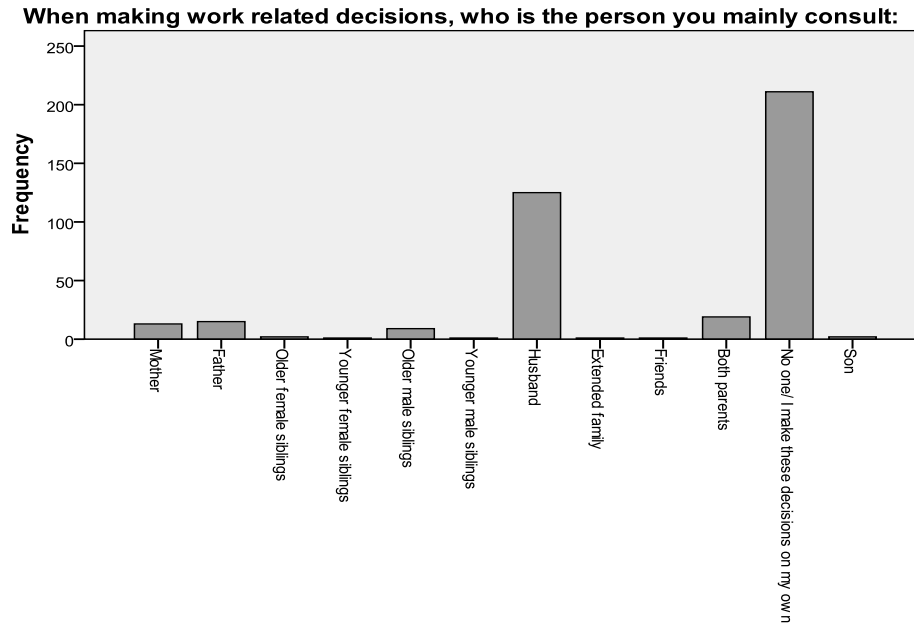


Figure 21 Work Related Decisions

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

In fact, statistics alone conceal a lot of the dynamics about what really happens in the house. An instance of a married woman working in the labour markets from low-income Beirut is Mirna, the respondent referred to in the section above, who said that she consults her husband on every work decision, simply because this helps her in many ways. Consulting him is, thus, an option she willingly chooses. First, consulting her husband in work related matters in the restaurant they own takes the responsibility off her back. She knows very well that Ali will reproach her if anything happens that contradicts his advice, should she decide to make decisions on her own. Secondly, Mirna says that she always invents stories about her work about which to consult him. Again, this relates to the fact that Mirna thinks she constantly needs to boost his ego and masculinity in order to continue doing things her way, '... it is my joker card,' she says.

Many interviewed women, however, disagree with Mirna, saying that they separate work decisions from their marital relations, and tend to make these decisions quite independently, so that they don't 'remind their husbands that they are working women.'

Marriage-Related Decision Making

Almost half of the respondents to the survey said that they make marriage-related decisions on their own (48%). Of the sample of married women respondents, only 14% said that they consulted their husbands about decisions pertaining to their marriage. Such decisions include their thoughts on fights, whether or not they should get a divorce, fights with the in-laws, and so on. However, very few women also seemed to discuss such decisions with anyone. Independence in decision-making with regard to marriage was clear both in terms of the survey data, as well as in terms of the interviews of respondents' attitudes.

When making marriage related decisions, who is the person you mainly consult:

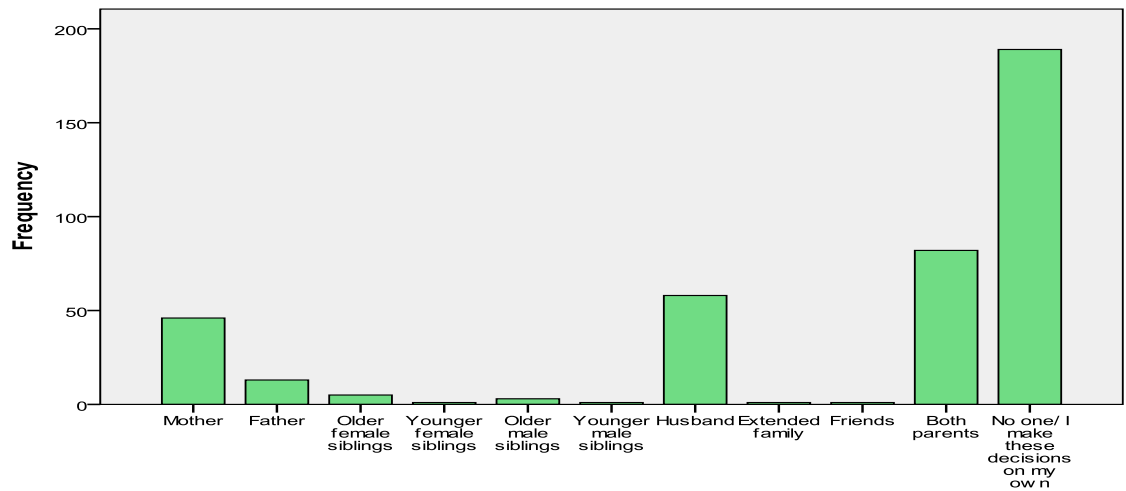


Figure 22 Marriage Related Decisions

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

This, in general, points to a trend that I found to be really poignant throughout my qualitative endeavour. Women from low-income Beirut described their nuclear family as being less and less connected to the extended family, friends or neighbours. The relationality that was described by Joseph (2005), and which was referred to in the theoretical chapter, seems to be less present in low-income Beirut, as described by respondents. For active women in the labour markets, this is due to their lack of time and to extensive responsibilities both inside the household and outside it. In fact, even women

who are not engaged in the labour markets have dissociated themselves from their networks of extended kinship and friends.

In terms of choices concerning her marriage related choices, fights, and major decisions, Nabila, a Christian working woman who is in the labour market and is in her forties, the mother of four, recounts:

I take my own decisions, I don't consult anyone. This is also because I don't have time for a social life for it to influence me greatly, and my husband and I both don't have time, because we take up any spare time to see the kids and take care of them and spend some family time together.

The work lifestyle has thus imposed a certain life pattern on the family that is more geared inwards to the inside of the micro-household. Nabila continues: "Neighbours? What neighbours? All the women are working. We meet at the elevator. Say 'good morning', and even when we take a day off, it's because we have stuff to do outside work." This pattern emerged in almost all of the interviews with workingwomen in the labour markets, who all down-played the effect of society, and even of their surroundings, on their decisions. This was complemented by my qualitative work, in which I witnessed many women making choices relating to their daily lives. I spent several consecutive weekends at Nabila's house, where I would come early in the morning and leave at night, and I witnessed several choices she made, and closely scrutinised her lifestyle, even on the weekend when it's seemingly the most 'social' time. In fact, due to her hectic schedule during the week, Nabila barely had the time to check things off her 'to-do' list during her days off, and had to constantly make fast decisions about which she had no time to consult anyone. The next section examines whether the pattern is similar for women who are not working in the labour markets.

Salam's Case- Revisited

To return to Salam, the woman referred to in the section above, who is not economically active, she speaks about how her friends or the society influence her decisions, especially marriage related decisions, in a way that is very similar to Nabila's experience, regardless of the fact that they belong to a dissimilar sectarian group, have a different education, or different status in the labour market:

If I respect myself, then I don't take anyone into consideration. As long as my actions are in conformity with my beliefs, I don't care about the opinions of those around me, or the opinions of people, and this is how I am raising my daughters. When you respect yourself, it means that you are doing things right.

When I asked her who she confided in most, she replied, 'I confide in my husband. Generally I don't have anything hidden. Maybe my sister also, but I don't tell her everything; I like the things that happen within the house to stay within it.' This emphasis on the boundaries of the nuclear family, which is portrayed by the walls of the house, was, in fact, a recurrent theme in many of the interviews. There was a very great distrust that most respondents – both economically active and inactive - displayed *vis-à-vis* the larger family and society at large. The nuclear family, however, delineated by the physical household, was always referred to as a safe space. Salam continues:

I trained my husband and my kids that it is all about us, [...] I don't tell anyone outside the house what happens between us. Sometimes, I tell my sister, but *alhamdella* [thank God] our problems are small. Like, if my husband comes and doesn't find me at home, he would start: Where are you? Why are you late? Etc. Why mention this to others when it's internal problems?

Other Major Decisions

The pattern that is discussed above is somewhat different when it comes to other major, but non-directly marriage related decisions. In terms of such major choices, which involve travelling, buying an apartment, and buying a car (Figure 3), about 8% of all women who answered the survey said that they consulted their father, and 4% consulted their male siblings. On the other hand, 26% of women made the decisions on their own, without consulting anybody. However, the majority of these women are single women. For married women, 48% said that the main person they consulted in regard to big decisions, was their husband. This pattern will be explained below, using interview material. All the statistics, above, however, are higher than the percentage of women who consulted their mother (3%) and their sisters (less than 1%), showing that women, in general, tend to count more on male opinions when it comes to major decisions. In terms of daily decisions, such as grocery, shopping, outings, and the like, the pattern was a little different. Most women

(65%) reported that they did not ask anyone in relation to their decisions, while 20% consulted their husbands. About 8% of women also consult their mothers on small decisions relating to everyday life, double the percentage of those who consult their mothers on big decisions.

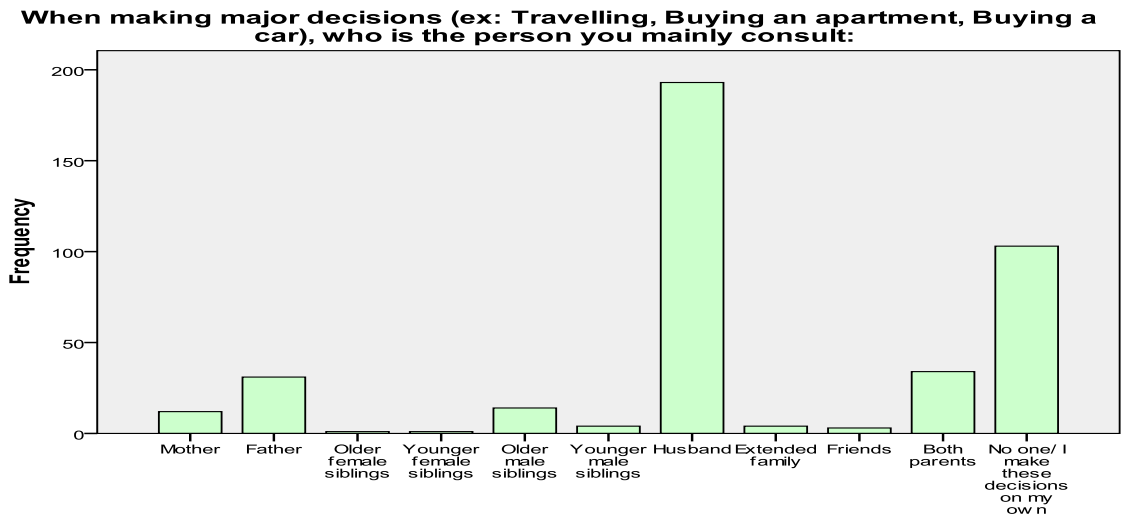


Figure 23 Major Decisions

Source: Author's own, based on survey results

These statistics, however, hide very interesting meanings that were unpacked through the interviews with the married women. In general, working women in the labour markets consulted their husbands with their decisions, but this was not reciprocated. For economically inactive women, however, an interesting pattern that was brought up by most respondents is that their husbands consult them in all major decisions also. The story of Amal, below, is a case in point.

Tacit Tactics

Amal is 56 and her husband is 65. Amal has three children, a girl and two boys. When she first married, she was working. Soon afterwards, she decided to leave her job so as to be able to care for her house and children. Amal speaks of her decision-making processes in a profound way:

I don't confide in anyone. If I am unhappy, I never speak in front of anyone. A lot of people -- you take them as friends, but when

something happens, if there is a fallout, they tell what you have confided in them. I sit with everyone, with the neighbours in gatherings. We are like a family, all the six stories in the building. They all love me, and swear by my name. In 45 years, I was never upset by anyone, and no one was ever upset by me... but now, I have no more time for them. As my kids got older, I have housework, I go out to get the house supplies, and that's it... And I am not afraid that they would speak ill about us, because we don't do anything, and we have nothing to hide, but, also, it's because I keep my relationship with them casual and do not go into much detail. In terms of decision-making, my husband and I take the important decisions. Both he and I, we take the decisions together... Whatever he says, I do, and whatever I say, he does. We consult one another on the decisions... and he also consults me. And if I have a fight with him, I don't consult anyone at all [...]. As to daily decisions, sometimes I ask him, but I make most of the decisions, I tell him, and he usually concurs. He also consults me with his work decisions. Every day, when he comes from work, he starts opening up to me about his day, and I listen. Then he starts to talk his decisions over with me. What do you think of this? What do you think of that? And I give him my opinion. Sometimes, he throws in expressions such as: "oh, how in the world would you know?" and I just smile, but in the end, he ends up doing what I advise him to do.

Amal's husband is the main breadwinner in the house. However, he gives her all his income when he receives it. She describes him as being at ease with her, because she knows exactly how to deal with him. She always makes sure to ask him, and consult him in decision making, but this is dissociated from the action that she ends up taking: "he won't remember what my action is. He will just remember that I value his opinion highly. It is all about how you frame things, I am telling you." Amal thinks one of the main reasons why so many marriages are falling apart nowadays is that younger women don't know how to use 'their power as women.' In her opinion, this new generation is taught to be loud and outspoken, to be blunt, and to fight their battles explicitly. However, she thinks that:

Younger women don't know how to use their assets. Like tears. Like showing the man he is making the decisions, while you make all the decisions. They just want to confront. They don't want to use diplomacy. They are more educated, in terms of certificates and degrees, but they don't know how to put their knowledge into life skills. What have they gained, then, of all their degrees?

Such tacit tactics have been brought forward by most women in the interviews, both those who are non-working and those who are working in the labour markets. These include ways such as: not nagging, suggesting the proposition as if it were his idea, praising him for positive things, and letting negative things pass, shedding a tear or two, silent treatment, among other strategies. However, a noted difference is that economically inactive women have started to abandon those strategies, either from a lack of belief in such 'traditional' ways of perceiving marriage and dealing with husbands, or simply because they don't have the time or patience, because of the stress they deal with at work. In the words of one of the respondents: "I have to be politically correct, strategic, and diplomatic all day. When I come back home, I don't want to have to do this all over again. I am working like him; things are what they are. Why polish them?"

Sandra, a Christian newlywed with no children, uses the tactics that her mother taught her with her husband, 8 years her elder. Sandra studied Business for her undergraduate degree, but doesn't work in the labour market. She thinks of herself as the main influence in her husband's decisions:

Those things don't come easy. You need to build his trust, that's what my mother always told me. Only recently, he started accepting my opinion, because many things happened and my opinion proved to be right. Now I feel like he has started to take my views more seriously than before, and to adopt my advice about everything. Even in his work, if he wants to take up a new customer or partner, I tell him: 'get him to the house, so I can see him.' We would then invite him to dinner and, many times, I would tell him: 'George, don't deal with this man, I don't like him'. At first, he wouldn't listen, but now he trusts my intuition. I have a vision in certain things and certain people, and he always tells me '*walla ya mara ma'ik haak*,' [Woman, by God you are right].

Sandra thinks one of the most important things is to always boost your husband's ego in front of his family. She says that whenever they visit his parents, she always talks about herself as being very docile, and as not being able to make any decision without him. In their home, she makes sure to consult him in small decisions, ones that she doesn't care much about, and then she would underline how she accepts his decisions. In this way, when it comes to bigger decisions, she will have a lot of leverage, and she will have him on her

side. “Those are the tactics our grandmothers used to use,” Sandra added, “and believe me, they still work today as ever!”

Some economically active women who were interviewed, on the other hand, reported a different dynamic, and thought that the fact that they earn an income greatly influences their decision-making power in the household. One respondent reports: ‘When you work and earn your own income, you have your word inside the household, you can get whatever you want, and take the decisions you want without anyone interfering.’ Digging beneath this pattern, however, you would find that it hides a lot of explicit fights over decision-making. This is not to deny that, in some cases, earning income does help women to take the lead in some aspects, but, often, it leaves them at a disadvantage in others, as will be explored in the next section.

I Am the Household

As the interviews above show, economically inactive women almost unanimously said that they had the final say in most decisions. For economically active women, the image seems to be more complex, as there are gender role expectations that they are still trying to fulfill, as well as – as the previous chapter demonstrated (Chapter 5), their spending habits and their decision-making choices are either dependent or independent of their husbands’, depending who is paying. Those patterns conformed to the perceptions of the respondents in relation to their position and their valuation of their own input inside the house. Below are some replies from working women in the labour markets when they were asked to describe their role in the family:

‘I think I would describe myself as a good mother.’

‘I am a wife, a mother, I guess.’

‘I am loved; I think my children love me. I always try to make time for them.’

‘I see myself as a main contributor to family income and life.’

‘The maid, the cook, the mother, the wife. It depends.’

On the other hand, below are some of the answers that were given by non-working women when they were asked about their role in the house:

‘The decision maker.’

‘If we fight, my decision works.’

‘I am the *lawlab* [main engine].’

‘The main pillar. Without me, the house will collapse.’

‘What do you mean who am I? I am the household.’

These short quotations reflect situations that I have seen clearly during the interviews. Unlike the conclusions that I would have anticipated, given the literature on ‘empowerment,’ and the development policy recommendations, I discovered something that is not too far from what I had seen when I was growing up, that was related to Tante Reem and my mother. My mother and Tante Reem were, then, no exception to all I had encountered in the eighty families that I held encounters with. As I described her in the first chapter, Tante Reem was an independent, successful, but - I can see now, reflecting back - very *tired* woman. In many ways, as I grew up, I also started discovering how insecure she was about the role she was playing inside the household. I would sometimes be jealous about why Tante Reem would always drive her two daughters to school, and use every minute to talk to them about their homework and school life, while my mother would send me off to walk on my own, or with them through carpooling. If my mother would drive, she would be singing and looking at the scenery, never asking me enough about my school. Riding with Tante Reem as I got older, I realised it was the only time she had to ask her daughters how they were.

In a society where she is expected to return to cook; where her husband receives more income, no matter how much she works; and where most of her income is spent on clothing and style, so as to look ‘accepted,’ Tante Reem was, in many ways, disempowered - compared to my mother, who was valued, appreciated, and cared for. Of course, this is not to say that my mother, who was not earning any income, had reached a perfect equilibrium in life, but just to highlight that both cases are not as rosy, or as gloomy, as the development discourse would seek to reflect. Tante Reem’s state resonated with something one of the respondents said:

When a woman works and has a salary, without feeling it, her husband tends to respect her more, and to pay more attention to her opinion, because it generates the feeling

in him that she doesn't need him. No one can deny that. But this feeling is also a double-edged sword, because a lot of men feel threatened by this feeling. The more their wives become independent, the more their husbands start looking for women who 'need' them. I think there are a lot of women who are not working, and who can still show their position inside the household very strongly. [...] So there isn't a right or wrong answer to the question: is a woman better or worse off working outside the house?

Indeed, of course, not all stay at home women are in a better position, nor do they all feel powerful and make the final decisions. However, it is important to bear in mind the context, and all the complexities and the background that form the first sections of this chapter, as well as Chapters 1 and 2. When a respondent says the following, what does she mean: 'I am no longer working, and I am the most powerful now inside the household. I am powerful with my kids, and I am powerful with my husband. I live with my sons as if they are my friends. Inside the household the main decision is mine.' Firstly, it means that there is no one size fits all to notions of 'power' and 'empowerment.' How does a woman who is not earning any income use her word power in such a strong assertive tone, while many women enchaind by their 9-5 jobs, their weakened position *vis-a-vis* the law, and their double burdens are hoping to have been: 'good mothers, I guess.' Women's lived realities and subjectivities are diverse, and their struggles cannot be essentialised with easy fix solutions, or one size fits all approaches.

This reminds us of a recurring question in this research: who are the women we are talking about? As one respondent puts it: 'Women are strong inside the household if they have a strong personality. It depends on their upbringing, education, husband's education, the examples of the women their husbands have encountered and grown up with.' Indeed: no wife is the same, and no husband is the same. For instance, the respondent referred to in Chapter 4, who quit her job at the bank, describes her relationship with her husband:

We would be invited to dinners from my work, and although my husband has gotten his education from abroad, and has lived abroad, I would feel he was not very comfortable to be introduced as the husband of the bank director. When I stopped working, I even felt that my relationship with my husband became different, I became closer to him. I had time to be a listener and to be fully attentive to him. When he used to tell me his problems at work, I had my own to deal with, and I was not ready physically, spiritually, morally. I was simply not comfortable, and I was

hearing what he was saying, but not truly listening ...and you know what, I felt that initially, I had no importance in my house, not in my kids' lives, nor in my husband's life, but now I am everything to them.

This quotation reflects, first, the importance of her husband's background as a factor in setting the relationship dynamic, proving that every woman is different, every story is unique, based on a lot of factors that intersect at one point making each respondent's 'empowerment' strategy her own. Additionally, it reflects how, notwithstanding the fact that many women might be very pleased with a job as a bank director, this specific respondent felt 'happier', more 'secure' and 'comfortable', when she left her job and became a full time housewife, something that might seem absurd to 'empowerment' theorists. Another economically active woman who was interviewed raises an equally interesting point:

I think when you stay at home, your husband will respect you more, he will not try to influence the way you spend your money. Believe me, not at all, to the contrary, when you work, you see more people, you spend more, you have to go out every Friday and Sunday, etc. My sister doesn't work, and she lives a happier life than all of us. Believe me, she takes all the decisions, he works and gives her the money -- and she does whatever she wants.

This quotation seems to sum up all the quotations in this chapter. More respondents than I had expected while I was designing this research saw their marriages as less successful compared to those of other women in their families who, in fact, weren't working.

Men Are Like Lions, Women Like Cats

While this research didn't dwell much on issues of sexuality, some respondents brought up sex while discussing their marriage. Far more of the economically inactive women rated their sexual life to be better than that of economically active women. Women with full time jobs and children rated their sex life to be the worst. Some of those respondents said that they sometimes don't have sex more than once every ten days, or even a month. Mirna, the respondent referred to throughout the chapter, says:

Sometimes you are tired, you tell him you don't want to have sex because you are working. If you are a stay at home wife, you have no right to say that. But for some workingwomen, if they start not meeting their husbands' demands for sex, they might tell them to stop working. It is stressful, also because you want to continuously prove to yourself that you are a good wife -- that your relationship isn't falling apart. Then you start hearing from all around you stories of crumbling marriages. For us Shi'a, it's more difficult too, because you know that at any moment, your husband might seek *mut'ah* marriage if you don't satisfy his sexual desires.

I gathered my courage and asked her whether she thinks Ali engages in *mut'ah* marriage. She was silent for a few seconds then answered, '*mut'ah* is only sex. It's just physical. Nothing beyond that.' I didn't dare to ask any follow up questions, but for many respondents, like Mirna, where women live in a society where men's actions are always justified, polygamy for religious men is okay, *mut'ah* is common among Shi'a Muslims and betrayal, by men who belong to any sectarian group, is at times acceptable, because: 'It's the woman's fault, if he were happy inside the house, he wouldn't have looked elsewhere.' This means that one layer of stress and expectations is added to an already hectic lifestyle for women.

In fact, this mentality is not only prevalent among Muslim respondents. Rita, to whom we referred in Chapter 3, who owns an ironing business with her husband, thinks that men are like lions, while women are like cats. She explains, laughing, 'Men are like lions. They want to dominate everything, including the bed. Women are like cats, they are okay with just cuddling, but if the Lion doesn't get what he needs in his house, he owns the whole kingdom. He will seek it elsewhere. For [neutered] cats, sex is only complementary.' Rita thinks that the society we currently live in is not helping men and women to maintain fidelity: 'Women in Lebanon always look like models. With make-up and heels, and a way to seduce, and a disproportionate ratio of men to women, you have always to be careful where your husbands' eyes are.' Additionally, she concludes, even if the husband is very loyal, it puts extra pressure on wives to maintain their youth and beauty in order to keep the relationship's flame burning.

In a discussion with several women in their shared office in one of Lebanon's public universities, some of the women highlighted an interesting opposite side

to this story. They said that it is equally hard for women who work in the labour markets to still be seduced by their husbands, when they meet amazing men all the time. One respondent details:

When a woman is not working, she is satisfied with what she has, when she goes out, without feeling it, unconsciously, you start comparing the outside with inside. You see a man in a suit. You compare him with the belly of your husband. When your colleague is working and her husband gets her a gift, etc. If you are not working, you listen to him, you wait for him. When you work, you don't have time to listen.

The conversation also brought up the fact that women at work talk and gossip, they speak of sexual positions, of what their husbands do, or don't do, to them in bed, and of other intimate aspects of their relationships. For economically inactive women, most income-earning women agree, things are much simpler.

On the other side of the spectrum come the opinions of women who are not working in the labour markets. Half of the stay at home respondents agree that their sexual life is in very good standing. They report that they still wear 'desirable clothing' for their husbands, and try to be romantic, by lighting candles, for example. Most of them say that they have sex with their husbands at least once per week. One respondent reports that she sleeps with her husband every day, sometimes twice per day: "He is very active in that sense. To me, it is becoming a full time job," she laughs.

The other half of respondents have different opinions, often involving dissatisfaction or neutrality with regard to sex, saying that it does not mean to them as much as it does to their husbands, but that they think it is their duty. The latter was especially true for more religious women from all sectarian groups, who thought that refusing sex to their husbands would push them into sin. Some women complained that they didn't have any leverage because they did not work outside the house, so they had no excuse for refusing sex. Again, this shows that decision-making regarding sexuality is complex, and depends on a myriad of factors that no one theory can predict.

Final Thoughts on Marriage

To tie all the above themes together, I asked respondents to give me their last thoughts on whether women's work in the labour markets benefited them or, rather, harmed them. Assya, a stay at home Sunni woman, the mother of two, whose husband owns a small shop in Al-Basta, summarised her opinions for me:

The homes of working women are not the same. Neither are their marriages. Believe me, there would be missing things if the woman worked [*to'ssir*]. From experience, even when you are a stay at home mum, you feel that sometimes there are shortages in the home, so how about the woman who works from morning till evening? In all cases, I always say that the woman, in the way that God created her, in her being, she doesn't tolerate pressure outside and pressure inside. This will make her nervous and stressed. If she doesn't take it out on her husband, she will on her kids... She will burn everything around her to make it on time. [...my husband, for example], he doesn't mind that I go out of the house, but he likes to find me waiting for him when he comes back. I rarely go out of the house in the afternoon, or at night. [...] It was my mistake that I habituated him [so] that when he is at home, he doesn't like me to go out, very rarely... I habituated him, because I love my home, and I love family and I love things to be perfect, but now, I feel sometimes that *khalas* [enough], I need some fresh air. Like yesterday, for example, I felt fed up with the kids, and their studying, and the house, and... and ... and ..., and people, and everything. So I feel that sometimes I want to go out alone, but then I say: 'Woman, praise the prophet' [*salli 'al nabi*, calm down]. Sometimes, I feel that I need space, I try to find one or two hours to go out alone. However, in the end, I come back to my home. As to workingwomen, I don't know how they do it... how they cope. To me, even one type of stress is more than enough!

This quotation shows the different pressures that face a stay at home wife. On the one hand, Assya thinks she is under a lot of pressure, and she does not understand how workingwomen in the labour markets can be outside their homes for long periods. On the other hand, stay at home women can suffocate because of always having to be there for their families. This shows that finding a balance can be equally difficult for both those women who are working outside the house, and those who do not.

Another instance is that of a daughter of one of the respondents, almost forty, and unmarried. She highlights another aspect of women's realities [make sure nariman did not say this before]:

You asked why are people not getting married, maybe because they are becoming educated, and working, so no one pleases them anymore. I believe a woman's position within the household would be the same whether she was working or not. I think the woman is the one who makes the value [*bta'mel eema*] for herself, or not. This is not related to work... Women are marrying less because of the money. She wants houses. She wants cars. She wants *Srilankians* [household help]. She wants -- I don't know what... of course, the man where will he get all this...? Now don't tell me I am defending the man, but they are right... Let one woman defend a man, right or not? There is a percentage of women who are becoming more demanding, and the girl who wants marriage [*al mastoura*] will tell you: 'I don't want anything, I want a man to marry me [*yesterni*]'. One time, a guy proposed to me. He was engaged to another woman. He left his fiancée because of disagreements over clothes, and stuff, and cars... She wants money. He came and told me: 'I have a car, but a very old car [*mkarka'a*]'. I told him the car is used to take a person from point A to point B, not so that I can tell the world: 'Look, I am sitting in a car with my fiancée, in a Jeep or some other ...'. He looked at me, as if to say: 'Is it possible there is such a woman?' [...] He was stunned. He looked at me and told me 'There is no way there are girls like that!' OK, the other girl was much younger, much more educated, and had a job, but he thought: 'Why take a woman who would give me

headache, I want a woman who would be convinced about her life with me...’

This quotation highlights the big crisis in masculinity that men are facing in such societies¹². Consumerist demands are increasing and, in a small society like Beirut, where people mingle with others from all classes, most women are self-identifying as becoming increasingly materially demanding. As reviewed in Chapter 3, this has also had an effect on married women, pushing them into the labour markets to meet the demands for a higher standard of living. Earning an income, that is sometimes higher than their husbands’, as well as the doubling of the house’s burden, and the sexual expectations of the husband, often creates other types of marital problems and stress.

A third example is that of Zalkha, a Christian woman in her forties, who dropped out of the labour market because she could not handle all the stress. She reflects back on her experience:

¹² Masculinity is an increasingly contested and theorised concept about which a whole new body of scholarship is emerging. This new body of literature rethinks the idea of ‘hegemonic masculinities,’ which originated with Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), and which has itself undergone several changes so as to incorporate power into the original model, where not only are women subordinated to a hierarchical order, but where men also are expected to perform certain roles. Please refer for related concepts on the negotiations of masculinities to: Pini (2012); Inhorn (2012). Additionally, there has been an increased realisation that the dominant forms of masculinities are in ‘crisis’- for this body of literature please refer to: Horrocks (1994), Robinson (2004); Walsh (2010); Adibi (2006); and Sa’ar and Yahia-Younis (2008).

The relationship changed, yes. When I stopped working, love increased, and there was more stability; things were calmer. [Previously], when I came home from work, I would be pressured, especially as I am very meticulous. I would feel uncomfortable, when I used to work, that I didn't have time for details. This changed a lot. Today, the house is all fixed with *etiquette*, you know... For example, before, I would wait for Sunday to fix my closet, etc. When you are working everything is in chaos. When you are at home, and someone visits you, you would do what is right. I don't think women lose anything by staying at home: No, I don't think so, I feel that my husband values me in front of my kids a lot more. [...] I feel he respects me a lot, in front of people [especially his family]. He shows something else, sometimes, that he is the man, but between one another it is different. For example, if he wants to buy something, I have a say, I tell him not now, not this, don't do that, wait a bit, improve your job and profession for now. [...] Now he listens to me a lot more than before.

The above instance shows that, sometimes, leaving work can 'empower' women, and can make them feel more valued and appreciated. This is not to say that women who work in the labour markets cannot feel the same but, rather, to shed light on the myriad of experiences and differing women's subjectivities that are hidden behind the essentialised notions of 'empowered women' that are imposed by development discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine linkages between the labour market decisions and marriage decisions of married women in low-income Beirut, as well as to examine more closely the 'sexual contract' within which, to a large extent, the decision-making of married women occurs. In Lebanon, similarly to many countries in the MENA region, age at first marriage and the divorce rates are increasing; however, marriage is still considered a turning point in an individual's life. Several structural and societal factors seem to be driving those changes in marital patterns, of which higher consumerist tendencies have an impact on marriage timing, as well as on the traditions that surround it, which have become increasingly material in nature.

Other such factors include the prolonging of adolescence, which is facilitated by globalisation and consumerism; the increase in women's education, as well as increased employment opportunities for women (Singerman, 1995). This makes it more difficult for

many women, who have become more educated and financially independent, to find matches that are attractive to them (Amin and El-Bassusi, 2004). In parallel, men are experiencing delayed career maturity, and women need to compensate for this by having a career, so as to share marriage expenses (Oppenheimner, 1997, 2003; Ibrahim and Singerman, 2001; Hoodfar and Singerman, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997). While the last point is not very common in Beirut *per se*, in comparison to, say, Egypt, where it is expected that women cover the marriage-related costs, these factors are similarly impacting on marriage patterns.

Studies in developed countries show that the centrality of marriage, as an institution, is decreasing, especially in a society that is dominated by ‘secular individualism’ (Lee and Payne, 2010; Geist, 2010). If we add to that the increase in the numbers of other forms of marriages and partnerships, cohabitation as well as other types of union, because of sexual preferences that are increasingly emerging to the surface, the above contextual impediments that are central to Lebanon, such as a legal reality that is governed by the personal status code (as reviewed in Chapter 1), the lack of state services, as well as societal expectations of marriage, these make marriage more and more complicated. Additionally, it has been argued that, in the Arab world, autonomy of choice and elements of individualism increase the more time a woman spends unmarried. Despite this, communal values still dominate societies, and family remains the main allegiance for these young men and women (Khouri, 2011; Sawaf, 2011).

While this thesis deals with issues relating to women who are already married, those marriage patterns are really telling and informative, allowing us to better understand the interviews, the positionality of women within the household, their perceptions of marriage, the terms and negotiations of their ‘unspoken’ sexual contract, which are all affected by the centrality of, and structural changes to, the institution of marriage within society. For instance, one of the structural elements - the economy – is increasingly putting men in insecure jobs, pushing women into employment with few benefits in order to respond to increased material demands. This is leading to ‘threatened masculinities and femininities’, as reviewed in this chapter. The lack of state services, and unchanging gender roles, making economically active women face double the pressure in relation to household work, as well the sexual expectations of their husbands, and being second-class citizens, all disadvantage

women within already established marriage ‘contracts.’ This leads many women, as has been demonstrated in the chapter, to have to assert their femininity again and again. At times, they do so by accentuating or overplaying their ‘domesticated’ roles within the household. At others, they make their husbands feel important and boost their egos by consulting them about ‘made-up’ or minor decisions.

On the other hand, economically inactive women, often portrayed in the literature to be internalising their subordination (Chapter 1), seem to have devised not only ‘negotiation strategies’, but lifestyles that have made them powerful agents in the household. Tools such as religion, for example, have been deployed to justify non-conformity to gender roles, something that does not fit with the empowerment literature. This proves once again that qualitative work is very revealing in unpacking the trends and explaining the patterns that may be concealed beneath the statistics relating to the percentage of women who are in economic ‘inactivity,’ proving that, in fact, a lot of ‘activity’ is happening outside the borders of the labour markets that are delineated by economists. The husbands of those same women, for instance, who are still viewed as being the main breadwinners, do not feel any threat to their masculinity and they are more open to performing tasks that are generally expected of women. All those forms of tacit power are, if anything, proof of a type of agency that needs to be recognised when discussing issues that relate to women who do not earn cash in low-income Beirut.

Similar contradictions emerge when it comes to the decision-making processes that are relevant to work, marriage, and major decisions where, again, economically inactive women seem to have the upper hand (both in the survey results and in the interviews) over economically active women, unlike the notions that are predicted by the empowerment literature (please see Chapter 1). Generally, both economically active and inactive women display increased elements of independence in their decision-making, and they do not conform to Joseph’s theory (1996) of a relational, or connective society. Workingwomen in the labour markets, especially, do not have time to consult their extended families, but a similar pattern is also reported among economically inactive women. Old tactics and strategies taught by the older generations are still used by stay at home wives, and they are still reported to work in getting them what they want. This puts into question the ‘one size fits all,’ ‘fight for your rights out loud’ advice of the empowerment paradigm. This also

translates, as has been shown in the previous sections, into women's own perceptions of their positions and roles within the family, as well as their sexual life.

This research highlights that women's lives, in fact, vary a lot between the binaries of 'empowered, economically active woman,' and 'subordinate, stay at home wives.' Perhaps, under the many 'empowered women' there live tired women who keep running to make ends meet, and under many 'traditional, stay at home wives' are women who, in fact, find freedom, independence, and value in their marriage.

Chapter 7

Rethinking ‘Empowerment’ in Low-Income Beirut

Every time I have visited Beirut in the past five years, my parents and family friends have made sure to introduce me to potential suitors. Sometimes these encounters have occurred in groups, and, on others, we have met alone for a coffee. Like me, my school and university friends in Beirut will all be undergoing this process of meeting potential lovers, partners, fiancés, and husbands. Whenever we, school girlfriends, meet, there is a big chunk of the conversation that hovers around recounting our stories about the men we have met in the past months.

Since my divorce, I have known men, ranging from two years younger than me to twelve years older. After I started studying for my Ph.D., I even began giving a chance to men that I knew were not compatible with me, because of my curiosity to explore their ways of thinking. One striking encounter was with Sami, a friend of a friend, who owns a very successful graphic design company in Beirut. Sami was seven years older than me, went to the same school and university as me, did his Masters abroad, and came from a family with high social standing. I remember he asked me why I was doing my Ph.D. I recounted to him my passion about the topic, and how I wished to bridge my theoretical understandings with the development work that I plan to undertake after I finish. It was then that Sami said:

It's a very interesting topic, and I am sure having proof that work is not empowering to women will help you convince other women how they should not be working. It is also very beneficial that you are educated, and will be a doctor. You know, for your kids in the future, you have all that it takes to help them in their homework, to be a good mother, and an educated wife and supporter for your husband.

I was silent for a minute after Sami spoke, quickly finished my meal and excused myself from the meeting. At the time, I did not have the patience to argue with him, and I did not agree to a second date, despite my initial inclination that this guy might really have potential. However, my encounter with Sami, and the quotation above, really shook me, especially in regard to two aspects. The first is my realisation that I need to be very careful

when stating my argument, for fear of it being misread. In fact, it made me conscious that it might also be used by conservative men to reify their patriarchal values, and by opponents of women's freedoms to argue against the advancement of the position of women in the labour markets.

A second aspect is that, despite everything I have heard from economically active women in low-income Beirut about how difficult their lives were- and how they would have preferred, especially in this particular context, where there are not enough state services, support, or any real valuing of their inputs, to be economically inactive- despite all that, I still could not, even for a fleeting moment, accept being with someone who might limit my choice of work in the labour markets. I could not tolerate to even finish the meal with Sami, simply because he did not see any added value in my 'education', except for the fact that I would be a better mother and wife. This highlights, once again, the importance of the ability to choose, and the crucial nuances that my argument carries, which will be discussed in the sections that follow.

In what follows, I will revisit the key theoretical notions around the concept of 'empowerment' that have informed the understanding of the empirical findings, and see in what ways they have been helpful or challenging to the research process. I will also summarise the findings of each chapter, before synthesising those conclusions into the main argument of this thesis, linking them closely to the theoretical assumptions. Finally, I will discuss how my empirical findings and conclusions contribute to the existing literature on women's work, and marriage, with the aim of pushing the prevailing debates on empowerment, masculinity, and gender and development forward; and of bridging the theoretical findings about women's empowerment, in the case of Beirut, with their implications for future policy, research, and development efforts that target women in Beirut, Lebanon, but also in the MENA region, more generally.

Revisiting 'Empowerment'

Looking back at the theoretical framework set up at the outset of this research, it becomes very clear that the choice of 'empowerment' as a guiding and central principle throughout this research endeavour and to examine empirical material through has been a

helpful and evocative choice. Power, a notion central to the ‘empowerment’ literature and theory, is indeed present in the very day relation of women: with their husbands, with their parents, with their families, but also with the structures and institutions that surround them and shape their very choices and decision-making processes.

This thesis confirms the literature arguing that one indicator alone cannot quantify for or measure the level of empowerment (Rowlands, 1996; Johnson, 1992). In a lot of the cases we have seen that while women who earn income have control over certain decisions, for instance, the same applies for other women who do not earn income. Other factors such as the ‘fall-back’ position of women, their educational background, whether or not they have children, come into play, further complicating the decision-making processes of women. The ability to have choices, as a central principle in the empowerment literature, depends on all too many variables such as: the availability of resources (in the case of Lebanon: state services, household help, access to decent jobs, among others), the opportunity costs of those choices (the fall-back position of the woman, the alternatives, the trade-offs, the culture stigma attached to certain choices), as well as the interplay of those choices with the bigger structures of the society.

The interplay between women’s agency at the individual level and limitations of this agency at the structural level has been apparent throughout the fieldwork. In certain cases, the internalization of both husband and wife of the culture and norms of the society has meant that the materialization of women’s desires into choices did not happen due to patriarchal and societal norms governing the decision-making processes of the women. Similarly, and in a lot of cases where women were interviewed, it was taken for granted that domestic work was a responsibility of the women. Religious beliefs, for instance, both for Christian and Muslim believers alike among the women respondents, informed a lot of their choices when it came to their availability for sex and intimacy with their husband.

In this sense, examining ‘empowerment’ through the notion of power embedded at every level of the decision-making processes of women was crucial but could not but go hand in hand with the larger structures as developed in the theoretical framework (Chapter One). Earning income and working outside the household did have an effect for instance on women’s decision-making processes; however, looking at this measure alone did not capture the interplay of other household dynamics such as marital decisions and spending

decisions. It also did not capture the manifestations of earning income on the relation between the woman and her husband, and the effects of the husband's 'masculinity.' This has been at times downplayed in the literature on empowerment, but has stood out very clearly throughout this thesis as will be further developed in the next section.

While the empowerment literature still struggles to explain instances where choice did not directly and overtly coincide with the over-all well-being of the woman making it, this thesis has questioned to what extent are the definitions of well-being used by the empowerment literature developed by the women themselves (Kabeer, 1999). For instance, this thesis has shown that in many situations, women themselves made the choice not to work, and while surely, this has made a lot of privileges of working women unavailable to them, this was not enough to conclude that their overall well-being was less than those of other working women. This was not merely linked to the internalization of women of their own positionality, but to a broader difference in the understanding of what their well-being meant in this particular context and in their specific case.

Another central notion in the measurement of 'empowerment' that has come up in the theoretical framework (Chapter One) and that emerged throughout the thesis, at times in similar ways, and in others in more complex ways, is that of the difference between choice and the actualization of choice (whether or not the choice can be materialised), and that of the control over the resources rather than just access to them (Sathar and Kazi, 1997; Jejeebhoy; 1997).

Other than to choice and resources, 'empowerment' is linked to the notion of agency in decision-making, especially relation to indicators such as children-related decisions, spending decisions, and work outside the home. While it is commonly argued that women who are not earning income control only decision-making processes that relate to the household, this research has added complexity by showing that access to income does not have a direct relation on the agency of women to make decisions in the context of low-income Beirut. This differentiation was apparent specifically in the discussions of household spending, and the differences that were highlighted between working and non-working women in the labour markets interviewed in this research.

The multi-dimensional conception of 'empowerment' that incorporates the three indicators to measure it (resources, agency and achievement), has proven to be efficient in

the analysis of the empirical material of this thesis and capturing the complexity of women's decision making processes. However, in the context of low-income Beirut, women themselves might deem certain indicators as empowering/disempowering differently than in other contexts. Also, the context dictates other sets of indicators that may add value to women's notions of empowerment, such as for instance, mobility, which is something women already enjoy regardless of access to income, making it as a measure, not telling in terms of empowerment potential. Hence, relationality in the conception of empowerment has proven extremely important in the context of low-income Beirut, and has been backed by specific examples throughout the thesis that the next sections will return to.

A Review of the Paradox

The main aim of this thesis was to examine the decision-making processes of women in low-income Beirut when it comes to their participation in labour market activities, as well as the impact of such a choice between marriage and the market. Through a multi-dimensional conception of 'empowerment' it aimed to assess how these choices reflect not only individual agency, but also pressures from the structural system and EEPs on the actualization of choice. The research questioned that economic activity *alone* is a direct pathway to women's empowerment. It asked the questions, do women in low-income Beirut *really* want to work in the labour markets? To what extent is women's economic activity a choice, and to what extent is it an imposition? What are the incentives and impediments to women's labour market participation?

As reviewed in Chapter One, the 'development' literature establishes a correlation between changes in a set of variables (such as declining fertility, higher education rates, urbanisation, to list but a few) and increases in labour force participation rates (Barro and Lee, 2001; Euromed, 2010; WB, 2013). The MENA region has experienced considerable progress in those indicators, but the participation rates of women in the labour markets remain stagnant (WB, 2013). This research looked at Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, as an instance of this puzzling reality, given the existence of all elements that will further enhance the female labour force participation rates, but still no real progress on that front.

In its qualitative section, this dissertation focused more specifically on women in low-income Beirut.

In order to scrutinise labour market decisions, this thesis began with two initial assumptions in relation to the low female labour force participation rates. The first is a probability that national statistics underestimate the numbers of women who are actively engaged in the labour markets, due to inadequacies relating to methodology, definitions, or out-dated data, as well as the inexistence of city-segregated data, which makes it difficult to make any generalisations when it comes to Beirut. This furthers the idea that more women might actually be working than are shown in the 22.3% activity rates reported in 2009 (MoSA, 2009), but that their activity eludes national statistics. The second aspect related to the continual existence of obstacles that hinder women's activity in the labour markets. These aspects put pressure on the capacity of women to exercise their agency in decision-making with regards to work, due to societal, cultural and structural factors impeding their choices to materialise.

Assessing national statistics, as such, is beyond the capacities of this project. However, this research surveyed a representative sample of women in Beirut in the age group 21 years and above. The survey's aim was to evaluate whether the surveyed women were indeed mostly inactive in the labour markets, and to discover the trends in relation to their activity patterns. It aimed also to capture their attitudes and opinions in relation to work, gender roles, decision-making, and marriage. This data was used descriptively across the chapters to provide a thematic overview and a statistical background against which the interviews could be unfolded.

My qualitative research with a sub-group of the survey category (married women in low-income Beirut, who were between 21 and 60 years of age) complemented the quantitative data. The qualitative data was collected through interviews with 80 women (and 10 husbands) from diverse sectarian groups. The sample of respondents was initiated through the help of key gatekeepers, and grew through the use of a purposive sampling technique which was used jointly with a snowball technique, informal conversations, focus groups and participant observation.

Both methods were used in the light of an interdisciplinary and intersectional methodology, in which data was collected according to interdisciplinary criteria (looking at

class, gender, labour force status, sectarian group, etc.), and examined using a mix of disciplines (such as economics, development, gender and development), but also by looking at women at the intersection of several axes of injustice. While using pre-existing categories to group respondents, this methodology questioned the boundaries of those categories, and it looked at women across these categories.

The first major finding of this research is that among the surveyed women in Beirut, aged 21 years and above, 60.5% of women were actually active in the labour markets, and thus this disagreed with the findings of the last national survey (Chapter 2). This result shows that a lot of informal work is hidden from the national statistics. The qualitative work, complementing the quantitative findings of the survey, highlighted a few of the main obstacles and incentives for women's participation rates in low-income Beirut. In the below sections are obstacles and incentives that have played an important role in defining the indicators and measures affecting 'empowerment' in the specific context of Beirut, as well as the obstacles that hinder the full exercise of women's agency in their choices relating to the labour market, examined in the lens of the theoretical discussion above.

Putting the Pieces Together

Who is Empowered?

The literature putting into question simplistic notions 'empowerment' and its measurability have been reviewed in Chapter One and in the first section of this Chapter. The definition adopted for this thesis is one that takes into account not only first order and second order choices, but also how these choices are exercised, and how decision-making is linked not only to the personal level but also to the structural one. Measurements of 'sustainable' empowerment, according to this framework, should go beyond resources and access to it, to incorporate agency in decision-making. Women's power and agency to make decisions shouldn't only be in realms that they already culturally are accustomed to have control over, and their level of influence shouldn't be at the implementation level only for that to count as an indicator of empowerment. Additionally, achievements alone (women

participation in labour markets, education, etc.) alone cannot be an adequate measure or indicator of empowerment (Kabeer, 1999).

Despite all this discussion, and the push for a triangulation of all the above when looking at women empowerment, and despite nuances that have emerged in differentiating between the types of economic activity, as well as the structural and cultural differences across contexts, working in the labour markets is still undeniably one of the main routes that modernisation theory and the empowerment literature prescribe for the ‘empowerment’ of women (Chapter 1). Indeed, this research has found that in order to enhance women’s positionality, and to increase the value that they themselves place on work, but also the valuing of their inputs by their husbands and other members of the household, practical steps that are often cited in the literature on women’s empowerment are needed (see the series of papers produced by Pathways for Women’s Empowerment¹³). This includes better access to jobs for women, the availability of secure work, enhanced working conditions, state services, and a better implementation of laws to ensure gender equality in the market place, to list but a few. But these factors alone build only a simplistic picture on what causes a real shift in power- central to the concept of empowerment- in women’s lives.

In fact, beyond the above recommendations, there emerge new findings from this research that force a re-questioning of the notion of empowerment in the context of low-

¹³ <http://www.ids.ac.uk/project/pathways-of-women-s-empowerment-research-programme-consortium>

income Beirut. This becomes pertinent when we look at the qualitative data whereby interviewed economically inactive women speak about the power they have inside the household, which stems from sources other than income earning. A more complex definition of power thus emerges in the context of low income Beirut, incorporating indicators such as women's belonging to a more 'reputable' family than their husbands, which is an indirect measure that is often neglected in measurements of empowerment. Many women who do not work in the labour markets have reported, for instance, that their husbands give them all their income, so that they are the main spenders in the household. All of those dynamics are under-reported in most of the empowerment literature that I engaged with.

Another instance of that is the spending dynamics, which testify for the diversity in the measuring of 'empowerment,' showing that for instance, control over resources is not always tied to earning them. Only a small percentage, amounting to 20% of the economically inactive women from my sample, do not control household spending, and those tend to be from older generations who still believe that this should be the responsibility of the husband, hence linked to an acceptance of the culture. The other percentage of the respondents, however, testify that, unlike what has been reviewed in the literature in previous chapters, control over resources is not necessarily directly related to access over those resources. This percentage is telling when compared to the fact that most economically active women say that they only have control over the income that they earn, and not for the income of their husbands. The husbands of economically inactive women (as reported by the interviewed husbands, but also by most respondents) are happy to provide for their wives and to give them control over cash. Women who do not earn an income, in parallel, speak of a lot of tacit strategies that they use to control income, which did not emerge from women who were active in the labour markets. Such tactics include positive reinforcement techniques, as well as giving their husband importance in front of his parents, and other ways that are shared among women across generations. This relates very much to men's experiences and sheds light on the significance of contestations of 'masculinities.'

This 'empowerment' –beyond the material- is also manifested in the fact that economically inactive women generally feel that they are the main pillars of the household

and that they have the final say in decision-making. While this phenomenon is found in the bargaining literature (Whitehead, 1981; Agarwal, 1994; Sen, 1991; Folbre, 1986; Kabeer, 1994; Sen, 1999), it points to women being able to optimise their options *within* the system, or to internalise their position of weakness. However, many cases in low-income Beirut proved different. In fact, several bargains are changing and shaping even the structures within which women operate. Additionally, this ‘visible’ internalisation of their weaker position is often a form of tacit power or agency, in which women are doing what they want. This is shown in the implicit ways in which non-earning women save and spend money, since they do this much more flexibly than the cash-earners, as mentioned above. This pushes us to re-think women’s capacities for choice and agency, and the linkages and importance that the empowerment paradigm places between the latter and earning income.

While ‘empowerment’ is tied to power, it has historically also been very much tied to a pre-conceived notion of ‘well-being.’ This research has shown that women in low-income Beirut express their well-being and success in a very dynamic and different way than that measured by ‘achievements’ in the material sense. This is especially highlighted when we take into account the context of the study, with a society governed by relational tendencies, whereby women might define their happiness and justify their choices in a very different manner than women in other empirical contexts. Most of the interviewed economically active women, report being less content and pleased with their lifestyles and their spending in low-income Beirut, given all of the structural impediments and factors that are mentioned above. They speak about being tired, under-valued and appreciated, and stuck in their traditional roles. In terms of spending, they can only spend from whatever they earn. This is not to deny that, in some interviews, women respondents agree that income has offered them more independence and an enhanced lifestyle, at times saving women from gender based violence, by providing them with an exit strategy, and thus improving their lives. At others, women have suffered from gender based violence because of earning income, as well as reporting another set of problems, such as always being mindful of the ‘masculinity’ of their husbands, having to be perfect in the household chores, among other issues that are under-researched in the literature that was reviewed in the chapters of this thesis.

Need and the Relativity of Need

Looking at this research's findings in relation to the above, in terms of incentives to women's labour market participation, have mirrored incentives reported elsewhere in the literature on women's work. For instance, need is reported, once again, in the context of low-income Beirut, but also in the survey, as being the main incentive encouraging women to work. This is similar to the situations in East Asia (Agarwal, 19994), Latin America (Deere, 2009), and the Middle East (Moghadam 1998, 1999, 2004). However, in the setting of Beirut, specific elements in this particular context emerge in relation to the definition of 'need.' Within the same context, perceptions of what 'need' is differed across age groups, so that older women defined 'need' in terms of schooling, and of meeting household requirements (such as bills, food, etc.).

On the other hand, the younger generations among the women spoke of 'need' in very relative and consumerist terms: need, was related by these women to requirements such as buying accessories, going to restaurants frequently, going on vacation once a year, etc. Additionally, many respondents reported spending as one of the elements of social mobility, thereby affecting the way that need is defined. All the above contributes to a more complex and nuanced notion of 'well-being' that is specific to the context of low-income Beirut. While Chapter Two overviewed how Beirut links to a wider network of global cities sharing similar traits, it also shows that the lived experiences can differ at a local level, according to age –among many other factors- as is shown in the above example.

However, 'mobility' in terms of the ability to leave the household, which was cited in other contexts in the MENA region (Hoodfar, 1997, Kabeer, 2008; among others), is not reported as being among Lebanese women's main incentives to work. On the contrary, women who are not working experience more mobility outside the household, as they are not pressured by time, and they also report having more freedom to engage in social activities. Conversely, increasingly, as mentioned by respondents, both economically active and inactive women do not have as much time for social events as they did before, since the pace of life has become faster, and the demands of their everyday routines did not leave a lot of time for their extended family or their friends.

At the Intersection of Work and Marriage

This thesis has furthered the hypothesis in the literature that places an importance in links between labour market decisions and marital choices (Hoodfar and Singerman (1996; Amin and El-Bassusi, 2003). In the context of low-income Beirut, structural changes in the institution of marriage mean that the significance of, and perceptions about, this institution are changing. These include a higher age at first marriage, higher rates of never married people, both men and women, and higher divorce rates, which are making even married women perceive marriage differently. Similarly to elsewhere in the region, many factors are driving those changing patterns, such as consumerist tendencies, which impact on the timing of marriage since the society has become more material in nature, aided by a prolonged ‘adolescence’, and higher education and employment rates for women (Singerman, 1995; Amen and El-Bassusi, 2004).

On the other end of the spectrum, emerge the Beirut trends in which men have experienced a delay in reaching a stable period in their careers, further delaying marriage, as has been reported in other contexts (Oppenheimner, 1997; 2003; Ibrahim and Singerman, 2001; Hoodfar and Singerman, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997). While women in Beirut are not expected to pay half the costs of weddings, this, in the case of researched low-income Beirut, has another implication, in that it is destabilising marital relations, especially when the wife earns a higher income, or any income at all, again causing a crisis in masculinity and, at times, causing a reversal in gender roles. Coupled with the lack of state services, increased consumerism, and the disadvantaging of women *vis-à-vis* the law, this sometimes puts women in a position of ‘disempowerment’ if they are income-earners. As reviewed in the multi-dimensional notion of empowerment that has informed this thesis (Kabeer, 1999; Batliwala, 2010), those factors represent important elements in the decision-making processes of women as indirect measures of empowerment possibilities.

When it comes to the implicit contracts governing marriage, negotiations and bargains do occur after marriage, as the literature sometimes predicts. However, in most cases, married women, in this research, agreed that the most important bargains happen before marriage. Those negotiations before the ‘deal’ is sealed, often shape the direction of a marriage for years to come. Women are usually advised, by other women in their

families, to bargain very radically for their terms at the start of the marriage, since those terms will be more difficult to change later. Hence, power and the negotiation over power and decision-making is also bound not only to contextual elements, but also to timely elements that influence the ability of choice and its effect on empowerment. However, some women reported that in different phases, for instance, when the children grow up, they start regaining their position in the household, since their fall-back position becomes stronger.

All of the above, in terms of the structural changes in the institution of marriage and the contracts governing it, are coupled with unchanging gender roles within the household, whereby women have to face the pressure of the double burden, as well as sexual demands from the husband. If they don't do the household work, or if they do not always show readiness for intercourse, economically active women are said to be threatening the household gender roles. This sensitive equilibrium is already threatened by their participation in the labour markets. It is then that women who work in the labour markets feel that they always have to assert their femininity, through pretending to fit into 'domesticated' roles. This, at times, translates into consulting their husbands in their daily decisions, just to calm their masculinities down. This shows that a certain 'empowering' choice might come at the cost of another, 'less empowering' trade off. Hence, the overall measurement of empowerment and well-being must be understood through multiple aspect of women's lives.

This pattern was not reported by economically inactive women. The literature often speaks of those women as being 'disempowered', or as trying to maximise their lives within the boundaries of the subordination within which they live, devising strategies and bargains within the household (please refer to Chapter 1). However, this research has found that those women are often in a better position in the context of low-income Beirut, asserting their strong hold on the household, be it on decision-making, parenthood or spending, among others. Tools used by those women sometimes extend to using religion, often said to subordinate them, to further their desires.

Those tacit powers that are used by women who do not work in the labour markets are, if anything, a form of agency. Their husbands, who feel that they are the breadwinners, do not hesitate to ask them for help in their decision-making, to help around the house, or

even to give them their income. The sexual lives of economically inactive women tend to be, as reported by respondents, more active, as they are not often 'tired', nor are they comparing their husbands to their colleagues.

Hence, the terms 'activity' and 'inactivity', in the economic sense, do not really determine how active or inactive women are as agents of their own lives. Linking activity and inactivity to 'empowerment', as an inevitable path, thus hides a lot of dynamics on which this research has shed light. This by no means signifies that all economically inactive women are in a better place than all of the active women I interviewed for this research. However, it puts into question the path to 'empowerment', especially in a setting like low-income Beirut, where there are not enough services, or support, and where gender norms remain unchanged. This has been demonstrated by women's *own* perceptions of their positions and roles within the family, as well as of their sexual life; rather than as an 'imposed', or 'top-down', recipe for empowering them.

A high Opportunity Cost

However, among the main cited impediments to women's participation in the labour markets in Beirut are structural, and they relate to the very high opportunity cost of participation in the labour markets, which sometimes makes this participation a disempowering option for women (Kadiyoti, 1988; Agarwal, 1997). The first cited obstacle is the lack of 'support', which is translated by women both as being a lack of services provision by the state, and a lack of logistical help from family members. Despite the relational setting, and the fact that a lot of women do, in fact, receive support from their mothers and/or mothers in law (without whom they wouldn't have been able to work), it is increasingly difficult for women to find family members who are willing to do this for them. This is pushing them to spend a good portion of their income on childcare, which adds an element to the disempowering setting of work for women in low-income Beirut. In that sense, even if women have access to resources, it is important to consider the impact of those resources on women's lives, or if similarly, to this situation, women have to spend it in places that do not really improve their well-being as they define it.

For women who are more educated, of course, this opportunity cost calculation decreases a little, because they earn higher salaries, which allows them to cover the extra

expenditure, such as childcare. On the other hand, it means that their opportunity cost is higher if they decide not to work, as they are foregoing more income. However, this means that other types of expenditure emerge for them, since they work in more formal settings, where they have reported having to spend more income on the way they dress, gifts to their colleague, and more socially-related expenditures. Additionally, since their children go to better schools, the demands of their children (iPads, vacations, attending birthday parties and buying gifts, etc.) are higher than those from the children of other, less educated women, who work in more informal jobs.

The opportunity cost is heightened when we think of the value that men place on women's work, as the interviews show. Often, men might feel threatened by the participation of their wives in the labour markets, and they tend to devalue their cash contributions, but they also devalue their contributions in the household. This lack of recognition makes women less confident about the importance of their contributions, not only as workers, but also as mothers and wives. All this adds to the complexity of women's decision-making processes in relation to work, and on the empowering potential of labour market participation in the lives of women in this specific context.

The Larger Structure

More indirect structural barriers to women's participation than those discussed at the previous sub-section include the legal system and the social contracts governing society. In the case of low income Beirut, these are similar to what has been reported in other countries in the MENA region (Miles, 2002; Moghadam, 2003, 2004; Jansen, 2004; Hijab, 2001). While those barriers do indeed play a role from a macro-perspective, if taken alone, they can hide dynamics that happen at the micro level. This was demonstrated because of the strength of the mixed methods approach, in which the qualitative interviews really helped to explain the trends that were reported from the quantitative data. Additionally, the intersectional method allowed for the unpacking of even those trends that were reported in the interviews, and thus did not allow them to be taken for granted.

For instance, while marriage is reported, in the quantitative section, as being one of the main elements that obstruct women from work, the interviews show that it is actually more nuanced and complex than, say, assuming husbands banning their wives from

participation in the labour markets. In fact, especially in low-income Beirut, very few husbands can ask their wives to stop working, because this would mean that they have to take up the majority of the expenditure, something for which most men cannot cater, given the increased needs imposed by society. In certain instances, women make seemingly 'empowering' choices because those are being imposed on them, rather than them being purely a manifestation of their own individual agency.

Another structural barrier that is reported by some women is that the system does not cater for the physiological needs of women, such as pregnancies, periods, childcare needs, among others. Those are not quantifiable or measurable elements, but are definitely factors that affect women's well-being, according to this research. This is why many women said that they preferred part-time employment. On one hand, mothers' expectations that they should be there for their children more, sit with them, and not leave them while they are young, are all social expectations because of gender roles that are now taken for granted in societies. On the other hand, a lot of women continue to report this feeling of guilt at leaving their children, and the emotional trouble that they experience when they leave their babies in day care, without incorporating those needs, dehumanises women and strips them of their rights to feel those emotional needs.

It can be counter-argued, of course, that the current economic system and job routines dehumanise both men and women, since a lot of fathers have also to be at work, and they miss the important milestones in their children's lives. Of course, this argument is also valid and it calls for further exploration. The neoliberal economy is pushing both men and women into exploitative routines. However, given it is one of many elements (such as gender expectations, the biological roles that women play, in terms of giving birth and breastfeeding, lower paid jobs for women, etc.), the system disadvantages women more than men.

Economic Inactivity as Desire

Finally, a new finding of this research is that many of the economically inactive women stated that they did not work, simply because they did not want to, because they did not wish to engage in this tiresome routine, rather than their being banned by their

husbands, or the like. Whether this ‘desire’ can be separated from all of the structural impediments and gender roles that society imposes on women, remains a question. However, it pushes us to pose this as a possibility to explain the outcome of inactivity. As this research has shown, some women prefer working inside the household, without earning cash, but keeping their value and status within the family, not because they are forced, but because they *want* to, in this specific context. The survey reinforces these qualitative findings, that 31% of economically inactive women surveyed in Beirut listed their desire to remain so. Many economically active women, from the interview sample, also list wanting to quit their job, if they could. This finding is really telling, and it deserves attention and thought to explain the activity patterns and the in context-sensitive definitions of empowerment.

Context Matters

Despite the commonalities in women’s struggles that emerge due to a global world whereby cities are more and more ‘global’ in the Sassen (2005) sense of the world, and whereby women are experiencing common structural obstacles emerging from neoliberal markets, there are big differences that emerged in the lived realities of women in this research that are related to context. For instance, women in low-income Beirut tend to be more educated than women in low-income classes in other developing countries contexts (Kabeer, 2000; Hasso, 2011; Singerman and Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar, 1997). This means that no single conclusion can be drawn for women in the MENA region from this particular research. This does not mean that the findings of this research are not revealing, on the contrary. However, it points to the importance of acknowledging difference across contexts, but also within contexts, something for which intersectionality caters. Additionally, this study points to trends that are interesting for research in other developing countries, regardless of whether the findings will be identical, or not.

For instance, while consumerism is a global trend that is shaping spending patterns everywhere, there are context specificities in Beirut, where, say, it is more common for women to have aesthetic surgery, and where, even in low-income settings, it is common practice for women to want to wear branded clothes. Those aspects are indicators of well-

being in that specific context but might not be deemed as so by women in a different context. Belonging to a certain sectarian group is another example, where, contrary to what the literature might suggest; this did not really affect respondents' choices. Despite seeing a more open attitude towards work from the Christian respondents, followed by Sunni respondents, and then Shi'a respondents, this did not alter women's decision-making about work. For instance, at the same time, the most conservative couples I have interviewed were from a Christian background, and they banned their wives from working because this would mean that they were mingling with other men. Additionally, most of the Christian families I interviewed had very traditional outlooks when it came to the roles of women. On the other hand, many conservative families, from diverse sectarian belongings, had similar outlooks. All of this points to the importance of examining the intersections of several factors so as to better analyse certain outcomes from women's decision-making processes, rather than any one factor alone in isolation (sectarian group, for instance).

In accordance with the literature, this research finds that almost all married women report that their husbands are the main breadwinners, regardless of whether the women are earning a higher salary than their husbands (Roudi-Fahimi and Mederios Kent, 2007). This points to the unchanging gender norms in the society, which still dictate certain gender patterns and roles. Additionally, women, whether working or not, continue to do the bulk of the household work. However, a new context-specific finding from this research is that economically inactive women tend to get away with doing less house work, and they also get more support for it, since their husbands do not feel threatened and their masculinity is not shaken by the fact that they help their wives in household work, since it is they who earn the household's income. This is a finding that is new to the literature on household work in the MENA region, and that deserves further attention and research.

Complexity and Variation

Sen (1999) equates development with the 'freedom' and capacity to choose, within a set of constraints. This research shows that the ability and freedom to be economically inactive is, for women, as empowering, if not more so, than their ability to be in the labour markets in the conditions that relate to low-income Beirut. The measurement of empowerment through indicators such as access to resources, achievements, and agency, should cater for the

ability of women in different contexts, and at different stages of their lives, to define those indicators and measures and their well-being in ways that might not fit the overall expectations, but that do speak to their own subjectivities and lived realities. In a context where the costs of work overshadow the benefits, how can we still speak of work as being empowering? Women's decisions are, as Kabeer reports (2008), on a continuum between structure and agency. However, economically inactive women tend to often be portrayed in the literature as being the furthest away from agency. This research proves otherwise. In fact, work played a central role, at times empowering, but, at others, disempowering, in the women's lives that are the basis of this research. In that sense, work in the labour markets cannot, and must not, be framed as the ever-empowering recipe for all women across cultures, classes, and marital statuses.

In the context of low-income Beirut, as this thesis has demonstrated, the structure of the economy, state services and heightened consumerism have led to women not really 'choosing' to work, but rather being pushed into work by 'need', often in the relative, rather than the absolute, sense. Work, informal, part-time, or even formal, is often not valued enough in the household, or in society, and this puts many women at a disadvantage, notably, that they have lost a lot of their functions to the market, which has outsourced a lot of their contributions. This thesis has thus challenged the assumption, which is often discussed in the literature, that women's empowerment routes, although varied, undeniably pass through the labour markets (Kabeer et.al, 2013; WB, 2006, 2012; Eyben, 2011).

It has also shown that women's decision-making processes, if looked at through an intersectional lens, are often a result of a complex web of factors that makes it difficult to generalise in relation to particular categories. For instance, membership of a particular sectarian group cannot, on its own, explain a single trend, neither can age, nor marital status. Each woman's 'lived experiences' (as defined by Campbell [2014] in Chapter 1) translates differently in her abilities and her choices to be economically active, in much more complex ways than modernisation theory predicts.

Age, as an instance, definitely plays a role in women's outlooks (and those of their husbands') towards work, while younger couples defended the importance of working in labour markets more. However, while this can be translated into changes in the perception of work, if looked at from an intersectional approach, along with the number of children,

and expenditure, it can also be explained that this relates more to the stages of those women's lives, the achievements that they have accomplished so far, the conditions of the labour markets at that specific time, rather than to age alone. At times, there is the possibility that women have chosen not to engage in the labour market, not because they have internalised their subordination, but given that circumstances make this choice a more empowering one at this stage of their life, or given their preferences.

Ways Forward

The 'empowerment' paradigm has initiated in the realm of grassroots activism (Sen and Grown, 1987; Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Agarwal, 1994), but has moved away from feminist research more into the gender and development agenda, and has been translated into policies that affect women's every day realities through development projects, labour market policies, and state laws and legislations. Basic questions, such as 'do women *really* want to work?' have disappeared, and they have been replaced by 'why are women not working?' assuming that all women must work in order for them to be empowered, but, more importantly, for the economy's growth and for developmental outcomes (WB, 2004, 2005, 2011, 2013).

What this research has tried to show is that, if taken for granted, and if taken separately from contextual circumstances and structures, and if stripped away from women's perceptions and daily lived realities, the implementation of policies that further those routes to 'empowerment,' based on a simple uni-dimensional definition of empowerment, risk disempowering women by forcing them to be in unequal and tiring labour market arrangements. Disregarding the implications of such 'paths' in a specific local setting can be riskier, rather than beneficial, for women's lives. This setting that is affected by global trends, such as very demanding formal jobs, and an increasingly consumerist culture, as well as a state that does not provide enough support, and unchanged gender patterns. All the above push us to examine the notion 'empowerment' in a more dynamic way, taking into account structural elements and women's subjectivities and desires.

Conceptualisations of empowerment, and paths to the advancement of women, must respect the desires of the women *themselves* and *their* strategies, even if those contradict

the tactics and outcomes that the ‘empowerment’ literature and theories predict, or further. Ridding policies, development programmes, and even research questions of judgments about what ‘empowerment’ should look like, and how it should be achieved, is a crucial finding of this research. Moving beyond resource as a sole indicator, or measuring choice without paying attention to the ability to actualize the choice, is very important when examining women’s decision-making processes. Agency, in its conceptualisation and manifestations in terms of tactics, has to start incorporating tacit power, not as merely a form of the ‘internalisation of subordination’, or as a form of bargaining within a set of constraints, but as a way forward to changing gender norms and outcomes in ways that women see as being successful in specific contexts. Those types of ‘agency’ should not be treated as being morally inferior to other, more ‘revolutionary’, forms of agency that fit the prescriptions of an ethnocentric view of ‘feminism’, or as a specific and acknowledged way to fight battles.

Another important contribution of this research is in its reiteration of the importance of a continually gendered approach to issues of women’s empowerment, work and marriage, by incorporating men into research efforts, development programmes and policies. One of the most important themes in this research is the relationship between masculinity and ‘empowerment.’ This research thus suggests a broader research agenda that incorporates masculinities as a crucial element in the furthering of women’s conditions, especially in the MENA region, where this research is scarce, and, more importantly, in Lebanon where this theme has not yet been addressed. This helps explain a lot of women’s tactics not as merely an internalisation of their subordination, but as actually a symptom of a deeper societal crisis in masculinity that needs to be recognized. Consumerism, too, emerges as a crucial theme that must be addressed in future research, especially in its implications for marriage and work choices in Lebanon, but also, in the MENA region more broadly.

Beyond themes, research, in its form and implications, should also always seek to answer not only how its findings merely contribute as a case study, a confirmation or re-evocation of existing theory, but how it can *directly* be translated into the lives of the very same women who have made this research possible. Hence, the first step that I wish to undertake, after finishing this thesis, is to publish it -- not only in English, but also to

translate it to make it accessible to all the women, who I wholeheartedly thank, and who have made this research possible. This is only being true to the findings of my research, which aims to advance social change. Further, this research's findings will be used to devise policy recommendations that will question many of the 'empowerment' programmes that are currently being developed, funded and implemented in the context of low-income Beirut, but also in Lebanon, more generally. It will invite all feminist researchers in the MENA region to re-question what 'empowerment' means in *their* contexts, rather than adopting notions that are ethnocentric. It encourages feminist researchers to be careful with the biases in their research questions that are the outcomes of the often taken for granted conceptualisations of certain notions.

It is dangerous to continue treating empowerment as a black or white matter, a road measured through narrow indicators, focusing on the individual, leaving behind a context, structure, but also the possibility that women might not want to be 'empowered', if empowerment means something about which they are not convinced. It is as simplistic as my attempts, as a little girl, to find out who was more empowered: *Tante* Reem, or my mother? Today, after four years of research, I can say who was the more empowered of the two. I can say: both. I can say: none. I can say: it depends.

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Appendix

A- Demographic Information of the Respondent:

1. Date of Birth of Respondent (DD/MM/YYYY):
2. Confession:
 - 2.1. Sunni
 - 2.2. Shia
 - 2.3. Druze
 - 2.4. Orthodox
 - 2.5. Maronite
 - 2.6. Catholic
 - 2.7. Armenian Orthodox
 - 2.8. Armenian Catholic
 - 2.9. Alawite
 - 2.10. Minorities, specify: -----
3. Marital Status
 - 3.1. Single
 - 3.2. Married
 - 3.3. Divorced
 - 3.4. Separated
 - 3.5. Widowed
 - 3.6. Other, specify:
4. Do you have any children?
 - 4.1. No
 - 4.2. Yes (If yes, number of children: -----)

5. Highest Educational Level Achieved:

5.1. Illiterate

5.2. Can read and write without school

5.3. Elementary

5.4. Intermediate

5.5. Secondary

5.6. Vocational

5.7. Graduated from university with a Bachelor's Degree BA/BS

(Major:_____)

5.8. Graduated from university with Master's Degree MA/MS

(Major:_____)

5.9. Graduated from university with Doctorate degree

(Major:_____)

5.10. Still enrolled in university for a Bachelor's Degree BA/BS

(Major:_____)

5.11. Still enrolled in university for a Master's Degree MA/MS

(Major:_____)

5.12. Still enrolled in university for a Doctorate degree

(Major:_____)

6. Employment Status

6.1. Inactive (Does not work and is not searching for work)

6.2. Unemployed (Does not currently work but is actively searching for a job)

6.3. Full-Time Employment

6.4. Part-Time Employment

6.5. Retired

7. Who is the head of the household:

7.1. One of the parents

7.2. Husband

7.3. Respondent

7.4. Other

8. Monthly Household Income Level (including income from all sources)

8.1. <450\$

8.2. 450-750\$

8.3. 751-1000\$

8.4. 1001-1500\$

8.5. 1501-2500\$

8.6. 2501-3500\$

8.7. 3501-5000\$

8.8. >5000\$

8.9. Don't Know

8.10. No answer

8.11. No income

9. Respondent's Personal Income Level

- 9.1. <450\$
- 9.2. 450-750\$
- 9.3. 751-1000\$
- 9.4. 1001-1500\$
- 9.5. 1501-2500\$
- 9.6. 2501-3500\$
- 9.7. 3501-5000\$
- 9.8. >5000\$
- 9.9. Don't Know
- 9.10. No answer
- 9.11. No income

B- Household Structure:

10. If married, please state

- 10.1. Year of marriage:
- 10.2. Is the Husband Lebanese? Yes/No
- 10.3. Confessional belonging of husband:
 - 10.3.1. Sunni
 - 10.3.2. Shia
 - 10.3.3. Druze
 - 10.3.4. Orthodox
 - 10.3.5. Maronite
 - 10.3.6. Armenian Orthodox
 - 10.3.7. Armenian Catholic
 - 10.3.8. Alawite
 - 10.3.9. Other

11. If married, which type of marriage did you resort to / If not married, which type of marriage would you like to resort to when you get married?

- 11.1. Religious Marriage
- 11.2. Civil Marriage
- 11.3. Both
- 11.4. Not Important

12. Household Register:

Important to include even if they don't reside in the household: Husband (Partner), Father, Mother, Children Also include all other members living in the household at the time of study:

Number	Sex (1=M/ 2=F)	Relationship to Respondent*	Age	Marital Status **	Lives with respondent (1= Yes/ 2= N0)	Dependent (1= Yes/ 2= N0)	Economic Activity ***	Highest Educational Attainment ****

*Relationship to respondent: 01=Husband, 02= Mother, 03= Father, 04= Son, 05= Daughter, 06= Son-in-Law, 07= Daughter-In-Law, 08= Grandchildren, 09= Brother, 10= Sister, 11= Mother-in-law, 12= Father-in-law, 13= Brother-in-law, 14= Sister-in-law, 15= Partner, 16= Servant, 17= Other: specify.

**Marital Status: 01= Single, 02= Married, 03= Divorced/Separated, 04= Widowed, 05= With a partner in other form of arrangement.

***Economic activity: 01= Inactive (does not work and is not searching for work), 02= Unemployed (Does not currently work but is actively searching for a job), 03= Full-Time Employment, 04= Part-Time Employment, 05= Retired, 06= Student, 07= Child Under School Age.

****Educational attainment: 00= Did not reach school age yet, 01= Illiterate, 02 = Can read and write without school, 03= Elementary, 04= Intermediate, 05= Secondary, 06= Vocational, 07= Graduated from university with a Bachelor's Degree BA/BS, 08= Graduated from university with Master's Degree MA/MS, 09= Graduated from university with Doctorate degree.

13. Does the household receive any remittances?

- 13.1. No
- 13.2. Yes, <450\$ per month
- 13.3. Yes, 450-750\$ per month
- 13.4. Yes, 751-1000\$ per month
- 13.5. Yes, 1001-2500\$ per month
- 13.6. Yes, 2501-3500 \$ per month
- 13.7. Yes, >3500 \$ per month

14. Do you have a maid/ household help?

- 14.1. No
- 14.2. Yes- daily
- 14.3. Yes- 2 to 3 times per week
- 14.4. Yes- once per week
- 14.5. Yes- 2 to 3 times per month
- 14.6. Yes- once per month
- 14.7. Yes- permanent/ resides with the family

15. Does the respondent own any assets?

- 15.1. Apartment they live in
- 15.2. Other apartment
- 15.3. Car
- 15.4. Land
- 15.5. A combination of the above
- 15.6. None of the above

16. Type of medical insurance:

- 16.1. No medical insurance
- 16.2. NSSF as employee
- 16.3. NSSF as family employee
- 16.4. End of Service Indemnity (EOSI) for civil service/military personnel
- 16.5. Voluntary insurance with the National Social Security Fund
- 16.6. Civil Servants Cooperate Scheme / Other Military Schemes
- 16.7. Mutual Funds
- 16.8. Private insurance
- 16.9. Other

C-Answer only if respondent is currently Inactive:

17. The main reason for your inactivity in labour market is:

- 17.1. Personal preference to remain inactive (respondent does not like work)
- 17.2. Permanent health related problems/Disability
- 17.3. Taking care of kids
- 17.4. Taking care of other dependents
- 17.5. Imposed by parents
- 17.6. Imposed by husband
- 17.7. Discouraged Worker Effect

18. Are you satisfied with your status as inactive in labour market?

- 18.1. Yes, I would like to remain inactive
- 18.2. No, I would like to take up part-time work in the public sector
- 18.3. No, I would like to take up part-time work in the private sector
- 18.4. No, I would like to take up full-time work in the public sector
- 18.5. No, I would like to take up full-time work in the private sector

19. Were you previously active in labour markets

- 19.1. No (Go to section G)
- 19.2. Yes (Answer section F with reference to last job)

D-Answer only if respondent is currently Unemployed:

20. You have been unemployed for:

- 20.1. Less than 6 months
- 20.2. Between 6 months- 1 year
- 20.3. Between 1 year- 2 years
- 20.4. More than 2 years

21. Are you:

- 21.1. Currently looking for first job (Go to Section G)
- 21.2. Looking for job but had previously lost a job (Answer section F with reference to last job)

E-Answer only if respondent is currently Employed:

22. Are you satisfied with your status as employed? (can choose up to two answers?)

- 22.1. Yes, I would like to remain employed in the same job
- 22.2. Yes, but I would like to work less hours
- 22.3. Yes, but I would like to work more hours
- 22.4. Yes, but I would like to change my job within the same sector
- 22.5. Yes, but I would like to change my job to the other sector
- 22.6. No, I would like to give up work if I could

F- Labour Market Activity of the Respondent:

23. You worked for pay in the last week in:

- 23.1. Public Sector
- 23.2. Private Sector

24. Employment Status:

- 24.1. Employer
- 24.2. Part of Family Business
- 24.3. Self-Employed
- 24.4. Employee in managerial position
- 24.5. Any other form of employee

25. Sector of Employment:

- 25.1. Services
- 25.2. Industry
- 25.3. Construction
- 25.4. Agriculture
- 25.5. Commerce
- 25.6. Other

26. Do you have another paid side job (secondary job)

26.1. Yes

26.2. No

27. What is the time of travel from your main job to your place of residence:

27.1. Less than 30 minutes

27.2. Between 30 minutes- 1 hour

27.3. Between 1 hour- 2 hours

27.4. More than 2 hours

28. What is the percentage of contribution from your personal income towards family expenditure?

28.1. Nothing/ Personal expenses only

28.2. Less than 25% of income

28.3. Between 25-50 % of income

28.4. Between 50-75 % of income

28.5. Between 75-100 % of income

29. Who has the primary spending responsibility on the basic needs in your household?

29.1. Respondent

29.2. Husband

29.3. Mother

29.4. Father

29.5. Siblings

29.6. Other

30. If given the opportunity, do you wish to migrate for work?

30.1. Yes; please state main reason:

30.2. No; please state main reason:

G- Perceptions about Work:

31. How would you define 'work'? (In other words, what does the word 'work' mean to the respondent). Give examples of activity that is considered 'work'.

32. What is the biggest obstacle to employment in your opinion?

- 32.1. Gender Discrimination in the workplace
- 32.2. No promotions
- 32.3. Low salary
- 32.4. Marriage
- 32.5. No jobs to match skills
- 32.6. No benefits
- 32.7. No childcare centres
- 32.8. Lack of proximity to the workplace
- 32.9. Family constraint

33. What, in your opinion, are the biggest incentives to work?

- 33.1. Financial need
- 33.2. To get out of the household
- 33.3. Filling up time
- 33.4. Personal Satisfaction
- 33.5. Gaining independence
- 33.6. Securing old age needs
- 33.7. Improving family's lifestyle

Other

H- Gender–Related Questions

34. Who does the bulk of the household chores (laundry, cleaning, etc.) ? (One answer only)

- 34.1. Respondent
- 34.2. Husband
- 34.3. Mother
- 34.4. Father
- 34.5. Siblings
- 34.6. Sons
- 34.7. Daughters
- 34.8. Maid/Household help
- 34.9. Other

35. Do you think there are some jobs that are more suitable for men than for women?

- 35.1. Yes
- 35.2. No

36. In your view, do you think marriage is important?

- 36.1. Yes, 2 main reasons being: ----- and -----

- 36.2. No, it is more advantageous to remain single
- 36.3. No, it is more advantageous to be in cohabitation with partner

37. Women should prioritise family life over career, and should give up work if it is affecting her prospects of getting married, or her marriage life:

- 37.1. Strongly agree
- 37.2. Agree
- 37.3. Disagree
- 37.4. Strongly Disagree

38. With regards to childcare, ideally:

- 38.1. Husband and wife should equally share the childcare workload, regardless of who works longer hours outside the household
- 38.2. Husband and wife should share the childcare, relative to who works longer hours outside the household
- 38.3. The wife should be the main responsible of childcare
- 38.4. The husband should be the main responsible of childcare

39. In your view, what is the main obstacle to marriage nowadays?

- 39.1. Financial instability of prospect
- 39.2. Lack of prospects in the country
- 39.3. Lack of suitable/matching prospects
- 39.4. Institution of marriage is becoming out-dated
- 39.5. High expectations of women with regards to marriage
- 39.6. High expectations of men with regards to marriage
- 39.7. Women prioritising their career over marriage

40. When making the below decisions, who is the person you mainly consult:

Person	Work related decisions	Marriage Related Decisions	Major Decisions (ex: Travelling, Buying an apartment, Buying a car)	Daily Life Choices
Mother				
Father				
Older female siblings				
Younger female siblings				
Older male siblings				
Younger male siblings				
Husband				
Extended family				
Neighbours				
Friends				
No one/ I make these decisions on my own				