

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS

C:NTACT

INTRODUCTION

DEAR TEACHER!

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS is a theatre project in Jordan, which aim is to articulate the hopes and dreams of women in Jordan. Through theatre, personal storytelling, music and dance, 12 women tell their own stories about their marriage, their parents and their children – about their past and their future, and how they would shape it – if it was up to them.

THE PROJECT AND ITS PARTNERS

The project is a collaboration between Jordanian Women's Union, KVINFO and C:NTACT. C:NTACT is a Danish social foundation, who works both nationally and internationally. C:NTACT has made several theatre projects in Jordan since 2009 with different themes and aims. Common for all of C:NTACT's projects is that they use the aesthetics of theatre to give voice to different social groups.

Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) is an organization whose aim is to unify Jordanian women's effort to protect their rights. JWU has been the project's local partner in Jordan, and has contributed with knowledge, production team, crew and participants for the project.

Read more at <http://www.jwu.itgo.com/bg.htm>

KVINFO is the Danish Centre for Gender, Equality and Ethnicity. The key role of KVINFO is to initiate research and disseminate information and findings, and to contribute to the development of an equal society. Through its work, KVINFO ensures the documentation and communication of knowledge about gender, equality and ethnicity – both in Denmark and around the world. KVINFO has worked in the Middle East since 2006, where they established their Middle East Department. KVINFO has contributed to **MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS** with project funding.

Read more at <http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/715/>

ABOUT THIS MATERIAL

The purpose of this educational material is to maintain the themes of the performance through discussions. The material consists of a selection of the scenes from the show, and asks the students to relate the issues to their own lives and their own future. The material also opens a debate of what theatre and personal storytelling is capable of. Lastly, it introduces the work of Jordanian Women's Union.



اتحاد المرأة الأردنية
Jordanian Women's Union

K V I N F O

PRODUCTION TEAM:

JORDANIAN TEAM

STAGE DIRECTOR

AND DRAMATURGE: Sawsan Nizar Dissi

MUSIC AND SONG COACH: Hifaa Kamal

COREOGRAPHY COACH: Nour Nizar Dissi

PROJECT COORDINATOR: Hana Jabire

PROJECT ASSISTANT: Wadaah Mahadeen

TRANSLATOR: Wajd Al-Shamavleh

DANISH TEAM

STAGE DIRECTOR: Solveig Weinkouff

PROJECT MANAGER: Firas Mahmoud

CAST

MUNTAHA · AMANI · ANNA · ENAS

ABEER · REEM · TAQDEER · LAYAL


DANA · TULIN · SAJA

*The date for the wedding
was decided without
anyone asking my opinion.*

Enas

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*Your father should approve
your marriage, is that OK?*
Dana



ABEER'S MONOLOGUE

"Happiness and joy are feelings I rarely felt when I was little, as I was living in a closed environment, burdened by the people surrounding us. There were many things I felt like experiencing and doing, but everything wasn't allowed. I wasn't allowed to go see my girl friends. They weren't allowed to come see me. From my home to school – and from school to my home. My mom is afraid of what people might say.

And to this day I can't forget when I was 13 years old, and my mom came to pick me up from the street as I was playing with our neighbours' kids. She took me inside and gave me a shower, blow-dried my hair and gave me ear-rings (and it was the first time I ever wore ear-rings!). I was very happy, but I didn't know what was waiting for me after that.

Why do you need a degree? A woman has only her home and husband. Abeer

On that occasion, she told me that her sister's family, whom I don't like, were coming to visit us. And I was very surprised when everyone started ululating and congratulating me. What for? I didn't know. Only when my mom said: "Congratulations, bride of honour!" I was shocked! What bride? How? Who? With whom?

When I found out that they married me to my maternal aunt's son, who I can't stand, I wished that I would die right there at that moment. We were engaged for 4 months,



and neither he nor I could continue, as the feeling was mutual. We broke up.

Of course, this story affected my mom a great deal. She started to feel that she had to marry me in any way possible to get rid of people's talk. Because I got engaged and broke up, it's as if this is a stamp of shame on me. My mother didn't know that she with her fear of what people might say and the importance she puts in that, she was killing the child's spirit inside me.

My engagement in a young age imposed on me a view from society that I must get married and that I'm a mature woman capable of taking care of a home and responsibility; forgetting that I'm a child of 13.

My mom kept at me until she had me engaged one more time when I was 16. This way I was denied my dream in life that I can finish my education and enter university. During my freshman year, I couldn't study because my fiancée didn't leave me any room. During exams he would stay late at every night at my place, and I would go to the exams in the morning without any sleep or having studied. I used to sleep during the exams. Of course, I failed. And he wouldn't let me re-take the exams. Saying: "Why do you need a degree? A woman has only her home and husband." This sentence that hurt me all-through our time of marriage. In the end, when all my chances of retaking the exam disappeared, I realised that he didn't want me to continue my education so that my level of education would surpass his. And as a result, I would become better than him, since he had only gone to school until 9th grade. This taught me that he is selfish and only loves himself.

I'm now 27 years old. I got divorced from my husband after living with him for 8 years and after all this time, I knew how to live with no fear from people's talk. I went back to school after being gone for 9 years, and this was a very difficult feeling in the beginning. That I had to go back to reading and writing and staying up late. And taking care of work and school. But even though there's all this hardship involved, I'm so happy. As much as I work hard, the look of joy and happiness is visible in my eyes. Because I feel that I exist. That I'm capable of doing something worthwhile for myself. That I'm able to reach my dream that I've wanted since a long time ago.

My parents were able to change themselves and accept me as I am and not pressure me with the subject of marriage. This is what happiness is all about. That a human being lives to realise her dream is much better than living to realise someone else's dream. As if anyone deserves this?!

**I feel like saying it out load – to everyone:
»I'm haaappyyyyyy!«**



DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 **WHY IS ABEER'S MOTHER SO AFRAID OF WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT SAY?**
- 2 **WHAT DOES PEOPLE'S OPINION MEAN TO YOU? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOUR PARENTS?**
- 3 **DO YOU THINK THAT IT IS A GENERAL IDEA AMONG MEN THAT WOMEN'S' EDUCATION CAN'T SURPASS A MAN'S?**
- 4 **HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT?**
- 5 **ABEER WAS ENGAGED WHEN SHE WAS 13 YEARS OLD. WHEN DO YOU THINK IT'S APPROPRIATE TO GET MARRIED?**



LAYAL'S MONOLOGUE

Marriage was something unfamiliar and non-existent in my life. Especially, since I was raised in an environment that insisted on educational excellence and training my skills. My family was the reason that made me discover my talent for acting. After that I entered the world of theatre at the age of five, in addition to my

hobbies, my main focus was on my education. For that I'm grateful for my family.

I remember the first time I was introduced to the idea of marriage, responsibility and importance was when I was ten years old. At that time, my uncle decided to marry



LAYAL'S MONOLOGUE

→ my cousin, who was 16. Her marriage was a huge shock to the family and created a lot of trouble. Especially since my family was all for women getting an education and jobs. And the bigger shock was that the reason was based on a material foundation, as she was marrying a wealthy person. After her marriage, my cousin would tell me about bodily violence and mental pressure, which she experienced from her husband and his family. One day, my cousin decided that she had to get a divorce after she had two children. Her decision wasn't accepted by her family, nor by society. But nevertheless, my cousin is now a working woman responsible for raising a complete family on her own.

What's puzzling me until this day is what moved my aunt's husband to get rid of his daughter in a young age. And the more important question is, how did the law allow for such a thing, knowing that the law doesn't allow a women to be married when she's younger than 18?

Following this incident, my mother insisted on putting me in a healthy social environment to teach me how to deal with others. And as time passed by and after I became 16, my family started discussing the topics of love and marriage with me. My parents were aware that each age I went through had certain demands and needs. So she explained to me that love and marriage shouldn't be built on materialism, or lineage, or social status. Not even on amazement or infatuation. My mother used to say: "The saying that 'they were married and lived the rest of their lives in ease' can only take place in fairy tales." In her opinion, a better saying would be: "They were married and worked harder to make the relationship work." She was convinced that first comes love then marriage.

The law doesn't allow a women to be married when she's younger than 18. Layal

As for me, marriage is still a mystery until this day. Although mom told me of her story and the stories of others so that I can learn from them, I feel that this matter really needs true love. More importantly: sacrifice. For me, marriage is not an option at the moment, as I'm still finishing my education at the university to get my masters degree and a job and realize my dreams. As for love, it's a reality I'd live to experience at the right time, in the right place."

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 DO YOU THINK THAT MARRIAGE AND EDUCATION ARE OPPOSITES – OR ARE BOTH THINGS POSSIBLE AT THE SAME TIME? WHY OR WHY NOT?
LAYAL WANTS TO FINISH HER EDUCATION BEFORE GETTING MARRIED. WHY DOES SHE THINK THAT IS NECESSARY?
- 3 FIND ALL THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE IN LAYAL'S MONOLOGUE. WHAT DOES HER MOTHER THINK ABOUT MARRIAGE? HER AUNT'S HUSBAND? THE LAW? LAYAL HERSELF?
- 4 LAYAL'S MOTHER SAYS THAT THE PERFECT MARRIAGE AND TRUE LOVE ONLY EXIST IN FAIRY TALES. DO YOU AGREE?



REEM'S MONOLOGUE

The words that keep ringing in my ears: "Girls! You know what my dream is? My dream is that all my girls and boys become academics with the best education."

Until this day, there's no other dream for my father than the we learn and learn and be of those who are successful.

I got married when I was 18, and marriage wasn't something that was on my mind. My father's words wouldn't leave me. My husband is an educated man. He supported the idea of me getting an education. And because his work demands of him to stay out for long periods of time, I started living two lives. The life of the housewife taking care of all the responsibilities of our home. And another life of the university student who wants to learn and research and think and push forward. I put a lot of effort to deliver everything needed and despite all the hardship, I was proud of my achievement. I could see appreciation and high regards in the eyes of my parents and friends, which added to my self-esteem and my insisting on realizing my father's dream, which I adopted so it became my own ambition.

During the third year of university, God gave me my first child. Three weeks of maternity leave and I returned to continue my journey with an added third job on my list. The job of being a mother.

Years passed as quick as lightning, and as a long night for those who're waiting, I finished my university degree with all my peers without any delay. I got very high marks in my right hand, and in my left I carried my son who was one year and three months. My happiness could fill the entire world and all the people in it.

Success always pushes us forward as ambitions grow bigger. My ambition was to work within my specialized field, which I fell in love with. And another period of pressure began. My husband refused the idea of work every time with a new explanation. Either he would tell me to take a little rest, or he would ask where Amjad would go?? But who'd take care of my things?

me the most was how to discuss this with my husband who's worried about my ambition and asks me: "Where do you want to go? What do you want to reach? Isn't it enough for you what you already achieved?"

My ambition exceeds the limits of the skies.

I will continue my education and organise my time and will not ask for help from anyone. And indeed I started the journey towards my master's degree fuelled by my will and with me is my mother's prayers and father's dream.

Pressure and responsibility multiplied: a home that needs cleaning and organising, and a husband that wants all his rights, and two children in school, and work that needs management and leadership, and an education that needed high concentration. Strange feelings – hard to describe. I told myself that it's just a phase that will pass needing more management.

Why must a woman in our society choose only one of her rights? Reem

I provided all the solutions and facilitation and compromises to get my husband's accept and I did indeed get it after a lot of insisting and stipulations. But all this didn't diminish my high spirit and enthusiasm.

I started my work in just the place I wanted to in the field of educating handicapped children. So happy with my job – every day I learn something new from it. I worked there for four years during which God blessed us with my daughter Ayah. I continued my work and Ayah became two years old, and as our children grew bigger so did our ambitions. My ambition was to found a small organisation that aims at educating and training handicapped children and defending their rights. Thank God, my organisation is now a name that is recognised in the field.

The growth of my ambition disturbs my husband and annoys him. I'm giving it all I've got to keep him satisfied and to win his support and recognition, paying with my time, effort, thought, body and mind. But the taste of success is something else only known by those who try it. Worth all the work and sacrifice.

After establishing my project (Aman) I started thinking about continuing my education, and the thing that worried

The first year of my master's degree passed, during which me and my husband decided it was time to have another child to beautify our home. And so it was decided. All my

responsibilities continued but this time with a body that was tired with physical transformations, dizzy spins and need for sleep. Despite all this, I only slept for two hours every day to be able to complete all my chores without any shortcomings and in the best way possible.

I handed in my exam completely after one year and a half with better grades than most of my peers. Each time my ambition pushed me more and more.

I got my master's degree to add to my personal and human achievement. A new achievement and high degree only to add in another month another beautiful child to my family. My daughter Randa, who's now 7 years old.

A question keeps turning in my head. Why must a woman in our society choose only one of her rights? Either she gets married and become a housewife only, or she gets an education and a job only.

My ambition grows each day. I will continue my education even more and develop my work, raise my children the ways I was raised so they can succeed with their education and work and create their own future and add value to life."



REEM'S MONOLOGUE

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 REEM'S AMBITION "EXCEEDS THE LIMITS OF THE SKIES," SHE SAYS. WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT POWER COMES FROM? WHAT HELPS HER? WHAT MAKES HER AMBITIONS MORE DIFFICULT TO REACH?
- 2 TRY TO ANSWER THE QUESTION THAT REEM ASKS IN THE END OF HER MONOLOGUE: "WHY MUST A WOMAN IN OUR SOCIETY CHOOSE ONLY ONE OF HER RIGHTS?"
- 3 REEM'S MONOLOGUE BEGINS AND ENDS WITH A REFERENCE TO THE ENCOURAGEMENTS OF HER PARENTS. WHAT EFFECT DOES THAT GIVE HER STORY THAT IT HAS A THEME LIKE THAT?
- 4 WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT REEM'S STORY? IS IT A COMMON STORY THAT YOU'VE HEARD BEFORE OR IS HER SITUATION EXCEPTIONAL AND RARE?



SAJA'S MONOLOGUE

And when he knew that I was carrying a girl, he began to hit me even harder. Saja

In a moment of anger and bad temper ... I was very tired ... I began to cry, and didn't know how to control my feelings and state, my sisters around me tried to calm me down.

At that second, I was kind of unconscious, and when I calmed down and thought about the reason, I recalled my story and discovered that my husband's temper was transferred to me. I was very affected by all that's happened to me because of him.

After getting married, my husband's treatment of me changed completely. All the tenderness he showed me during our engagement turned and he became another person. In the beginning, he made me choose between him and my family. I tried to be balanced in my choice, and I refused to choose. I clarified to him that I chose both of them together. But he didn't accept and started to ask me for things that go against my principals. So I refused these

things. And when I did, he would get angry and give himself the right to beat me and say blasphemous things.

I tried to take it and talk to him in any way possible, but with no result. His anger and violence towards me would increase. Even his parents treated me bad. Instead of standing with what's right, they would lay it on me and encourage their son to hit me even more, as he had a weak personality in front of them.

Afterwards, he came up with a new story that our home is filled with demons. He would steal my jewellery and say that the demons took it. Sometimes he would return it – sometimes he wouldn't. He tried to scare me and drive me crazy along with him. I won't deny that I was felt fear, especially when he would place a knife under the bed to kill demons when they appeared. I felt that he could take the knife any moment and kill me with it while I was

SAJA'S MONOLOGUE

→ sleeping. I was very afraid of him. I turned on some Quran in the house to calm me down.

One time it was so bad that he turned on the gas in the kitchen and closed all the windows to suffocate me. And despite all of this, I wouldn't tell my parents everything. I tried to change him and help him. Until I found out that I was pregnant. I was happy for my pregnancy and like everyone else; I wanted to check with a doctor to get some reassurance. But he refused to take me, because he was very stingy.

And when he knew that I was carrying a girl, he began to hit me even harder. He would blame me for being just like my mother – only pregnant with girls.

After a couple of months of pregnancy, and after a long period of fights and bad treatment, I decided to go to my parents. He declared that he didn't want me and he didn't want my daughter. He told me that day before leaving the house: "If I came back home and find you here, I'll kill you!"

At my parents' home, the atmosphere was very tense. I was always angry. Even when I was with them, he wouldn't leave me alone. He would ruin my reputation and sold all my clothes.

It was difficult for me to get rid of all these things that happened to me. But my pregnancy and daughter that was on her way in addition to my parents' support helped me become stronger. They helped me decide to become a strong mother for my daughter. A human being capable of controlling her feelings and anger.

My daughter can't be blamed for anything. I tried to contact him after giving birth for her sake. But he refused. Now he rarely asks about her or sees her.

I know very well that life isn't all about him. My new life began after I got separated from him. I want to continue my education, especially since I'm a high achiever at school. This is my dream from the beginning – to learn and work. It was also my father's dream since we were small.

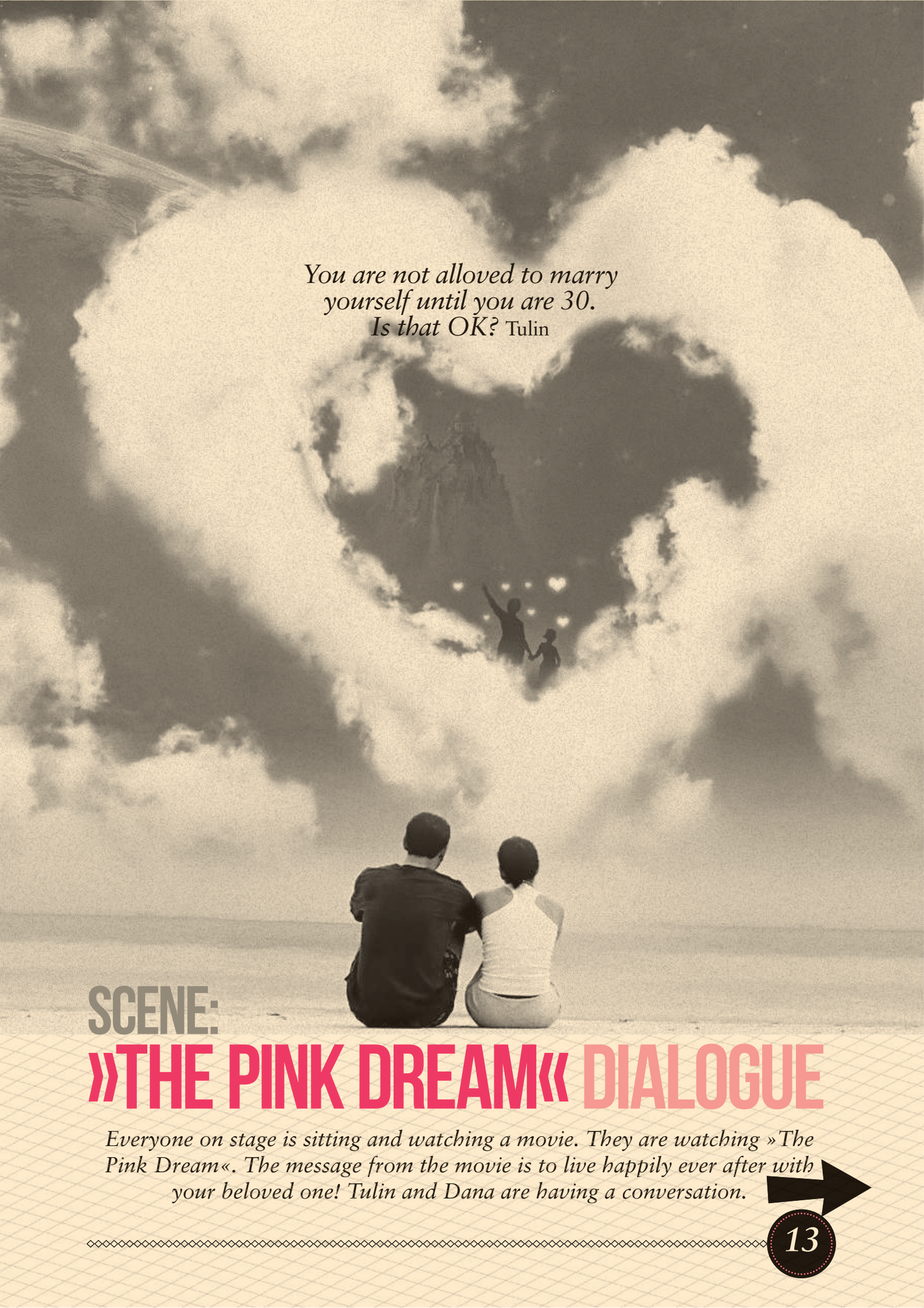
Today, we all ask ourselves how this could happen to me? Especially, since my father isn't the kind that denies our right to education, on the contrary, he supported it.

What's important is that I will raise my daughter to become stronger than I was and I have a beautiful family that makes me see that tomorrow will be better and better."



DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 **SAJA BEGINS HER STORY IN A SPECIAL WAY. IN THE BEGINNING THE VIEWER DOESN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT SHE IS TALKING ABOUT. WHAT EFFECT DOES THAT GIVE HER PERFORMANCE?**
- 2 **SAJA ASKS IN THE END OF HER MONOLOGUE: "HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?" BOTH SAJA AND REEM HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED BY THEIR PARENTS TO FINISH THEIR EDUCATION. WHAT MAKES THEIR SITUATION DIFFERENT?**
- 3 **WHICH OF SAJA AND REEM'S STORIES ARE THE MOST COMMON, AND WHICH IS THE MOST EXCEPTIONAL?**

A black and white photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a beach, seen from behind, looking out at a massive screen that fills the sky. The screen displays a scene from a movie where a couple is standing in a heart-shaped cloud. The overall mood is romantic and nostalgic.

*You are not allowed to marry
yourself until you are 30.
Is that OK? Tulin*

SCENE:

»THE PINK DREAM« DIALOGUE

Everyone on stage is sitting and watching a movie. They are watching »The Pink Dream«. The message from the movie is to live happily ever after with your beloved one! Tulin and Dana are having a conversation.

My marriage was built on a lie. Anna



→ **SCENE:**

»THE PINK DREAM« DIALOGUE

Tulin: This is all bullshit. Movie business ...

Dana: No! If there's love for real, why not?

Tulin: Where will this take you?

Dana: Why not? If I find a guy who is handsome, cute, well-dressed and we come to love each other, there's nothing more beautiful than for us to grow old together and get married.

Tulin: From this I understand you'll keep loving the same guy from now until you finish university?

Dana: Well, if he's handsome and romantic, I'll stay with him. There's nothing better than going out with him and talking on the phone all the time ... and gifts! Wow! What a wonderful feeling...

Tulin: You're telling me that the white dress, the wedding party, chaos and your epic love story is what's on your mind?

Dana: Looks like you weren't paying close attention to the movie to notice how cute they were...

Tulin: Let your "cute" help you...

Dana: You want to convince me that you don't want to wear the white dress and have lots of guests, and put on makeup and enter the room to the song, and

you two dancing a slow dance and have a wedding-planner?

Tulin: Of course there's love. But not at our age. Aren't we still 15?

Dana: But it's exactly best if we find Mr. Lucky now...

Tulin: All of this is nice and everyone wants it to happen, but there are priorities and our priority is our education.

DISCUSS

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 **WHAT MINDSETS DO TULIN AND DANA REPRESENT?**
- 2 **WHAT ARE THEIR ARGUMENTS? WHAT IS THE DIALOGUE TRYING TO TELL THE AUDIENCE?**
- 3 **MOST OF THE PLAY IS MADE OUT OF MONOLOGUES. DOES THE DIALOGUE GIVE ANOTHER EFFECT? WHAT EFFECT DOES IT GIVE?**

The date for the wedding was decided without anyone asking my opinion. Enas

JORDANIAN WOMEN'S UNION

JWU is one the partners of this project. Below you can read about their background and their aims.

Source: <http://www.jwu.itgo.com>

A GENERAL BACKGROUND:

The Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) was established in 1945. After the emergency law in 1957 dissolved all civil society organizations and political parties, the JWU was forced to stop its activities for some years.

However, despite all pressures exerted on the union and its members, it was able to stand up to the challenges facing it and to pursue its aims with determination. The Union was re-established under the name of "The Women's Union in Jordan"(WUJ) in the year 1974.

Again, in 1981, the Minister of Interior gave instructions to dissolve the Union. However, during its active period (1974-1981), the presence of the WUJ was very important because it was the only body that represents Jordanian women in Jordan.

The management committee of the Women's Union in Jordan appealed against the Minister's decision which the court agreed was illegal. The WUJ continued its activities in spite of continuous pressures from the government, but was finally forced to discontinue for some time because of intimidation of its members by the security forces.

It was not until the restoration of the parliamentary life in Jordan in May 1990 that the Union was able to reactivate and to regain momentum. The Union's name was changed to the Jordanian Women's Union in Jordan (JWU) and new democratic bylaws were passed and approved.



THE AIMS OF THE JWU AS STATED BY THE AMENDED BY LAWS:

- Organizing and unifying the Jordanian women's efforts to protect their rights and achievements
- Facing all kinds of discrimination against women
- Emphasizing the role of the Jordanian women in the society and empowering them in order to practice these rights as citizens on bases of equality, justice, equal opportunities and respect.
- Raising women's awareness about their role and stressing their participation in different fields.
- Enhancing women's integration in the local society
- Improving Women's social status
- Eliminating all legislative, economic, social and cultural hindrances against women participation according to human rights conventions that the Jordanian government has approved and signed: in particular the convention on eliminating all kinds of discrimination against women, in accordance with the Jordanian national chart
- Activating the role of women to enhance Jordan's independence, the democratic process and the national culture
- Helping women to benefit from the family planning program and providing necessary child and mother care
- Enhancing women's participation in public life and strengthening human rights principles in general, and women and children's rights in particular
- Training women in different disciplines to improve the economic status of their families and to achieve economic independence and stability for their children
- Eliminating legal, cultural and political illiteracy among women
- Supporting the Palestinian women and their national rights
- Supporting Arab women and cooperating with them to achieve common aims
- Assisting women all over the world in their just cases



*God gives you the
patience and compensates
you for the bad things.*

Taqdeer

DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- 1 HOW DOES THE THEATRE PROJECT FIT IN WITH THE AIMS OF JWU?
- 2 WHICH OF THE POINTS ON THE LIST ABOVE DOES THE PROJECT SUPPORT? ARE THERE POINTS THAT IT DOESN'T SUPPORT?

INTERVIEW WITH SOLVEIG WEINKOUFF



Danish director Solveig Weinkouff has travelled all the way from Denmark in northern Europe to direct thirteen women in Jordan together with Jordanian director Sawsan Nizar Dissi. In this interview, she talks about how the view on women reminds her of her own religious upbringing in Denmark, how the project has progressed and what it's like being asked: "Why are you here?"

Why is it necessary to work with women's personal stories in Jordan?

In countries – including Denmark – where some women don't have the greatest consciousness about their rights, it is important to in one way or another improve it – especially the consciousness about the rights that are not wound up only on moral and tradition. In a country such as Jordan, everything is based on how the family works; the family's economy and its traditions. That is some tight constraints to

grow up with. I know that because I grew up in a strongly religious family in Denmark, where you always had to be very conscious about what other people thought of you and your actions. You couldn't do anything that gave way to the morals of the area I grew up in. It's exactly the same I've seen in Jordan. Women are really oppressed! That's the only way to put it. Of course, there are some who aren't. But for those families, who hasn't got a patriarch oppressing them, the society also have a moral codex, which means that you, as a woman, can't go out at night or be around your male friends, because people would look down on you. Generally, it is the same oppression of women that we had in Denmark maybe fifty or a hundred years ago.

What was the biggest surprise of coming to Jordan?

I was also in Jordan last summer, where I directed the first part of

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS. What surprised me was how fast the Danish dramaturge, Sofie Lebech and I, bonded with the Jordanian women. From day one, we just laughed so much with these women. That was the liberating surprise. And it was so lovely. The other surprise, which I didn't realize at first, was their attitude to me as a leader. I consider myself a leader without oppressing my femininity. I don't believe I should be acting like man. But at one point, I started noticing that all the other female leaders I met in Jordan wore trousers! (laughs) I always wore a dress. I was appreciative and welcoming. But I realized that that doesn't work! I had to issue orders! I had to use some sort of old-fashioned hierarchy-based leading style. So I was gladly surprised that it was really easy to talk with the women about the same things that are important to me; children, husbands and so forth. The other surprise was that I had to change my way of leading.





INTERVIEW WITH SOLVEIG WEINKOUFF

*How does the project progress?
How do you make a theatre
performance with real and
personal stories?*

I think I have my own way of doing things as opposed to other directors. I really like the part of sharing your stories with each other, with all the participants in the group. I never talk to a participant one on one in the beginning. There is always a selection in a C:NTACT project. You can have thirty women in your group to begin with, but there can only be fifteen on the stage in the end. In the beginning, what happens is a form of witnessing. We sit in a circle – very hippie-like – and turn our backs on the world. Then we listen to each other. It is theatre in itself, when we're sitting there! We listen to Sascha, who tells us about her marriage with a complete maniac, who saw things under the bed and forced her to watch porn. If Sascha wasn't to be a part of the performance in the end, she still got to share her story with us. Sometimes, women aren't allowed to be a part of the project in the end.

I ask them some general questions when we first meet. Everybody gets to say something they remember or something they want to share. That's the first session. The next time we get more thorough. Then we pull them aside one by one, me, the translator and Sawsan, the Jordanian director. And then we grab a snip!

The stories are written down and compressed, so they become theatrical. Maybe they turn into a monologue. Or they become a poem. Or a song! This year, the headline is 'marriage', so that was

the theme we worked from. We got a really wide range of different women from 15 to 76 years old to participate. Last year, the oldest was 46 years old. It was really interesting with the big age spread. And the team fit so well together! There was also a big spread on social status. We had two Christians and the rest was Muslim. They dressed differently; one wore a niqab. It was a very complex group, and they grew to love each other very much.

What challenges did you have?

There is a sociologist, called Bauman, who says that all rebellion comes from the bottom. In Denmark, we used to believe that we could export democracy to Afghanistan! If there is no wish for democracy, it's not possible. It's not trading goods! It's a way of life and a belief, in a way. Therefore, I was very conscious *not* to be a missionary. You can't be, and I didn't feel like being one at all! But I want to share some experiences and I want to push people. One of the questions I asked these women was: "How do you bring up your sons and daughters?" The women came to reflect on the way they also contribute to the differences between boys and girls in their society. On the other hand, I've also been asked: "Why are you here? Haven't you got your own issues in Denmark?" But I think that I can make a bigger difference with this work in Jordan than in Denmark.

I am a catalyst, I set things in motion, but the stories are within people – and that is where reflection begins. And then it spreads to the audience. That's what makes it so extremely important. It is

such a joy that it is local women standing on stage, telling their own stories – instead of us coming with some product and stuffing it down someone's throat.

What is it theatre is capable of in this context?

If we take theatre as opposed to visual art, I think that most people will find theatre much quicker and easier to decipher and to mirror themselves in. I think that you need a certain level of abstraction to mirror yourself in art. When it's on stage, it's emotionally much easier to say: "That's the way I feel!" or "The woman on the stage tells me something about this problem that I have as well." The fact that she dares to stand on the stage with her own story can make a big impression. It puts something in motion in the audience that is worth gold. I know a documentary director, who cried during the entire performance. She is a prosperous woman, who suddenly realized how her Jordanian sisters were feeling. It's not some conditions that are easy to deal with. It really takes a lot of effort to tell the stories that the women are telling. But they don't always tell the entire truth! There's a lot I don't know! (laughs)

What do you hope the project will change?

The show is about to go on a tour, where they will start a direct dialogue with the audience. I know that our partner Jordanian Women's Union will make more projects like this in the future. They have become inspired by it. *They* can see that it is meaningful. And then our mission has been successful!